

2-9-2009

Interview no. 1537

Basilio Silva Jr.

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Recommended Citation

Interview with Basilio Silva Jr. by Homero Galicia, 2009, "Interview no. 1537," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Basilio Silva Jr.

Interviewer: Homero Galicia

Project: Hispanic Entrepreneurs Oral History Project

Location: n/a

Date of Interview: February 9, 2009

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Transcript No.: 1537

Transcriber / Summary: Vanessa Pantoja

Basilio Silva Jr. is one of ten children, was born in a mountain village in Chihuahua, Mexico. Silva migrated with his family to El Paso, Texas to find employment. Silva was placed in a vocational class because he did not speak English. He faced racism and was called names while in high school, but turned the negative experience into drive for success. He also says his father instilled work ethic in him at a young age. He also worked with his brothers and sister to provide additional income for their family by finding odd jobs. Through a local program called Upward Bound, Silva was introduced to college. He did a work study program where he was a sales man at Montgomery Ward's department store. Silva began at the University of Texas at El Paso being a probational student and graduated with an engineering degree. After working for construction companies, Silva bought into Vista Con, an upcoming commercial construction company. Through the help of hispanic investors, Silva was able to buy half ownership of the company and later the full company. Silva faced many challenges such as discrimination. He could not find work in the private sphere so he moved to finding business in the federal government. Silva attributes his success to employing honest people who do the work needed. He hires based on experience and does not require a college degree. He does not receive large construction contracts because he is over looked for being Hispanic, but Silva does not get discouraged. He still receives contracts on Fort Bliss, El Paso bridges, and schools. Silva constantly places bids for work and feels motivated by his wife. Silva also credits his father and the struggle he faced growing up for his success.

Length of interview 80 minutes

Length of Transcript 38 pages

Name of Interviewee: Basilio A. Silva
Date of Interview: 24 February 2009
Name of Interviewer: Homero Galicia

This is February 26. This is Homero Galicia beginning an interview with Mr. Basilio Silva who is the president of Vistacon, Incorporated.

HG: I appreciate you giving us time and I'd appreciate if you would begin by telling us where you grew up, and what area, and how you grew up.

BS: Well, I was born in the mountains of Mexico, in Chihuahua; immigrated to the United States in 1969. I went to high school here in the United States, and I was put in vocational school because, I guess not being fluent in the language. At the time, at Riverside High School, they didn't have a program. They just put us in a room, all the immigrants, because they felt like – well they didn't have the resources, whatever, I don't even know and I don't really care to find out. I just know that there was about thirty of us that were put in a room like a study hall because they didn't have the proper methods or, I guess, they were not ready for us. So based on that, somebody decided along the way, and I think that was the principal, Don Harrison Pickett, assistant principal, that we were not good enough for school. So they sent us to vocational school. I went and talked to the counselors and the counselor explained to me, which I understood, the counselor was doing her job, she said, "I'm sorry Mr. Silva, but you're not fluent and we don't have the resources right now to help you, but we can train you in the vocational field." And they put me on, at the time, it was the No. 3 program, which was for non-college students, vocational students. Then I kind of refused, but there was nothing that could be done. So I went to vocational school. They got me a job as a distributor education, which was as a salesman. And I went to work as a salesman. They sent me to [inaudible] and Brothers, and they didn't put me in sales on the floor because they said they felt that I have an impairment. It was my language. So they put me as a stock boy. So that defeated the purpose of the vocational training because I knew that I wasn't ever going to be a salesman. That's what they were telling me. In my heart, I knew that I had come

to this beautiful country to work hard because that's what my father told me. He says, "Son," as he was telling us when we immigrated he said, "we come into this country that's given us the opportunity to grow and to feed us," because we were hungry over there. He goes, "So we need to respect it and work hard. We need to make them proud of us because they opened the doors. It's like a neighbor that opened the door for you. Be thankful. So I want you to treat this country" –

HG: How old were you when you came from –

BS: I'm sorry?

HG: How old were you?

BS: I was fifteen years old.

HG: And so you went to Riverside as a freshman?

BS: I had finished my second year of secundaria in Juarez. We were getting from the mountains to Juarez and it was a shock for us because we came from a small town to a big city. We couldn't deal with it. And then on the side, my dad's saying, "We got to go to El Paso." So my education was from Mexico. When we came, they put me as a freshman at Riverside High School.

HG: And your father, did he have a job here already when he came over?

BS: Yeah, he was working as a stockman at a grocery store?

BS: And there were ten of you – your mother, your father, and ten children?

HG: I'm sorry?

BS: How large was your family?

BS: It was 14 of us. It was eight brothers and sisters, my father and my mother, my grandmother and an adopted cousin from Juarez.

HG: And you all came over at the same time?

BS: We all came over at the same time. Yes, on May 5, 1969 we all immigrated at the same time. Except for my dad, he already had papers.

HG: And so you have older brothers and sisters?

BS: Yes.

HG: And did they find work right away or what did they –

BS: Well, we were young, okay. My oldest brother, which was, at the time he was 18, he was working distributing some milk products. And we all did our share because my dad was making the minimum wage to support the family. He was in a program where they paid the mortgage, half, my dad, whatever he could afford, and half the government. I don't even remember what kind of program it was, but I do know that they did that for us. So they provided us with a good house.

HG: So when you were at Riverside and they put you in the vocational program and you went to work, that was income for you?

BS: Well see, I worked during my high school years because I was in the NYC program. They had a National Youth Corporation [inaudible] program. It's like a work-study program. So I was a janitor helper for at least three years in high school, my freshman, sophomore and junior years because my senior year I went to work for [inaudible] and Brothers, that's through the vocational. I used to go in

at six in the morning and helped the janitors. And then stay from 3:30 to six o'clock in the afternoon, clean the rooms, and then clean the gym during games, basketball games. I used to clean the gym at the halftime. Then Saturdays I worked half a day.

HG: There at Riverside?

BS: Riverside, yeah, I needed to help the family. It was too large of a family.

HG: Did that cause any stigma for you or anything?

BS: I think it does. It does because I can tell you – I even get teary-eyed. And it wasn't the students fault, you're just young, you don't realize that you're hurting people. Now, I look back and now my kids are grown. And they tell me, Dad, that might have helped you. I mean, sometimes you just know you're gonna go on with your life. I wanted to go back to Mexico, bad. I mean, I just didn't like it here. And people used to make fun of us, call us "wetbacks", our own Mexican students, I mean, the same race. It was a lot of discrimination against us. We were a little group on the side. I don't know, you had to understand some of the students were doing (that?), the parents were they were educated or at least they were, they've been here from the United States. They said they were raised and grown in the United States. We weren't. We're coming in like total strangers. So it was very difficult, very, very difficult.

HG: And you didn't speak a lot of English when you came in?

BS: I'm sorry.

HG: You didn't speak a lot of English?

BS: No, not at all. Like right now you have special classes and they teach you English, but over there they just put us, like I said, I mean they put us in a study hall. They just entertained us because they knew that it was very hard for us to compete to the level of the other students.

