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Interview no. 1538

Teresa Gándara

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Teresa Gándara

Interviewer: Edmundo Valencia

Project: Hispanic Entrepreneurs Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: February 24, 2009

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Transcript No.: 1538

Transcriber / Summary: Vanessa Pantoja

Teresa Gándara was born and raised in Central El Paso, Texas. She attended various catholic schools and graduated from El Paso High School. She credits her catholic education for helping her through school. Even though her parents did not approve of her going to college. She cleaned houses, was a house painter, and a life guard throughout her college years. These jobs helped her to pay rent and basic needs. Gándara received her bachelors and master's degree from the University of Texas at El Paso. While attending school, Gándara met her mentor Connie Gamboa who taught her how to channel her leadership abilities into coaching. Gándara moved out of El Paso to New York where she faced racism. In New York, she worked as an assistant manager for Wynona Knitting, a houseware store. She moved back to El Paso a year later to finish her education. Upon arriving, she started a job at Linens-n-things, where she moved from stocker to manager in a year. Gándara graduated and began coaching, she returned to receive her masters degree. Her husband lost his job at this time and assisted with housework as she got her masters. While discussing returning to a job, Gándara and her husband began a new business, Pencil Cup Office Products. She decided to go into business for herself because her husband had knowledge of office supplies, and felt that her husband was the best person to invest in. Pencil Cup supplies offers a personal experience while purchasing office supplies. The company was supported financially by Gándara's education career, this was their biggest challenge. Gándara now depends on a line of credit from her bank. She plans on getting further funding from the federal government 8(a) after her company become certified. Being 8(a) certified makes it easier to obtain loans. Gándara plans to leave her company to her son when she feels he is ready. She also hopes that El Paso will buy things locally which will help all small companies to grow.

Length of interview 96 minutes

Length of Transcript 40 pages

Name of Interviewee: Teresa Gándara
Date of Interview: 24 February 2009
Name of Interviewer: Edmundo Valencia

This is an interview with Teresa Gándara on February 24, 2009, in El Paso, Texas. The interviewer is Edmundo Valencia. This interview is part of the Paso del Norte Entrepreneurs Oral History Project.

EV: Thank you, Ms. Gándara, for being here with us today. Let's start. When and where were you born?

TG: I was born in 1958 in El Paso, Texas.

EV: And what is the exact date?

TG: The exact date?

TG: March 19, 1958.

EV: And where did you grow up?

TG: In El Paso, Texas. I have had the opportunity to go to other places, but 90 percent of my life has been lived here.

EV: In what area of town did you live?

TG: We lived in Central El Paso. We lived right beneath the big "A" on the mountain where Austin High School is. That's where my home is, and that's where I've lived my whole life, around that area.

EV: Since you were a child?

TG: The only time we moved out of that area was when my mom— I was in first grade through seventh grade. And my mom and dad owned a restaurant down in the barrio, the Bowie Bears Restaurant. And, for those eight years, we would go and stay there, back and forth. But we still lived on Federal, which was Central El Paso.

EV: I'm sorry. What was the name of the business, again?

TG: It was the Bowie Bears Restaurant and Grocery Store.

EV: What was the exact address?

TG: I don't remember. It was right across the street from Bowie Bear High School.

EV: Like on Paisano?

TG: No. Remember, think back. Was that Bowie High School when I was in sixth grade?

EV: Actually, I don't—

TG: Bowie High School used to be the Guillen High School. Where Guillen Middle School is, that used to be Bowie. Bowie was moved to Paisano later because they needed a middle school, so they made Guillen the middle school.

EV: And what were your parents' names?

TG: Edmundo Rojas and Julietta Rojas, and they're both deceased.

EV: I'm sorry to hear that. And what were their occupations?

TG: The majority of the time, my father was a jeweler, and my mother was a housewife. Of course, having said housewife and jeweler, a lot of my mom's time was spent helping and supporting my dad in whatever business he was in at the time. So when they had the restaurant, they were both in that business. He had been a jeweler. They did the restaurant business. He went back to being a jeweler, and my mom was always helping him, but she was more a housewife, than anything, first.

EV: Do you know how your dad started in that field?

TG: His father was a jeweler, so he automatically picked up being a jeweler, himself. He had several members in his family who were also jewelers.

EV: Do you remember how many businesses he had?

TG: I can't remember right off hand. The earliest I remember, he worked at Zales Jewelry as their jewelers, and this is when he was pretty young. And then they went from that, I believe, to the restaurant. And from the restaurant, he worked with several other jewelers. I remember him staying a very long time with Ditmore Jewelers, which is no longer around. And then he started his own business, finally, which was Kern Village Jewelers. And he ran that jewelry business for many years, in the Kern Place area. And, at the very end, when he was close to retirement, my brother talked him into being the employee of the month, every month, with the gun shop that my brother owned. So he went to help my brother start his business.

EV: At what point did they own the Bowie Bears Restaurant?

TG: Oh, well, it was when I was very young. I wouldn't be able to give you exact dates. Carlos is the one with the date and number memory. I have none.

EV: That's perfectly fine. Please tell me about your education, where you went to school from elementary up to high school.