HG: What messages did your father and your mother give you that helped you?

BS: I'm sorry?

HG: What messages did you mother and father give you that helped you with that at that time?

BS: Well, like I said, they told us that in order to be successful in life you have to work hard. We come from a small town where since I was five years old I remember working chores at home—taking care of the domestic animals and all that. So, work wasn't the problem here. It was not being able to get to it that was the problem because my dad made it very clear, we're coming to this country, again, a beautiful country, which I will be thankful and he said, "They opened the door for us and we need to work." And that's why we came here, to work and make a living. He never liked unemployment. He never liked that welfare. He never did. He said that that was only for an emergency, not to take advantage of the system. So, I think work ethics was my strongest point that I had. As you can see right now, I'm not even very fluent in English, but I tell you what, in the border, you don't need much English.

HG: And your mother?

BS: Housewife, she raised us. She never worked. There was too many of us. Her job was just to keep us going.

HG: After high school, what did you do?

BS: Well you see, what happened was that I was very fortunate, and I mean fortunate because out of all the Riverside High School seniors – I guess somebody walked into the school and I heard of a program, Project Upward Bound. And I wasn't even accepted to the program. I just went and I talked to Pete Duarte at the time, which was the director, and he said, "Basilio, you don't meet the qualifications for the program, but we can bring you in. Be part of it, but you actually are not part of the program." I said, "Sure." And the program was, spend a day at UTEP, and find out whether the program would actually help you and convince you that you were college material. Even Upward Bound had a problem with me because they figured like, You're a total immigrant. I know that they tried to help the immigrant and the farm workers because my dad was a farm worker for a long time in California. And I just was adopted to the program, but I was never actually part of the program. I attended. I didn't get a stipend; I didn't get the benefits that the other students would get. But I consider the success in my life was because one of the saddest things in my life is to see my parents struggle for money. I would go to sleep covering my ears because all they talk about, Mijo, how are we going to do it tomorrow? Mira, so and so is sick. He needs new shoes." And my dad said, "What do you want me to do?" He was only making minimum wage at the [inaudible]. He said, "Mija, what do we do?" My dad used to walk to work because he couldn't even afford – that would kill me every night. I even hated to go to sleep because I hear my parents struggling. My mother crying and my dad like, "What do you want me to do, Mija? That's all I can do." I figured it out and I talked to my older brother and my oldest sister, I said, "Carnales, we need to help our dad." And we did.

HG: What did you do?

BS: I used to do a lot of yard work. Besides working for Riverside. We used to do a lot of yard work. My dad and I worked; he would take me to a yard, pick up some yards and yard work. And I used to go to work in a gas station in Juarez. I

used to do a lot of things, a lot of little things, here and there that would make money. In the neighborhood, I used to go cut grass for the people and even throw away trash and clean the yard, a lot of little things.

HG: So what year did you graduate from high school?

BS: Nineteen seventy-three, and like I said, I finished my distributor education program, which helped me by the way, helped me in my mind, college degree and a career. It's a long story, Homero. I can tell you, we could sit hours and tell you that story. But it takes a lot of hard work and a lot of dedication. I don't know. I sometimes even think that there's somebody up there that's guiding you because I come from a big family, I was the only one that was able to succeed. Why? I don't know. We come from the same family, the same parents, education at home, the same. I just, sometimes, I'm not a freak in religion, I just think that there's somebody, something up there that guides us, that helps us. I cannot tell you what it is because I can't even define it myself, but I do know that there's a lot of things that happened in my life that fell into place. Like I was disappointed with the distributor education that they gave me in vocational, okay, Project Upward Bound helped me get grants and everything to go to college, okay, because I wanted to go to college from that. As a matter of fact, I went in as a probationary student because I didn't pass the ACT. I mean I got a high score on math; I flunked the English part. Even people that were going with me in high school, that graduated with me, that were born and raised here, they didn't pass the ACT. Not because they were dumb, because it was set up for people that were fluent in English, very high capacity in the English. They didn't allow me to take English IV in school because I wasn't in the program. I took third program. English III was the highest that I went, and so to make a long story short, distributor education, the salesman, helped me in my later years of my career at UTEP.

HG: In what sense?

BS: When I started UTEP, I was working work-study. I got grants, and I worked in work-study, and I was working in Montgomery Ward as a salesman. So, I was taking fifteen hours of school, and I was working forty hours at Montgomery Ward. But in those days, now I look back and I think it had to do with TV and we didn't have money. So there are a lot of distractions [that we have] now that we didn't have back then. Even if they were, we couldn't afford them. So my life was go to school, go to UTEP, (get a grant to pay?) my books and my tuition, and help my parents, go to Montgomery Ward and work forty hours. I worked ten-hour days on Saturday and then everyday, according to my schedule – they were very good. They worked around my schedule. I was a salesman for them and I used to work from five to nine. I would close the store, the men's department, five to ten o'clock at night Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. And Tuesday and Thursday, I would work like eight-hour days. So it was, I don't know, it was very, very –

HG: How many years did you work at Montgomery Ward, going to school?

BS: I had a year contract with the U.S. Post Office that helped me out a lot in my junior year. They would select students that were low-income, hardworking, and how I got the job, that's what I'm telling you, I don't know. I just, right now, I look back, and I say, "How did I get the job with the post office?" That was a year program. I worked a year with the post office, fulltime. At downtown I used to go open the post office at four in the morning, five in the morning, work until nine everyday, Saturday, and that gave me enough money because it was paying high wages, to buy a little car and continue to go to school. I can tell you right now, a couple of times I missed an exam because I didn't have gas. But that's a long story, like I said.

HG: How would you get to the university from your home before you had a car?

BS: My dad. My dad used to get up at four in the morning and take me to downtown. And I don't know why he did that for me (poor man?). I don't know why he did it because I know that he drive me to the post office, leave me there, and then I would get up at nine and get the bus and go to UTEP, or walk. It's not that far from downtown. And in those days, walking, it was like part of our lives.

HG: What was your major?

BS: Since I didn't pass the ACT, or PSAT, I don't remember, I was in general studies. They didn't know what to do with me. They put me in general studies. So I talked to Pete Duarte. He says, "Basilio, go to general studies. Get out of your probationary status. And then you have enough time to decide during those two years – they're basic." He said, "Get the basics. You might lose some credits because if you decide to go to follow a certain degree, you're gonna have to probably lose some courses because some of those general studies courses will not apply." They couldn't apply them to whatever my career plan was. So, I was on probation and I was in general studies for the first year and a half. And I always wanted to be an engineer. I wanted to be a doctor. I lost that dream right away because it was a long career. I didn't have the money; I didn't have the language, fluent. I knew that was a handicap. So I decided that I needed to go to a career that did not require my speaking skill, my language skills, and I chose engineering. It wasn't easy. I can show you a the transcript, working, took engineering courses, not being able to study at home because, I remember, I had to wait until my parents put my brothers and sister to sleep at eleven or twelve. So I would be studying from twelve to three in the morning, four in the morning. Sometimes I didn't sleep. But if you asked me right now, I mean, to me, it was part of life. To me, I didn't make sacrifices. I didn't. I just thought that – my dad told me – my mom, he had to work hard. To me, it was better than feeding the chickens; and all that, that we used to do. . I mean, it was better work. So, no, in going back, I just think that there's somebody up there that guides our lives. I don't know.

HG: But you had a dream?

BS: I had a dream to help my parents. They suffered a lot, financially, and a couple of times I even did some things that were not supposed to be, that I'm not proud of it because I knew my brothers and sisters, they didn't have shoes. My mom was telling me, "It's okay to be poor, but not dirty." So she kept us very clean, washed our clothes. They were old; they were rags. I just know sometimes [inaudible] in the summer, my tennis shoes, they had holes and I burned myself on the asphalt. Pick up one foot; pick up the other one. And so I just knew that – my whole idea was to help my parents and my family. I didn't know that by doing that I was going to be successful. If you asked me right now, oh I had a dream. We all have dreams, okay, don't take me wrong. We all have dreams of being rich, millionaires, whatever. At that time, I didn't have a dream, but I just wanted a job. And little did I know that eventually, that was going to put me in a better position, and a higher position, than a lot of my classmates and a lot of people that I grew up with.

HG: You stayed with Upward Bound through college?

BS: I'm sorry?

HG: You stayed with Upward Bound all the way through –

BS: As a matter of fact, I stayed with Upward Bound and then I was a counselor with Upward Bound for about two years. [Inaudible] the money went up, but after I didn't get paid, I still spent my time with the other students trying to give them the opportunity to Upward Bound offered me.

HG: So what did that do for you, the experience?

BS: Upward Bound helped me. If you asked me right now what was the major impact in my life, I would say, "Upward Bound" because I found out that I wasn't the only one. I thought I was the only one. And then when I see all these other students, it was a hundred students plus "los arrimados" because they called me the arrimado because I wasn't officially part of Upward Bound. So there were a few of us, arrimados, and it made you feel good because sometimes you find yourself in a corner, you say, "Why is this happening to me?" Well, no it's happening to everyone. You just don't know. And that helped me. And also the fact that they guide us through how to get grants, how to get work study, and all that, and all those programs available that the high school didn't show them to you. They show them to certain people and I can assure you that because I worked at Riverside and I knew that the teachers' pets, the – what do you call it, those kids that are – teachers' pets, whatever, and that's it. At the time, I thought I was being punished for not knowing the language and I was, indirectly, but it wasn't because somebody had something against me. It was just the damn system, just the way the system worked. I cannot say it was meant.

HG: At UTEP, did you find some of that still at UTEP when you went to UTEP? Were some professors harder on you than others?

BS: Well, at UTEP they treat everybody equal. Like they say, you pay, you come, you don't come, okay. I knew the handicap that I had about my language barrier. I knew that. I knew I had the culture barrier. And I knew that I was a little different than the rest of the students because I didn't have shirts. I used to have a white T-shirt, clean, and my jeans and my tennis shoes. And as a matter of fact, a couple of courses I couldn't take because that's when the calculator was [inaudible], early '60s the calculator. And for me, I didn't take chemistry and I didn't take one of the calculus classes because I didn't have the calculator. And at the time, they were trying to change all that from slide rule. I stayed with a slide rule. And then, all of a sudden, I find out that now on some of the exams were geared to calculator. So, I had to work very hard to get a calculator. My sister

was working downtown. I told her, “Mija, I need to get a calculator.” So her savings and my savings, we went and bought a SR-50 computer (calculator?), and I felt [like]the richest kid at the time. It’s like giving a kid right now an iPod or whatever, but I felt very proud of my calculator. So, no, UTEP is rough. It is rough with the Hispanics, in my opinion. Even though we’re Hispanic, the popular people, the people that made the decisions, they want to – I don’t know what it is because I – I’m talking about thirty something years ago. I don’t know how UTEP is right now. Was, I don’t know now. That’s not even fair of me to say that. But at the time, it was rough. It was very rough. It was race oriented and I think that had a lot to do with it.

HG: But Upward Bound gave you a place of belonging?

BS: Upward Bound, I think that was the best thing that could happen to me. Without Upward Bound, I would have never gone to college, never.

HG: And what year did you graduate, then, from UTEP?

BS: I graduated in 1978, May ’78. It took me almost – well the last semester I was only going to school for two hours because I wanted the courses that was a requirement, a prerequisite, of graduation. It was only taught once a year. So I should have graduated in December of ’77. I couldn’t because of the course, so May ’78.

HG: And you graduated in engineering?

BS: I got a bachelor’s in science and engineering, (civil?) engineering.

HG: And upon graduation, what did you do?

BS: That's another one, okay. I had some interviews with big corporations because they used to come into the campus and interview. I wasn't very successful because, at the time, they were more concerned with your grades than they were concerned with what you could offer. In other words, I could see friends of mine that graduated with me going to the big corporations, Exxon, Shell, and nobody would hire me. So what I did, I applied with the navy, which they had the navy civil engineering corps. So it was a part of the navy that they, you graduate, you enroll with them, and they make you some like [inaudible] lieutenant, something like that, because of graduation. So I was already married and I didn't have children. My wife and I was still going to school and so I told (Mija?), "I gotta go. I need to get a job." It just so happened that Parks and Wildlife, at the time, the state, they hadn't met their quota for minorities because that was the reason I was hired. I found out later on, not when I was interviewed. So they interviewed me and they hired me, Texas Parks and Wildlife in Austin. So we moved. Then later on when I found out that I was, by a fellow employee, one of my co-workers, one day he got mad at me, he said, "Well, you know you're here because you're Mexican, not because of what you know." I said, "No, I'm here because I'm an engineer." He says, "No, (Don Brisco?) said you need to meet the minority criteria and that's why they went and hired you." I said, "Well, thank you very much for telling me." I told my master engineer. I said, "I'm resigning." He said, "Why?" (I said?) "I want to make your life easier," I said, "You're a very beautiful person, Anglo, a very nice person." I was very fortunate. My immediate supervisor was Anglo, World War II veteran, beautiful person. The head of the department was also a beautiful person, Mr. Hamm. It's just the other people around us (from?), they were like, I guess A&M. And at that time, I didn't give a shit about A&M or UT or whatever. They just, for some reason, in that area they were very, very high and mighty of hiring your own kind and that was the Aggies. And he said, "No, don't." And I said, "No, I am." And so then, he said, "Well, you made a decision. Let me help you get a job." I said, "I think I already have one in Manuel (mind?)." He goes, "There's a company that my," his son worked for. "You got a lot of potential, but you need to go to the private

business because if what you're telling me is correct and you mean it, you're very proud. You have a lot of pride. I respect that." He goes, "I know you're making a mistake, but then again, it's your life, but I'll help you get a job." So he helped me get a job. I worked with a company in Austin and it was a developer. And I had learned a lot. I mean, I had already been with the state almost three years. So, then, I had a lot of planning and a lot of (I was in the master planning office?) and so I needed to go to the (design?). So I went to the (design?), worked with this company out of Austin.