TG: I went eight years to St. Patrick's Elementary, which was very hard to do when we were growing up because there was eight of us. And my mother insisted that we get a Catholic school education. So we spent a lot of time working a lot of extra hours on behalf of the school. Back then, they could do that. They would work with you. I mean, we cleaned, we did Fairs, we did everything. And my mom had her own janitorial staff with all of us doing everything all the time. But eight years at St. Pat's. And then I was one of those (clears throat) troubled students. (laughter) So I went to Austin High School. I tried Jesus and Mary, didn't work, tried Loretto, didn't work, *definitely*. Ended up at Father Yermo, which I loved, stayed at Father Yermo a year and a half. Then money got real tight and I ended up going to El Paso High. So I graduated from El Paso High School.

EV: Was Father Yermo still— at that time, was it located at the same—

TG: It's never changed. Father Yermo's always been the same. When it started, it was just the elementary. Then they made the high school, which was just girls. Which is what I really needed because I liked testing my boundaries, let's put it that way. So that was a very secure environment for me. Now it's girl and guy, at the high school level. But when I was going it was all females.

EV: St. Patrick's, where was that located?

TG: St. Patrick's is the same place it's located now, on Mesa, that's never changed either. I mean, they've changed a lot with the schooling and the process, but it's always been there at the corner of Mesa and Arizona.

EV: You went to El Paso High how many years?

TG: El Paso High, I just graduated, my senior year.

EV: Like the last—

TG: Uh-hm.

EV: So up to that point, you have gotten, always, a Christian education—

TG: Well, no, not really, because freshman year, I was in Austin—

EV: I mean, I meant to say, private.

TG: Well, freshman year, I was at Austin High School, which is a public school.

EV: Oh, freshman year.

TG: And I got into a lot of trouble because, you know, the story of the good Catholic girl going to a public school for the first time. It was like, “Yee haw.” So I had a lot of fun, got into a lot of trouble. My mother said, “*Condenada*, you’re gonna go back to Catholic schools.” And we tried a few, until I fit in at Father Yermo. But we couldn’t afford it, with so many of us in school at the time. I had to go back to public school. And I went to El Paso High, and I graduated okay from El Paso High.

EV: What was the primary language spoken at home?

TG: English. We were not— and this is very important, we were not allowed to speak Spanish. My mother and father spoke Spanish so that we would understand Spanish. But my grandfather, who was my mother’s uncle, actually but we never had grandparents. All our grandparents, we never knew any of them. And my

mother's grandfather came, and he lived with us when we were very, very young. And he said, "You will not speak Spanish. In order to survive in the United States you must speak the language to compete and to understand. Otherwise, you'll just get by." And I remember, very distinctly, as a little girl asking for *leche*, and getting slapped because it was "milk," it was not "*leche*." So that was very strongly upheld in our family.

When I went to Father Yermo, as a matter of fact, I couldn't speak a word of Spanish. And when I went and lived in various places, I didn't speak Spanish. It wasn't until I came back to El Paso, in the '80s, and I started working for an immigration lawyer, that I was thrown back into the language. And, since I'd heard it all my life, I started speaking it just with the practice. But there were some embarrassing moments with the language. I remember once when I was working with the attorneys, I was supposed to send a client to the County Attorney's office at the county building. So I sent him to the *Corte del Condon*. (laughter) I thought it was close enough. So they all came back with the customer, and they were all there, and the judge even came, just to see my reaction. They asked me, Where did you send this man? And I said, "The *Corte del Condon*." They were like, Where? And I said it again. And I said, "Okay. I know it's wrong." And they said, You sent this man to the condom courthouse. And I was so embarrassed. But that's how I learned. And I learned never to say that word again in public. But, being in it again, you just pick it up again, when it's spoken around you.

EV: After you graduated from high school, what did you pursue?

TG: Actually, I wanted to go to school. But I was the fifth daughter, out of five women in my family. And only one of my sisters was considered smart enough to go. And being the fifth daughter, I was expected to stay home and take care of my mom and dad. And these are the cultural things that we grow up with. And people are so surprised that they still exist. But they do. And I had been told,

“No, no, no. *Tú te vas a quedar aquí*, and if you want to get married, you’re gonna get married and be here. And you can stay married, and be here with us. But, *no te nos vas a ir.*” So after high school, I wanted to go to college. And my mother said, no. She said, “*No más quieres estar de puta.*” And I was like, “No!” But that was her fear. I was not a good girl like my older sister. She was a saint. I was not. So my mother was terrified that I’d go out among people she didn’t know, and end up pregnant. My father, being the kinder of the two parents, said, “*Mija, estas muy pendejita, nunca lo vas hacer.*” So a year after I had left high school, and I had left El Paso, to stay with the first white man I had ever known. I had never known a *gringo* before my brother-in-law, Bobby. And Bobby had come down to marry my sister, Rose, the good sister. And he’d met me. And when they got married, they moved to Seattle. And he was the first person who ever asked me, “Who bestowed the right to be the family maid upon your shoulders?” I had never been asked that. I had never questioned it. And, for the first time, I said, “Maybe there is more for me to do.” So it took that outsider coming into my world to make me realize, You know what? I can do that and more. But my parents’ vision was very limited. And they said, No. You will not go to college. So I committed my first federal offense, and I forged my parents’ signatures on my scholarship financial aid. I got accepted. And I was disowned for the next three or four years, by my family. But I started going to school. And I lived by myself, which was very unusual for a female Mexican back in those days. And I had three part-time jobs, just to try to make it by. I cleaned houses for some of my professors and friends because they were all slobs. And I charged twenty, twenty-five bucks, and I knew how to clean very well. I’d been the family maid for so many years. And I learned how to swim exceptionally well, and was given a student aid job at the university pool. And I painted houses, when I wasn’t doing other things, for a friend of mine whose father bought houses. So I made it through.