HG: A land developer, property developer?

BS: It was property development and then they used to develop in the private sector, not public.

HG: And so how long did you work there?

BS: I was there (fortunately?) for a year because my wife got pregnant and she got homesick, very, so she wanted to come back to El Paso. And she just would not get (no for an answer?) she was going to UT Austin. She was already a junior at UT Austin. Because I did tell her, "Mija, if you help me finish my last year as an engineering, now you need to go to school." And she didn't want to. And I said, "No, (you'll make it?). No, no, no, you'll be okay." So she also went to UT as an (upper division?). She got accepted and she got a degree as a teacher. And that's another thing that we did, we waited to have family until we were educated. Then my daughter decided to come early, so – because we were married almost four years when my daughter was born. And we went to El Paso and now it was a big shocker for me because I was making all this money in Austin. And I come here to El Paso and I went from \$500 a week to \$200 a week. That's how much cut in pay I took to be able to survive in El Paso.

HG: Who did you work for in El Paso?

BS: I went to Conde Engineering, and then I didn't like the environment, so I decided to go to the construction. And the construction industry, with the racist history, I mean –

HG: Tell me about that. You left Conde right away? You stayed there a while?

BS: Well, actually, I, at the time, I just needed a job, so one of my, I guess, friends, engineers that graduated with me, was working there. He said, "Basilio, maybe this is not what you're looking for, but we need somebody here. The pay is not good. The hours are long. The pay is not good." I said, "Well, I'll take anything." So in a way, I think I only stayed there for six months. I don't remember, maybe seven months. I just knew that wasn't for me. My background was what they're doing, it was in development engineering firm. I made the mistake that a lot of us make, even nowadays. I was making good money, so we bought a house and everything and so when I took a cut in pay here, well it was a big shocker because I couldn't make the payments. So now my wife, she graduated from school, she started working so things went back to normal, and at the time, I went to look for a construction company, which thanks to the construction company it gave me the basics and the knowledge to be where I am because they were very good to us.

HG: Who was that you worked for?

BS: Urban [Associates], Mario Montes with Mr.(Humberto?) Sambrano, but they're my general contractors. They were, at the time, they were partners or you know they were the (principals?) of the company.

HG: So how long did you work for them?

BS: About four, almost five years.

HG: And you learned the industry?

BS: I learned from them, very, very sharp people. I really learned from Mr.Sambrano in the field. Because I was a field engineer, superintendent, whatever you want to call it. It's just I was in the field. And then Mario was [in] the office and I was able to learn from both of them. They were a good team. They were a good team.

HG: So you worked for them for four years and you learned –

BS: It was four and a half, but let's say four years.

HG: And what years was that?

BS: That was in 1980 to '83, '84, somewhere in there.

HG: And then what did you do after that?

BS: That's when this company was created, Vistacon. A good friend of mine had started a company and he invited me.

HG: So you started your own business after?

BS: Yes, in 1984.

HG: In construction, in –

BS: Construction, it was construction.

HG: Home construction, general construction?

BS: Commercial building, no home building, just commercial.

HG: And your friend was also an engineer, your partner?

BS: Yes, he's an engineer.

HG: And who helped you start your business?

BS: It was investors. He started the business, actually. He invited me after the business was started. So I bought into the business with him, but when I joined Vistacon in 1984, he did not tell me that he had – I also did not understand that the company was owned by him, and later on, I found out he had investors into the company, which it was fine. Without the investors, I mean we're poor. We didn't have money to operate. So these people were providing the means for the operating expenses and also the buying capacity. It was very little by that time.

HG: Major investors, several investors that –

BS: Major investors, and to make a long story short, later on he resigned. Why, I don't know. Then I bought into the company 50 percent with the investors and then a few years later I was able to write a note and buy them out 100 percent.

HG: Were the investors Hispanic or Anglo?

BS: Hispanic.

HG: Hispanic investors? That was not too common at that time.

BS: I'm sorry?

HG: That wasn't too common at that time.

BS: No, and what helped us is that the investors were also into construction, but they were into a different field. They were not into a general construction. They were into a different field of construction. They were subcontractors to general contractors.

HG: So did they help you not only with finance, but did they help you with business operations or did they just do the finance?

BS: No, they did the financial. The operation of the business, we had the background. I had the background. The financing part of it, I was raised counting pennies so I knew that overhead was a crucial part of the business that you gotta keep an eye on. You had to know how to spend your money and how to save your money. And that wasn't hard because that had been our life ever since we were little.

HG: So where did you learn to run a business?

BS: My parents. My parents used to have a grocery store in the mountains. They had a, well not a grocery store, it was like a, what do you call those stores that they have everything?

HG: A general store?

BS: A general store.

HG: In Chihuahua?

BS: In the mountains of Chihuahua. And I was raised and born there, followed my mom running the daily business and my dad also. Actually, we came to the United States because there was a drought, five-year drought, and my parents lost

everything. But they lived on exchange and there was no money. So if there were no crops, nobody could buy anything or they wouldn't pay you. So basically, that's where I learned how to run a business.

HG: As you started your business, what acceptance did you find in El Paso? You didn't have trouble getting contracts?

BS: The biggest challenge up to now, and you can quote me on this, we had to depend on government work, public work. Private work is very, very difficult to break in.

HG: Why is that?

BS: I think the race, the ethnicity. I think it was more controlled by the other people. I personally feel like it was because of the discrimination, a little bit of discrimination. It's just in the sense of maybe the private industry felt more comfortable with our competitors or – I don't know. I just know that, even up to now, my business, and when I tell you 95percent is public work and 5 percent is private.

HG: When you say public, you're talking about –

BS: City, county, state, federal; our major, major, major, I guess, concentration of work has been in the federal government. They don't discriminate or at least I don't, at least they give (you your share?). [If] you're low, you're low, and [if] you get your work, you get your work.

HG: Were you an 8(a) contractor?

BS: We became 8(a) contractors late in the game. We became 8(a) contractors, we'd been in business like for almost – I've been doing this for twenty-five years. So we graduated last year, plus nine years. So I'm going to say we were thirteen

years into it. 8(a) did not make us, what helped us with just a job. I think it's a good program, don't take me wrong, but some people and some of my people that I like that come and talk to me about the 8(a), they're already into the program, and yes, I think the program is excellent when you barely start your business because that's what it's set up for. We had already been in business for twelve years, like I didn't have my investors anymore, I had already bought them out when we started as an 8(a). Yeah, we got some work, and good work, but if you were to ask me what made us successful, that wasn't really, 8(a) was not the—.

HG: What made you successful?

BS: What made me successful was that somehow – and again, somebody upstairs was guiding me – somehow, I'm going to quote somebody that told me, "You know what Basilio, you're being successful because you know how to swim around sharks."