EV: And what college was this?

TG: UTEP.

EV: UTEP.

TG: I am an UTEP alumni. I have both my bachelor's and my master's from UTEP.

EV: So you were here, but living by yourself, in El Paso.

TG: Uh huh, which was very odd.

EV: You had decided to leave your house.

TG: Yeah.

EV: Because that was the only way you could pursue what you wanted.

TG: Yeah. And I knew I wanted school. I didn't know why, then, but it was so important to me to prove that I could do it, for me.

EV: And what major did you choose?

TG: Back then, it was coaching, which was so easy. But I was too young to know how to do school. I had more skills than other kids because, in my belief, my private school education, they were very strict with us. But I didn't know how to learn for myself. So after the first two years, I had to leave school because I had a .69 GPA. (laughs) And they had given me two or three chances, but I think we all decided, by the time I was at .69, that it wasn't the right place for me, at the time. But I always knew I would finish my education, not for anybody else, and not to prove anything to anyone else, except to myself. I knew I could do it.

EV: Let me go back a little bit, to your private school education. From that whole environment, what do you think you learned? Because you mentioned that you believed that it was because it was more strict, that you—

TG: With someone like me, not with everyone, but I was a child who always tested her boundaries, which should have been taken as a positive thing. But the fact that I was a girl, number one: Girls didn't test boundaries. Girls were told what their boundaries were, back when I was growing up. And I remember my mother telling stories about how, at five months old, I found a way to climb out of the crib. And the whole world stopped. They had to find a way to keep me in that crib. Why? So as a baby, they would tie me into the crib, to try to keep me in. And I'd inevitably get loose, and get out of the crib. Now we really encourage our girls. A lot of us now encourage our young ladies to be strong and efficient and go after what they want. Back then, you were told what you wanted. You were told what to do. The Catholic education really helped me, very strongly, because it kept me focused. People have a lot of nice things to say about nuns, but I'm not one of them. I always considered nuns reincarnated mafia lords because they were so mean. And they would slap my hands and they would swat me. Back then, hands-on parenting, and hands-on really meant hands-on. And I was always getting whooped for something. As a matter of fact, I got kicked out of St. Patrick's school about seven times, for just playing with the boys because I was a tomboy. Nobody knew what a tomboy was back then. And they tried breaking it out of me, for as long as I can remember. But I was too headstrong. So I was always trying to break the boundaries. But I needed the nuns. Now I know that. If I had been allowed to do whatever I wanted, however I wanted, I would have gone crazy. The nuns kept me on a very short, short leash. It wasn't an option, back then, to say, "I can't do the studies." As a girl, you were supposed to be good at school. So if I did something bad in school, I stayed after school. I'd have to do it again. I'd have to do it right. And the nuns were very strict to make sure we did it right. So I looked at them. I give them full credit for teaching me how to do school for them. But, as a young adult, I had to learn how

to do school for me. No one ever put it on my shoulders. I did it to please them, and to get them off of me. I had to learn how to do it myself later on. And that's something we don't teach kids right now. We teach them how to do it for your parents, or how to do it to make your teacher happy, or how to do it for whatever. But in the long run, and this is one of my strongest contentions, education is for you. It's your success, no one else's. It doesn't belong to anyone else but yourself. So you do what you do, in school, for yourself. But without the Catholic strictness and sternness, I don't know how it is now, but back then, they kept me in line. And it taught me how to be successful in school.

EV: Did you have any previous jobs, before you started going to UTEP?

TG: Oh, yeah. Well, when I was at UTEP, I had three jobs. I tell you, I painted on the weekends, I cleaned houses, and I got student aid, so I had twenty hours a week so I could be a lifeguard, and manage the pool there. My very first job that I remember— and I just went to thank the man for it, I was thirteen years old and my mom and dad knew Wayne Wendell. Wayne Wendell was our state senator, back then. He's in private law now. And he had to go Washington State to do something. So it was my job to babysit his children for three weeks. And I did that at thirteen years old. And I stayed there. They had a maid, but they needed somebody to play with the kids. So I loved that job. We'd go swimming every day, and we'd hang out at the country club. And I was like, "Woo hoo." And then they paid me to boot. But that was my very first job, babysitting for Wayne Wendell. Other than that, a lot of our energies were spent, back in those days, with chores around the house. Of course, we didn't get allowances. The allowance was, "You are allowed to live in this house." You don't get paid for doing what you should be doing to help the family, which is ludicrous to me to this day. We worked all the time, as part of a family. Then I started the other things. I've had a multitude of jobs since then.