HG: You know how to swim with the sharks?

BS: You know how to swim around sharks.

HG: Around sharks, okay.

BS: When mentioned that, you're a survivor. And so going back, this company did not start with a professional. When we started this company, my key employees [were] Abe Labor, which now has his own company and [is] doing [a] real good. I had a carpenter, which is one of my top project managers, and I had a labor foreman, which is my top, in my opinion, project manager. He's running millions of dollars worth of work. There were people like diamonds. They're (raw?) diamonds. Nobody pays attention to them. Like there's many people that we lost, people always lose people. Why? I don't know. We all learned together. I was able to show them what I knew. I was able [inaudible] what they knew. And

the rest is history. I mean if you asked me right now do I have any professional[s] working for me, no. No, I don't have anybody with a degree working for me. My third project manager, he's not even fluent in English, still. As a matter of fact, my top project manager is not even fluent in English. I could say I'm a seven in English, he's probably a six, and like that. But this company's run by honest people, by down to earth people.

HG: What principles do you run your company by? Do you have a set of principles?

BS: Well, if I'm paying you to do a job, I expect you to do a job. If you need my help, I'll help you. But you're on your own. And if I see that you're failing to do what you're supposed to do then I ask you why. I don't go and scold you or tell you, "You're a piece of this." No, no, I say, "Come here. We're having this problem. What is the problem?" And I found out over the years that by doing that, they feel like they're needed. They feel that they are producing. They feel that they're giving part of them to the company and they feel very proud.

HG: How many employees do you have now?

BS: Okay, we sub out 60 percent of the work, now. Years ago, we used to do most of the work ourselves in-house, but now we sub out 60 percent of the work. In-house, we have an average of seventy to eighty.

HG: What about financing? You had your finance projects, what –

BS: No, you know, steady growth. When you do steady growth, you don't need financing. And what I mean by this, I was very fortunate to, and again, here we go, you asked me what made this company successful because when you direct to me with this company successful, no, I'm not successful. All of us are successful because we are a group of people that are successful in their own way. And when I say that, it is because like my top project manager, he was a labor foreman.

He's running projects, eighteen million dollar projects, nineteen million dollar projects, projects that right now with my competitors, they're run by professionals, engineers, top-notch people. Not here because we're a group. We learn together and we keep going and the day things are going to change, the day I'm gone, I don't know what's going to happen. They even tell me, What's going to happen? We're getting old. I said, "I know. We're getting old." [They asked,] What's going to happen? I said, "I don't know, just keep on working, Cabrón. One of us is going to go first." Really I think that's a very difficult question to answer because everybody's successful in their own way.

HG: The larger community in El Paso, how have they accept your success?

BS: The what, I'm sorry?

HG: The larger El Paso community?

BS: When you say larger, what's –

HG: Well, the Anglo community?

BS: No, no, they never, I never felt like – I never got in their way. And lately, lately I've noticed more. Now that I'm going to the \$50 million jobs that we've combined, see I'm running a project way over \$100 million. A single project, right now, has gotten from 1984 a \$27,000 job to \$45-\$50 million job. We're able to bid those projects in that magnitude. We haven't gotten it. We knock at the doors, and we haven't gotten it because that's where discrimination comes in.

HG: In the big projects?

BS: We have to break that. We can't. I'm not going to give up, but it's been very tough. And how? They call it, best value, past performance, past experience.

HG: Not price?

BS: How can I compete with the big guys? The big guys, they get the big jobs and they use our subs. They use our subs. The subs are the same. It's just who's directing the job. That's the only difference between us and the big – I mean you go to the top-notch major general contractor in El Paso, or they come in here, and they hire our subcontractors. So what is the secret? I ask myself those questions and I want to keep knocking [on] the door. I'm not going to give up. I just feel like somewhere, somehow, there's going to be an opportunity to get in there. We bid on a couple of large projects, when I say large, forty-five, fifty million [dollars]. We are very competitive. Somehow, our competitor found out a way to take them away from us. Again, best value, quote unquote, it's a beautiful tool that was, in my opinion, was set up to select whoever you want to select.

HG: Are those city projects, county projects? What are those?

BS: Well, city projects, county projects, no, they're (not?) very competitive because there's more (small?) projects. But if you see a county project over forty million [dollars], you bet your, I mean that becomes political.

HG: What's your largest project to date?

BS: The largest project that we have done is with GSA. I could tell you a story about that one, the major expansion of the bridge of the Americas. I'm going to say, as a single project, is the work order contract at Fort Bliss. It was up in the upper twenties in millions of dollars.

HG: Multiyear contract?

BS: I'm sorry?

HG: Is that a multiyear contract?

BS: It's a five-year contract. But a single project has to do with GSA, General Services Administration, about \$18 million, \$18.5 million.

HG: Okay, and you built some big schools.

BS: We have. We have. We did the (Northwest Middle?). That was about an eighteen some million dollars. We thought we were going to be able to bid on a large project right now at Fort Bliss, and we made the low quoted quotes. I guess they want to comply with the regulations that low three, but we never get to be that one, okay. Why? I don't know. But even the fact that we're considered the low three bidders, potential bidders, that's good. That's good because that means that somebody's paying attention to us. Even though they look at the proposal, and I'm sure they read it and say, Ah, forget it. But they're still, next time they're going to see. So hopefully, what I'm crossing my fingers is that one of these days they're going to say, Okay, fine, give the son of a bitch a job. He keeps bugging us.

HG: How have you overcome all these challenges that you've had to face? What drives you?

BS: My wife. My wife, she's my strongest supporter. She's been with me and I go home and, well she sees the day-to-day activities because she does run the office. I don't have nothing to do with the financial, I'm a field person. But my wife tells me, "Gordo, Don't give up. Don't give up. Look, we've come a long ways. We're both immigrants. I mean we are where we never thought we were going to be. And maybe sometime you're getting too greedy," she goes, "you better slow down."

HG: How many children do you have?

BS: Three, two boys and a girl.

HG: Are any involved in the business or going to get involved?

BS: Yeah, I recently brought my daughter in. She graduated from USD, University of San Diego?

HG: Really?

BS: Sent her to private school, thank God. Then the field that she graduated in is still waiting because she decided to tell me, “I want to go with you, Dad.” I said, “Mija, you should have told me that five years ago. I would have saved myself a lot of money. Really! But fine.” I said, “Look, I’m not going to be able to teach you what took us here because what took us here is a lot of respect from our subcontractors.” My subcontractors, they’re the backbone of us. And over the years, we know each other. We trust each other. So they know us, we know them. And to bring somebody new and tell them, “Look, this is so and so,” you know, they’re young. So they gotta start within their own. They gotta start young. I’m just going to put it here whenever I’m gone. If they want to continue with the company, if they want to – excuse me.

2nd: I’m sorry, Mr.Silva. Hector said he really needs to talk to you.

BS: Who?

2nd: Hector.

BS: Okay, give me a second.

HG: Let me ask you one more question.

HG: Testing, testing. We're back. Continue the interview with Mr. Basilio Silva.

HG: I want to ask you about who influenced you as you grew your business. Who out there in the community was influencing your –

BS: To choose construction? Nobody, nobody. I knew that if I had to stay with the state, I was a state employee – I saw people that were, they were miserable because they were doing the same thing for so many years. You know, break in the morning, break in the afternoon, go to work, go home. I just couldn't see myself doing that. I just needed to help my family. So actually, I guess, to continue to bring my brothers and sisters to get them an education, and I didn't have family at the time. So actually, I guess to help both families, my wife's and my family, to reach something beyond, to bring them the same thing, of not getting an education I knew that I could break the barrier.

HG: So once you did and once you found success, how have you been able to help your family?

BS: Lately? When I got my degree – my dad passed away, a heart attack, and one of his worries, because my mom was a handicap, she was in a wheelchair. And he said, "Son, Mijo, I hate to put this burden on you," on his deathbed and he goes, "but take care of your mom if I die." [I said] "Don't worry about my mom, don't worry about the family. I'll take care of it." So he rests in peace. He left. He went knowing that I – and I did. My mother passed away recently of cancer and I supported her all those years. I was able to help my brothers and sisters all along. I got two brothers working with me right now. And even up to now, I have nephews that I've been pushing them to go to college. One already graduated as an engineer. My daughter graduated. My other son is graduating next semester, and my other son will graduate in about a year. I haven't dented the family,

believe me. We are a large family and I'm going to say out of all the nephews, maybe 3 percent, of breaking the barrier. The rest, they chose to stay behind. I'm going to blame the system. I'm not going to blame them, they're good kids. It's just that the education that they were getting was very questionable.

HG: Here in El Paso?

BS: Yeah, south of the freeway. I'm sorry, I (had?) to admit it, I know went to school south of the freeway, but again, if it wasn't for Upward Bound, I'd still be south of the freeway. That's just the way it is. I guess you don't seem to understand that side of the freeway is set up to be the working people of America, factories and all the jobs that for some reason – I'm starting to believe that they just give an education to, I guess, comply with the constitution, and after that, you're on your own. And you end up working in a factory, doing jobs that, the same, and then it's a cycle.

HG: Well, you've been able to break through, but have you been able to break through in the larger, in the whole community?

BS: I can't answer that, I cannot. I keep a low profile. I really do not go out there and get involved with anybody. I just, I don't do lunch with people. [Inaudible] tell me that I'm wrong. I have my reservations about that. We're very fortunate that we're a company that we eat what we kill, quote unquote. We don't have to go out there. We have people come to us. We go to people on the job that we want. We get, you just gotta lower your profit margin. I mean that's it, and sometimes when you get work, at cost. I really do not depend on the private industry. If I was dependant upon the private industry, I would definitely have to go in and dine people, but not (in the public?).

HG: So you've built a reputation for quality construction and what? What is your reputation?

BS: I think we have because if you, I guess GSA is one of the strongest federal agencies and we're one of the selected contractors. I guess if we weren't doing the work that we're supposed to be doing, we probably wouldn't be part of the circle because we're invited to bid with them. We work with the Corps of Engineers. We're doing work with Fort Bliss. So basically, I think it's a reputation that has actually helped us get the kind of work that we ask for, that we go after.

HG: So what's the future for your business?

BS: You know what, I asked myself that question and a good friend of mine, which is an attorney, we were talking and I almost gave up, but I went back. There was a strong reason why I wanted to say, "You know what, it ain't worth it." I think with the money that we made, we can live the rest of our lives and I think my children can be educated, and the best you can do for your children is an education. Not that education is the answer, okay, but at least it's a little bit of security. Because I've known friends of mine, people that I know, they have no education and they are very successful. And one of the setbacks is (debt?) because if you spend, when you put up a job together on the medians, you spend a lot of money, a lot of resources. And it's very hard, it's very unacceptable, it's a very – see I'm running out of English – it's very, I guess, dramatic to be putting a package together [that] (you know you are not going to get?). You're spending those money resources, hoping that you get it, but you know that it's like [inaudible] used to say, 1 percent, okay, it's still a possibility, 1 percent. If it's 0 percent, it's no possibility. So I'm hanging on the 1 percent. What is the chance of you getting this job? (One?) percent, fine. It's better than nothing.

HG: How much does it cost you to put a proposal together?

BS: About \$25,000, and that's what hurts the smaller companies, the capital to put these jobs together.

HG: So how have you managed your capital?

BS: You know, Homero, I really don't know. Up to now, I thank my lucky stars that I have money to operate. We've been very fortunate.

HG: How'd you build up your bonding capacity?

BS: One of the things that helped us be successful is we know how to be poor. We don't know how to be rich. So I ran this company with a mentality of poor, poor, poor. I have never cut any corners on my jobs. I have never cut any corners with my people. My people get paid well. They get a check every Friday. They drive the best vehicle that I can afford. Not because I'm trying to make an impression on the community, it is because if you get up at five in the morning and you have a concrete floor (pour?), at five in the morning I want you to be able [to], in hot and cold weather, wind, whatever conditions, to get into the vehicle. You have a vehicle that can run, that you can feel proud of it. You got a CD [player] you can listen to, even if it's an hour and that has two reflections, okay. My dad died not knowing what it is to buy a new car. These people that work for us, they'll probably never own a new car, but I want them to know that the company that they work for very hard, and they give their life to, provides them with good transportation. And I tell them, I've said, "You know, so and so, you're due for a vehicle. Go pick out the one that you want." [And they'll say,] Are you sure boss? I said, "Yeah."

HG: So you supply a vehicle for your –

BS: Yes, I supply a vehicle for my employees, and it's whatever they like. Sometimes I feel like, God (dang?), they really went all the way out, but I already gave them

my word. Go and do it. I have problems with my wife about that. [She will ask,]“Why [did]so and so buy this vehicle?” [I will reply,] “He earned it.” When they come into this office and they said, Thank you. And I said, “No. Thank you.” I say, “You. Nobody’s going to give you nothing for free. You worked for the thing, okay. No, I thank you for helping me be where I am.” That’s the way it is. People [are] the one[s] that make you. And you know why I’m like that, because I was denied those things when I was young. So I know that I’d be in the field. I know when the people in the field feel about their bosses, being neglected. I go to work. I go to lunch. I don’t go to lunch with so and so. I go to lunch with my employees. I meet my number one project manager at six in the morning for coffee. He’s having breakfast, and he’s drink coffee, and we talk about the day. At 7:45 [a.m.], I leave with my other crew for breakfast. While they’re eating breakfast and I have a burrito, we talk. One thing Homero that I learned over the years, this is very important, and it was negative when we started [inaudible]. You know we’re all trying to cover up our mistakes; I did not cover them up. I exposed them and they got mad at me. [They asked,]Why in the hell did you tell so and so that I made this mistake? [I would repely,]“Why? To make you a better person.” [They’d say,]How can that be? I didn’t know-” [I’d say,]“Wait a minute, you made a mistake. We got three other projects over here. I want the other people to know what happened to you, not because you’re a less person or you don’t know what the hell you’re doing, I want them to know the mistake that you made so they don’t make it when they’re in your shoes, not because I want to expose your mistake.” It costs us money, fine, fix it. But over here, I don’t want this guy to make the same mistake that you made because I didn’t tell him what happened to you. Another area that I’m very strong with them is, Don’t tell me about the little mistake that you make. I’m human God damn it, you know. I’m going to get pissed off at you. Fix it. But if it’s over \$2,000, ah, I raised it to five [thousand dollars] now because of the level of work that we had. If it’s over \$5,000, I need to know. If you’re below five [thousand dollars], you fix it. After you fix it, you tell me what happened, and how you fixed it, and how much it

costs us because a mistake costs us twice. Why? You made the mistake, okay, now to correct the mistake it's going to cost us.