EV: Once you were at UTEP, and you had all these multiple jobs, how did you decide to do all of those?

TG: It's necessity. I had to. I didn't have a choice. And I see kids now saying, Well, I can't go to school and work part time. *Please*. I went to school full time and I worked three jobs just to be able to pay my rent. And I remember, many a times, it was just *sopa* and *frijoles* for the next two weeks because there was nothing else and my cigarettes. I always had cigarettes. I didn't care if I didn't have food. Food would find its way to me. I made enough money to pay my rent. And I remember I was paying gas, which was just a couple of dollars back then, and electric. I didn't have a phone. I didn't need a phone. But I made enough with those three part-time jobs to keep myself going. I rode a bike everywhere. I didn't have a car until I was like twenty-something years old. I rode a bike. Or I rode a bus, if it was a far distance.

EV: From all this that you have talked about so far, are there any special figures, mentors, people that you think that have taught you something that you have carried on?

TG: I went to be a teacher because of my love of children; it took me a while to get there. When you do research on what makes kids change, because I tell you I wasn't a good kid, so to speak. I was a troublemaker. And when you do research on what makes those kids change, because every now and then you see this kid who is just a pain in the butt, and they come out okay, there's always one person who intervened. And the person who stood up and helped me was Connie Gamboa. She's still at the university, with the Department of Kinesiology. And she's the first person who took my skills and my ability to cause trouble and said, "Why don't you use those to lead? You lead anyway." I mean, whenever there was something wrong, whenever people were swimming in the pool with the volleyball team, and football players after hours and without permission, I was the one who had done that. And instead of putting me down for it, or degrading me,

she is the first person who said, “You have phenomenal leadership abilities. But you always lead wrong. You got to learn to lead right.” She said, “People will follow you wherever you ask them to because you’ve got that—” But no one, no one, had ever told me that. And to this day, I credit her for being the one—

EV: Take your time, if you need to.

TG: She challenged me to have faith in myself. And she knows it. She knows I give her credit all the time. Give me a Kleenex from right there. (crying) Thank you

EV: Sure.

TG: Thank you. Okay. I’m good. But it was Connie Gamboa, UTEP coaching, back then, Kinesiology now. She’s still a dean, she’s an assistant dean to the Dean of Kinesiology, and she’s a magnificent woman.

EV: After that point, how did you face those skills? How did you embrace them?

TG: How did I use them?

EV: Uh huh.

TG: I started realizing that I could do anything I wanted to. I already knew I could do anything I wanted to do because I really was always breaking the rules. And it didn’t matter to me, back then how much trouble I got into. I mean my question was, Will it be worth it? And most of the time, it is worth it. But I just started deciding after that, You know what? I can do whatever I want. And I can make what I want happen. When I quit school, that first time, it was in about— I graduated high school in ’76, so started high school in about 1977. And I went for two years so it was about ’78, ’79, when I stopped.

EV: At UTEP.

TG: At UTEP. And I also decided, You know what? I've got to get out of El Paso. I've got to try something new. So I had a friend. She was the sister of my brother-in-law, Bobby, who had married my sister, Rose. And she lived in upstate New York. And she said, "Come up here. I'm getting married. I want you to be my maid of honor." So I took it as a phenomenal opportunity. I packed up all my stuff and I moved. And I remember, as soon as I got there, it was the first time I'd ever really actually faced racism because I was told, "Oh, you're a Mexican. So you're up here to get unemployment," and blah, blah, blah. And I remember thinking, What would that have to do with my being a Mexican? And it was said in a very funny, funny, ha ha way. But it was the first time I ever felt wrong for being who I was, as a Mexican. And I'll never forget that feeling. Well, after that I decided, "You know what? Within a week, I will have a job."

TG: I'm sorry. Who told you that?

EV: It was an uncle of Kim, my brother-in-law's sister. They were very, very from Upstate. When I lived there, because I ended up living there a year and a half, I realized, for the first time what prejudice was. I mean from this road to this road, above the road, it was all Irish Catholic. And they were the people with the money. From this road to this road, below the road, it was Italians or anything else. I found an apartment on the bottom end of the road, and was told, "Oh, no, no. You can't live there." And I remember telling them, "Guys. Look at the color my skin, not for nothing, and I love you all dearly, but I think I have a little bit more in common with the Italians than I do with you guys." But it was very funny because I'd always been a party person, which is one of the reasons I was always in trouble. But whenever I threw a party, my white friends, or my Anglo friends, which included my brother-in-law's sister and all of her friends, would come until about ten o'clock. And then when my Italian friends started coming, they'd all leave. And my Italian friends would come, and we'd party until all

hours of the night because that's how we do it. But it was always very separate, always very separate. My brother-in-law's sister, Kim, made great strides to try to be friends with both sides. But she'd grown up not being friends, so it was a very big stretch for her. I didn't care. I'd never seen that division. And not only that, knowing that there was another way of doing things, which had been brought to my attention by my brother-in-law, just opened my mind to be open and want to understand how different cultures and different people do different things. I'd never experienced that in El Paso because everyone I dealt with was Mexican, or not Mexican, but not something else. So it was the first time I got to meet other people up there. But as soon as I was there, I had a job. And then I got a better job, and then I got a better job. So I've always worked.