HG: Who has been the biggest inspiration to you?

BS: My dad. No school. And it's a shame that they give their life for us. Both him and my mom, their whole life was to support us eight kids. My dad made it very clear to us that he didn't want large families among us. He said, "No Mijo, I did not make a mistake. I love you all," he said, "but if you have less kids, it's a better life." He was right. All of us only have two kids, two or three at the most. Well my sister had four because she had a twin, but that was one of the things that my dad always stressed very hard. No large families. And, "Because," he said, "I cannot give you the love that I want to give each one of you. I can only concentrate on the one that's having problems. I cannot provide to you the things that are normal for a family to be provided with. Because not even that, I could not even give you that." When I graduated from college, I told him, "Dad, I graduated from engineering school." He says, "¿Que, Mijo? ¿Tu, vas a graduarte? I said, "Sí, dad." He said, "¿Cómo?" He didn't even know. He knew that I was doing something, but he didn't know, really, what I was doing. He knew that I was going to school and he probably in his mind thought, "Mijo, ah, he's a dreamer. How can he be an engineer? How can he be an engineer?" Let me tell you, the stressful part for my dad was when we got the bridge of the American Border Station [contract]. He would go to the job everyday, pass by, he'd call me and say, "Mijo, are you sure you know how to do that? Are you sure, Mijo, because I see trucks going in and (out?) I see a lot of people? ¿Estas seguro, Mijo? Because maybe you're getting too greedy. Ojala Dios te ayude, y Dios te bendiga. Y, I pray for you." So my second inspiration of being successful was fear, fear of being poor. I just knew that I couldn't have my children live that kind of life that I lived. Not that it was a bad life because I didn't know I was poor. Now I know. You look back, yeah, we were poor. At the time, it was my life. But just to see the struggle that my parents went through

with all of us, it was a lot of fear. And even now, I'm still fearful. I wake up thinking that I'm going to bid this job. What if I lose my ass? What if? You know, because big jobs, big losses.

HG: Have you lost on projects?

BS: We haven't lost, no, no, no, but I guess experience comes with it. The experience that I have now, if I would have had it ten, fifteen years ago, we would have made a killing. But you grow. None of my kids can follow what I'm doing because they weren't there. And they're not going to be there. And I don't blame (them?) because that's the way I wanted it. They tell me that I spoil them crazy. My wife and I, our biggest disagreement is, that, our children our family. She calls me the (Disneyland?) father. I said, "I'm sorry." And I know I'm doing wrong. I know, but just the thought of them feeling what I used to feel, kills me. No, I don't want my children to do it. So inspirations, there's several inspirations. My family was an inspiration, my own family. I want my kids to go to school.

HG: Have you gone back to Chihuahua to visit where you grew up?

BS: No, I have not. Let me ask you why. There's something that my wife said that I have skeletons in the closet. There have been bad experiences in my life and those experiences probably held me, too, because I want to forget about those experiences. I don't want to go back to Riverside High School. I haven't gone back to Riverside High School. I have bad memories of Riverside High School. It was kids. The kids know what they're doing, too. They hurt me a lot. I mean I can tell stories that you probably couldn't believe. The one [inaudible] my whole life and I'll never forget it, there was two kids, the whole football team – I never played sports because I couldn't. I was working. I would love to play sports, I just couldn't. So to make a long story short, I loved the Riverside jackets, the orange jackets. I wanted one and they told me, No, you cannot have one because you're not in sports. So I told my dad, "Sí, sí puedes, hijo. Vamos a la Del

Norte.” I went to the Norte Sporting Goods and they said, No, we cannot give you the orange.” They only would give you the white and orange because the other ones are for the letterman. So I told my dad, “No le hace, jefe. I want one.” “Okay, Mijo, vamos a apartarla.” So we layed it away. I used to go do yards. After the yards, come in and pay it off. My dad would go around the block and I owed about \$2.00 for my jacket. To make a long story short, I ended up with my jacket. Well, that Monday morning I put on my jacket and I went to school. I was so proud of my stupid (school) jacket. We were in government class and they split the class in the middle. So I sat down at my desk and I’m looking all over the place with the beautiful orange and then I look at mine and then one of them says, “Hey Basilio, [I said,] “¿Que paso? Mike.” “I didn’t know they gave letterman jackets to people that clean floors. Is that why they gave you one?” I walked away. I put the jacket away for life. It’s still somewhere in my sister’s house right now because my mom kept it. I have never worn the jacket again. I said, “You piece of you know what.” I said, “He’s right.” I wanted to be something that I wasn’t. Maybe I wanted to be part of the team, but I wasn’t. My team was over here with the poor. I was working. I mean, as a matter of fact, they had to put me inside the classrooms to clean the classroom because when I put my trash in the hallway, they’d come in and they’d kick the trash. I have some bad memories. They humiliated me a lot because I was a wetback. They said that we were, que éramos mojados. And so I go back and my wife says, “Because you’re negative. You always fall back into the negative part of it. Look at the positive part of it.” I says, “Mija, what [inaudible] of it? The counselor sent me to vocational school because I didn’t know how to speak English. The principal down here humiliated me one day in front of the assistant principal.” Because I used to open the door in the morning for the students to come in at 8:15 [a.m.] because after I did my chores, I had the key to open the front door. I was cleaning the floors and I found some (damn?) little, those pen things, and it was from [inaudible] or somebody. So (Don Harris?) (comes to?) me and asked me, “Where did you get that from?” He made me feel like I was doing something wrong. I said, “I found it.” “Well, do you know what that means?” The assistant

principal, Mr. Pickett, he told me, “Where did you get it?” I said, “I found it.” [He asked,] “Do you know what that means?” I said, “No.” “Well you know what, it belongs to one of the-” I said, “Well, I didn’t steal it.” “No,” he goes, “he lost it.” “We just, you know” – I said, “Well, here.” I felt like that I had done something wrong. But (Don Harris?) was very negative. He was very negative towards Hispanics. I don’t even know why. He was doing that as a principal because that was a Hispanic [inaudible] a Hispanic students. So really to go back, inspirations, I guess success is also based on the negativity that you go through in life.