EV: Would you describe the jobs that you had.

TG: Well when I got up there, the first thing I did was get a job at a pool. They needed a pool manager at one of the city pools. So I knew that job would pay for my rent while I found another job. And while I was working that job, right before the end of summer, another job came up for this place called Benjamin Franklins, which was like a Linens N Things, a kitchen supply sort of thing, which was really cool because I could buy all my stuff really discounted. So I started buying really cool stuff. But then, in the same mall, there was an opening for an assistant manager at Winona Knitting Mills. So because of my management skills at pools, and because I could manage several people, which is ironic that the thing that everyone always tried beating out of me, which was my tom boyishness, is the reason why I am who I am. Because of my ability to manage, I got the Winona Knitting job immediately. And it was a very good-paying job, and had insurance, and all the benefits. So I was very excited by that.

EV: These places where you had a managerial role, did you get any training from them? Or did you develop your own system?

TG: No, I just fell into it. You find out what they want, and if you want to be successful, you play by their rules. It's the same thing in college. It's like I told students all the time, "I'm dumb as a rock." And people say, Oh, no you're not. When I say that other people, smart people are offended, or they're very sensitive, "Don't say that." I say, "You don't understand. I'm dumb as a rock. It takes me three or four or five times to read and understand. I wasn't born naturally smart." And people who think that's not true don't belong to large families. Because in my family, I could tell you which were the ones who were naturally smart. They could touch a book and through osmosis, all the information would go in them. The skies would open, and God would touch them on their heads. And then there were other ones of us who, no matter how much we studied, how much read, it just wouldn't go in. But what I learned was it's all a game. It's all a game. You have to play by their rules. You have to decide how much you want play the game, and if you want win the game. So with college, especially, it was just a matter of, You know what I am not going to lose this game. When I graduated with my master's, I was very proud of myself. Well, when I went back to school the second time, when I came back from New York, I was very, very proud of myself because that first semester I went back, and I got on the Dean's List, just because. Nothing had changed. I was still me. I was still dumb as a rock. But I learned, by that time, I was old enough to know that I wanted it for me, not for anyone else. I didn't have anything to prove. And I had to study and learn on my own and keep going. But I had that commitment that you have to have when you're in college, to do it for yourself.

EV: So from that time, when you went away, from that whole experience. What would you consider that you got out of that? Like in the sense of personally, as well as working as a manager. What skills did you develop?

TG: That's easy to answer because personally, comes to mind immediately. When I was up in New York, I remember being all by myself, in my apartment, smoking and drinking, and I felt very, very lonely. And I thought, Oh my God, I'm all by

myself. And I realized what I consider to be my defining moment of who I was, at that time. And this is what I tell everyone, “You’re exactly where you want to be in life because that’s where you’ve chosen to be.” Even though I was alone, I had to stop and ask myself, Who bought the ticket to move up here? Who left everything she knows? Who decided it was time to start on her own? There is no going back and making a change to the decision. You make the decision at the point that it’s necessary to make it. There is no hindsight. There is no looking back and saying, “I should have, could have, would have.”

In my opinion, you make the decision that’s necessary at that point. So when you question it in the future, you just got to make sure to remember, When I made this decision, I needed to do this. And I walked away from New York learning that about myself. You’re exactly where you want to be because that’s where you’ve chosen to be. If you don’t want to be there anymore, change. It’s that easy. People are scared to change. And we get into these comfort zones, so that we don’t want to change. You’ll die if you’re too comfortable. Change is an uncomfortable aspect. You have to be willing to be uncomfortable in order to be happy. So that was my personal experience up there. I knew that anywhere I was that’s where I was choosing to be. And that played a very important role when I left administration, when I left education to start this business. I had gotten to the point where I was no longer totally satisfied with my job, as an educator. And I love kids. I miss kids more than anything. But it was having less and less to do with children, and more and more with all the other junk. That’s not what I got into it for. So when I had that uncomfortableness, my decision was, Do I stay here? Because I’ve got my master’s in education. I’ve got this job with great insurance. Or do I challenge myself and go into entrepreneurship? Which is it? And me, I love the challenge. So I walked away. But I learned then, in New York, that you’re exactly where you want to be because that’s where you choose to be. If you don’t want to be there anymore, change. And as far as all the jobs go, I learned very strongly that every job you have is a steppingstone to the next one. You never lose. I don’t care if you work at McDonalds cleaning toilets. As

long as you learn to do that well, it's a steppingstone to the next job. And if you pick something up from everywhere you go, you'll have this wealth of knowledge and experience, which is what I came back to El Paso with. When I got back here, I immediately needed another job because I wasn't going to move back home, even though they were kind of talking to me, at the time. And I got a job as a stocker, stocking goods, not stalker, at Linens 'N Things. And it was new to El Paso. It broke my heart when they closed a couple of months ago. But when they came to El Paso, it was the first time, and it was out at Lee Trevino. Two days after I was here, I had applied, gotten the newspaper. They're looking for people to stock the store. I was very strong. I got the job immediately. And then, having had management skills, they knew I was capable, but they didn't have a management position. But within a year, I had moved from stocker, to salesperson, to cashier, to management.

EV: How was your experience coming back to UTEP and pursuing your degree?

TG: Well, it took me twenty years to get my bachelor's, twenty years. But it was something. I kept running into Connie Gamboa, and she kept telling me that I had to go back. And I would tell her, "Connie, I can't." During that time, I had two children. I got married. I had two kids. My commitment was first to my children. So when I got back to El Paso, and I started at Linens 'N Things, I had met my husband shortly thereafter. And that's another story— whew. We don't have enough time on this one. I couldn't stand him. *Ay caramba. Ay Dios mio.* But we won't even go into that one. That's another new tape. We have to be drinking when we discuss that one.

Then I got a job at Honeywell. Actually, after Linens 'N Things, I went to work at Gail Darling. And Gail Darling placed me at Chevron. And from Chevron, I went to Honeywell. And at Honeywell, I moved up from answering phones to systems management to the administrative assistant to the finance director. So that was a very, very good experience. Again, all of it led back to starting as

painting houses. But people saw that I worked. I love work. I work very hard. And that's what I picked up from every job. So at Honeywell, I worked there during the time that my children were born. And when both of my kids were born, I told my husband, "It's time for me to raise my children. I want to raise my own kids." So I went home, and became a housewife, and raised my children. And when they were both in school, at least half-day, that's when I told my husband, "It's time for me to go back to school. Enough time has passed." And I'd take a few classes here. And I was PTA and Girl Scout leader. We had a twenty-five girl troop. We went to San Diego and San Antonio and all over. We'd take the whole family. So we had wonderful experiences with Girl Scouts, and did the PTA thing, and all this VIP in the public schools. So I was always very involved. I've always had this very high energy level, like this crazy man. So when it was time to go back to school, finally, it was time. We had the money. It was going to be tough because we didn't have a lot of money. And I couldn't get grants because I wasn't the first one in my family. My sister, Rose, had been the first one in the family. And that was big thing back then. And I was married, so I had a family. So the grants weren't there. We had to start paying by cash. But my husband said, "If you want to do it, let's do it." So it took me twenty years, from when I started to when I finished, to get my bachelor's. And my kids, at the time, were already in about third and fourth, or fourth and fifth grade when I got my bachelor's. And then, immediately thereafter, I started working as a coach, at Terrace Hills Middle School, and a teacher, and everything else. I was always doing five or ten things. And a few years later, I thought, You know what? I'll try for my master's. Why not? And I tried for my master's, got my master's two and a half years later.

EV: And what is your master's?

TG: My master's is in education.

EV: Education?

TG: Uh huh. So then, I became an assistant principal at Bassett Middle School. And I worked there five and a half years. But that's the same time that we had started this, you see? I'm coming back to the entrepreneur. When I was getting my master's, I was going crazy because I was doing coaching, I was doing teaching. I had a club called Girl Power that I started El Paso wide. So it was a huge organization. I was doing life skills. I was doing a lot of different things at the school because I love being involved with the kids. And when I decided to start my master's, my husband had just gotten laid off from corporate America. And I was very proud of him because he got laid off for a matter of principal, which was neither here nor there, but he found himself without a job. And at that point, I told him, "I need a wife. While I'm getting my master's, I need a wife. I need someone to buy the groceries, and make sure the house is clean, and the groceries are bought, and make sure that the kids continue doing their chores." So he took a year off, which my daughter calls it the year of boot camp. He took a year off to help me, while I got my master's.

Once I got my master's, I immediately was placed as an assistant principal at Bassett Middle School. So it was time for him to start looking, and he was going to start looking. And we sat down one day, and I remember telling him, "Why do us *Mexicanos* think that we have to work for somebody?" Because he started thinking, "Well, I can go here, and I can go there." I said, "You know what? You know better than anybody." He had worked this business since he was nineteen. His is 100 percent committed to customer service. He works hard. He works smart. One of the smartest men I know who never got a college degree. And I've said it before, "Some of the stupidest people that I know have masters and PhDs. And some of the smartest people I know never had the benefit of college. They're just street smart." And I'll bank on street smart any day. So we started thinking, and he said, "You know what? We've got no money." Who needs money? That's always my thing. Who needs money? But we started on a dime, and we had three customers. And I would do all the paperwork, everything we needed for

certifications and stuff. Joe started working with him. I'm sure he told you that Joe worked free for many months. Once we could pay him, we paid him well. But we just had one little office room next door. And it was slow and steady, but I always wanted to come here. And I was always saying, "When can I come? When can I come?" He said, "Not yet, not yet, not yet, not yet, not yet." Because we needed my income to keep the business going. The business didn't make money for the first couple of years. And you need a secondary income. So my money would help run the business and keep the family going. So it was, "Not yet, not yet, not yet." Then, after about five and a half years, someone said something that really pissed me off. And I said, "I got to come." And he said, "Come on. It's the time." So it was perfect timing. So I came here. And that was two and a half years ago.

EV: Before we continue, because there's people who are going to listen to this, and they don't know what are we talking about. What is the present name of your company?