HG: Have you reached a level of satisfaction?

BS: No, no. And I make my own dreams in my mind. I share them with my wife because my wife says, “Gordo, don’t even tell anybody about your goal because I know you can reach it. But some people they’re going to look at it the other way. People that envy, people that are just looking to see when you’re going to fall, don’t even give them the satisfaction. Just you and I, let’s share this.” No, I’m not and I, something is wrong with me. I tell my wife there’s something wrong with me because I just – I mean, retiring, I don’t think I’ll even retire. The only thing that here because what are you going to do at home. I call people you retired to wait for death. Semi-retired, maybe. Vacations, I’ve never taken a week vacation. I feel guilty. What are they doing over there? I’ve taken long [weekends] like Friday, Monday, you know four days, but like you say, I’ve taken no ten days. All my family’s gone to Europe, everywhere. I want them to do the best things in life. To me, that makes me happy to see my family enjoying things. And (embarrassed sometimes?) my wife says, “No, I don’t want to buy the car.” I says, “Why?” “No, I don’t need it. I’m good with what we have.” But that makes me happy. That means I’m accomplishing something, okay. And she says, “No, no, no, no. We’re okay, Gordo. Don’t.” If you ask me right now, satisfaction is when I see my family enjoying the little that I can offer.

HG: Have you run into small business people you've tried to help?

BS: I have, but they don't want to be helped, and it goes back to I was quoted as being, que me la tiraba muy bueno, a couple of years ago. And this goes back to Pete Duarte because somebody asked me to go do a presentation to talk to children that need help. And I said no for two reasons: One, I haven't been able to reach to my own family kids, to my own brothers and sisters, okay? The second one, those kids don't want to be helped. [They asked,]Why? That's why we want you to go talk to them. I said, "Put me in a room with immigrants and I'll talk to them. Don't put me in a room with people that were born here. They're bad. They don't want to be helped. They feel that the government owes them something. They feel like they're owed something for some (damn?) reason. They don't want to be helped. They don't want to go to school. Why? I don't know. Don't blame the system for that. There's also a fine line, there. Forget about assistance (the system?). Look at me,(the system wasn't against me?). Look where I am. No, you don't want that. There's a point where you don't want to help yourself. That's the bottom line. So why do you want me to go talk to them? You want to use me, pass the buck to me, the responsibility because I would feel responsible for those kids if I said something wrong. They don't want to hear anybody. They already know what they want to do. See, this is the situation where, los golpes de la vida,okay. That's what we're going to teach those kids. As they go through life, as they, golpes y golpes, then they're going to learn. But immigrants, it's different, in my opinion. We were neglected by our own country, okay. I love Mexico, don't take me wrong, but Mexico didn't take care of me. So my life, I give my life for this country. This country took care of me, opened the doors. He said, "Look, you can be whatever you want to be." And that's the beauty of this beautiful country. You can be whatever you want to do. You just educate (dedicate?) yourself, smart. To me, intelligence, yeah, there's a lot of intelligent people, smart people, but you know what it's the education (dedication?) that sometimes overcomes things more than time. I bet you would (what?). It's very simple. And these small businesses, let

me tell you, in my opinion, why most of these small businesses don't succeed because they don't want to crawl, they want to run. They want the money, immediate –

HG: Immediate gratification.

BS: Immediate gratification, immediate, (snapping his fingers) like this. They don't want to pay their dues. Oh, and they go to 8(a) because they're hoping that 8(a) make them rich because they heard somewhere along the line – and I was dumb in that respect myself. When I started with Vistacon, it was Urban, JT (Jt?), Amerigos, Tim Bodine, and those companies were 8(a), and we heard like, “Wow, they're making the bucks,” and maybe they were because it was a [inaudible]. So right there, the mentality is okay, I want to go into business, not to support my family, to become (successful over the years?). No, immediate gratification. I want money now. And let me tell you the worse part, and I've seen it, and sometimes I bail out, I help a lot of subcontractors and I do. I bail them out, not because out of my goodwill, it's a mutual. I'm not a Robin Hood here. Nobody gives you nothing for free. My dad said nobody's going to sell you a horse because he's a good horse, okay. But basically, I see where, if I don't help them at that point, they're going to go down. And all I'm doing is giving their money upfront because they don't know how to administer themselves. Let me tell you what I've learned. I have several contractors. They (come in?) beautiful trucks. I said, “When the hell did you buy that truck?” Oh, I'm doing good.” I said, “You had one job, Cabrón, one job. We had one job. The money that came in, that big check, it's not yours, okay.” That was the biggest setback, the (failure?) on the (our?) subcontractors. They see the money, they think it's theirs. They forget about workers' compensation insurance and all. That's what makes it. My wife supported me for a long time with her teaching. I would not cash my checks. And you can interview some of my employees. (They?) made me feel bad because I knew they were getting money every Friday and Basilio wasn't – I had a stack of checks saved because I knew that I didn't have the

money for the checks. I knew that I had the money for my employees, but not mine. I could not cash mine. But they made it. They made us. So basically, the success, we never took money out of the company. We reinvested it, reinvested it, reinvested it. We started with a CECO version Type 2 Corporation, not Type S. Everything stays with the company for bonding, for bonding, for bonding. So the success is bonding. That was [inaudible] bonding. When I bought out my investors, I lost 80 percent of the bonding. It was a bad move. When we agreed to sell, we had an agreement, but I'm from the old school, verbal agreements. My wife says, "No Gordo, in writing now, don't forget." [I said,] "Oh no, Mija, le di la palabra." [She said,] "Forget about the Palabra, it's gone. Gordo, please, it's gone." So sure enough, we signed everything and he ended up with three notes of \$180,000 a note per year, for the next three years, plus whatever we paid, separate. To make a long story short, we agreed that they were going to leave the bonding with us. They pulled the bonding. So I started the company, he left me with \$1.9 (1.5?) million worth of bonding. I got together with my employees and said, "Guys, this is what happened." Honesty, always be honest with my employees. Fifteen years ago, I said we're going back to square one. [They asked,] ¿Qué paso? I explained to them. Quote unquote, me la pelan. It's okay. Cabrones, me la pelan. No, sure enough, we worked hard, we did all the work in-house, and that's when we made the money because we were doing a lot of work in-house. You see, when you do the work in-house, the 20 percent that's [inaudible] overhead and profit was coming directly to us. So I think overall, in the long run, success in many ways is up to the individual, how to treat it, whether it's based on negative past experiences, whether it's [inaudible] the ethnicity. I don't know. But the bottom line, there's somebody up there that helps you, too. In my case, somebody might like me because He takes care of me. I don't know, there is something that I can not explain.

HG: I appreciate your time. I appreciate your story, and I trust that those students that have a chance to review your story from time to time will find the inspiration that is there. And I thank you for your time.

End of interview

DRAFT