TG: My company is called Pencil Cup Office Products. And we are here in El Paso, 1701 Texas Avenue, locally owned and operated. We have anything you find in an office, furniture, supplies, which include paper, pens, inkjets, toners, break room supplies, coffee, cookies, cups, plates, bathroom supplies, toilet paper, Lysol. Anything that you need to run your office with, we can get it and sell it for you here at Pencil Cup. So that's our business.

EV: How many employees do you have?

TG: Now we have fourteen employees. And we started with Carlos and Joe. Actually, we started with Carlos, by himself, because even for a few months there, he worked by himself with three customers.

EV: How many years has the company been in existence?

TG: Seven and a half years. We started June 1, 2001.

EV: The next question, you already started a little bit on that. Why did you decide to go into business for yourself?

TG: You're more successful at doing what you're good at, and what you know, than you are trying something different. So his automatic reaction was to go back into office supplies for someone. But I had this really good teacher-paying job, so we had money to invest in ourselves. And the idea of making our own paycheck, without having to answer to someone else, to someone else who doesn't do it as good as you, as well as you can, was very enticing to us. And we knew it would be challenging. But I remember telling him, "If I could invest my money in anybody, I would invest it in my husband." And it was the best decision I made because he started this business. I helped as I could, but I maintained my business, my educational career. And he built it up, so that when I came over, we blossomed. But it's a true team effort with myself and my husband.

EV: Did somebody else encourage you to have your own business?

TG: No, just him and I, him and I. We decided to do it amongst ourselves. Now, once I came over, I realized how much help there is. A lot of entrepreneurs try to go this route by themselves, which is what we had done for five and half years. We had done it by ourselves. When I came over, I give a big shout out to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. They have so many programs to help entrepreneur businesses. The community college, through their Contract Opportunity Centers, have so many opportunities that helped. But it took us about a year for me to figure all this stuff out, and start making contacts. I wish everyone who wanted to start a business would start there first. Get the help and support that's available. It would be so much easier.

EV: How did you determine the need for this business?

TG: Well, he had to get another job. Carlos had to be employed. And either he was going to go work for someone else, or we were going to start our own business. And like I say, both of us are very strong, determined people. And when the need came for him to be employed, better us than anyone else.

EV: Well you had mentioned that's all he had done, he had plenty of experience. But yourself, do you have any experience in the field that you are in?

TG: My experience comes in management. I mean, immediately issues started arising when we started increasing personnel. When you talk about, "Did anyone teach you?" The district was phenomenal at training employees. They gave me so many trainings through the district on management, on budgets, on financing, on all that stuff. And more importantly than anything, when you're a teacher, when you're a principal, they teach you people skills. So when I came over here, I brought all of that experience with me. At first, I felt completely out of my element because this is so far from education. But then I realized that all of us are teachers. We're all selling something. Parents are always selling their morals and their values to their kids. They're teaching them about those morals and values and behavior. And whatever behavior the parent has, the child is learning. So the parents are teachers. Anyone. You're a teacher. I don't know who you deal with on a daily basis, but if you have brothers, or sisters, or *sobrinas*, or *sobrinos*, or whatever, you're teaching them. You're selling them whatever you believe in. Once I started realizing that connection, You know what? I've always been a teacher. I've always been selling. I was good at that because I'm good at this. So I brought everything with me and said, "Now it's time to sell. Instead of good behavior and education, it's time to sell this stuff." So I started doing everything that we could do to increase our business. And we went real fast, real quick.

EV: And what were the economic conditions in the region when you started?

TG: In the region when we started? They were good. They weren't great, they weren't bad. We knew it was going to be hard. We knew our biggest competition, our competition is huge. I mean, we have two or three of the biggest organizations that we compete with on a daily basis. I go back to knowing that you're exactly where you want to be because you've chosen to be there. We chose to compete with those big guys. So we knew we had to do that they do, better, faster, and more committed to our customers than they are. Our niche is customer service. People have forgotten about customer service. And when we remind them how important it is, because we service them, it's like finding an old friend. We really, truly take care of our customers. And that's something you can't find at a store. Go back to the question again because I forgot my train of thought.

EV: We were talking about the economic conditions.

TG: Yeah. So we knew it was going to be tough, but we knew that we were doing what we were good at. We knew that we were doing what Carlos was good at. I was already doing what I was good at, in schools. That wasn't a question. We didn't have any concerns that he couldn't do this in competition with the big guys who just sell. That's all they do. They say they take care of business. They're taking care of their business. He would take care of the customers. And in doing so, took care of our business. So we knew that it was going to be tough, but it all depends on how much you're willing to sacrifice. And we were ready. We were ready to play the game.

EV: What was the initial reaction of the community at large when you opened your business?

TG: The initial reaction was one of, I would say, unknowing. They just didn't understand. First of all, "You're doing what?" And of course, everyone

compares you to what they already know, which were the big guys. And I'll never say their names, so you'll only hear me talk to them about the big guys. But they do that. Yeah, but they do that. And they make you go down, spend your gas, spend your time, lose your productivity, put yourself in liability's chance, and do all that. We'll do it for you. And that's where the customer service starts coming in. People started saying, Wait a minute. Do I have a minimum order? "No, you don't. We will service you because you're our customer, and we honor the fact that you do business with us." So people started realizing, You know what? Customer service does count for something. So the initial reaction was, "We already buy office products. We don't need it." And I told Carlos, I told my husband just this weekend, "I can't find it, but I know that somewhere, I read Zig Ziglar said that you need five things in order to change a person's behavior." And when we were going out there pushing Pencil Cup instead of these big guys, we would always address those five things: the need, the ability, the want, the desire, and, I think, it's something else. I don't know. So we had to change people's behavior to believe that we could get them the same thing, very compatible rates. We have to compete to be in business. But we do it nicer, faster, quicker, and more personable. And El Paso is a culture that likes personal. They don't like not knowing you. *Tienen que ser compadres*. They have to know you. So at first, it was disbelief, or unknowing, but we changed their mind very quickly.

EV: Did you need funding to start?

TG: Carlos is one of those stubborn, obstinate men— I'm sure you picked that up yesterday. And when we started, he said, "No. We're going to do this on a dime. We will do it with what we have." Well that was fine when we had three customers. But when we started growing, and we noticed we needed a computer, we had to get help. And Larry Madrid, who was with ACCION, at the time, stepped in, and gave us funding for a computer, even though it was almost like pulling teeth with Carlos because he hates having credit. He's one of those that

believes if you have the money and you want something, you buy it. If you don't have the money, then you don't really need it. So we got funding, through ACCION, for our first computers.

EV: What is ACCION?

TG: ACCION is— I don't remember what the acronym is, but its run through the Upper Rio Grande Work Force Division. And I think it's statewide, I'm not sure. But it's a funding opportunity. It's a federally funded program that loans you money. I believe it's based on your personal assets. So as long as you have personal assets, you can get funding to help your company grow. So we used it to buy our computer. And we paid it back immediately. And from there, just kept going.

EV: Did you have any other sources of funding besides that?

TG: Just my job. Every time I got a paycheck, it would go straight into the company. We would deduct what we needed to pay our bills at home, buy a few groceries. My children were great. They knew it was going to be real tight for a while. But they were as excited about us starting our own company as we were. So I'd get my paycheck, and it'd just go straight to the company. So that funded our company for the time.

EV: Did you begin with any kind of business plan?

TG: For ACCION, we had to a little business plan. And it's funny because I found it the other day, and it was so cute. It looked like a kindergartner's drawing because we were so small. Our family van, Aerostar van, became the company delivery truck. And they said, Do you have your own delivery vehicles? "Yes, my Aerostar van." And we were tiny. So we had to do a little plan for them. Did we ever look at that again? Not until we got 8a funded. And 8a funding, which

happened to us last year, that is funding through the SBA, 8a/SDB funding, that requires a huge effort to develop a business plan, before you're even considered. And then all your assets and everything else that comes with that. And that was very hard to get. But very well worth getting because it really made us focus on our business.

EV: We'll go into the 8a in more detail in a bit. Let me just ask you something before that. What major obstacles did you encounter in the start-up phase, if any?

TG: When you say obstacles— and I know you got Carlos. Carlos doesn't believe in obstacles. And I consider an obstacle something you can't overcome. I don't believe in obstacles. Don't forget, you're exactly where you want to be. And if I want to be on the other side of that obstacle, I consider it a challenge. The challenges we had were the financial. That was hard, but it was a challenge. We knew we could overcome it. We knew we'd get better. The challenge we're facing right now is better understanding our books. We're finally delving into the actual bookkeeping ourselves, and understanding cash flow, which was not a big deal before we grew. I mean, when we were a little company, "Woo hoo. We made a few dollars profit this month. Woo hoo." Well all of a sudden, we started growing so fast that we had all these new customers, but they don't pay you for another sixty days, and your bills are due. So it was like, "Aaahhh. What are we doing wrong?" It caused us to pause and say, Stop, and look, and concentrate, and get more involved with our own bookkeeping. Even though we have a bookkeeper, get more involved with it. So that's been a very big challenge for us. It's been exciting, and I'm very proud of Carlos. He's the chief financial officer. It's been very challenging for him. And he's one of those guys who is just driven. So when something's hard for him, you know it's going to be hard for the rest of us because he gets so focused on it. So the challenges have been just understanding our business as we grow. And like I say, neither one of us had a business background. We have the skills in customer service and management that we've made it with. So it's been real interesting.

The other challenge has been being able to afford insurance for our employees. That's been very hard. And this year, for the first year, we were able to afford insurance. I wish we could have afforded it before because it's so expensive. It's so expensive. And even now, it hurts. But as soon as we got insurance, one of my ladies went and got checked, and she has advanced breast cancer. She hadn't had it checked for years because she hasn't had insurance. And I just keep thinking, If we could have had it two or three years earlier. But who knows? You can only do what you can do. We'd been trying to get it for two years. We finally got it this year. I'm very happy we got it. But that has been a challenge, to be able to make enough money to be able to say, "As a company, we can give this back to you, our employees." And it's a big chunk every month, so you feel it. But I'm happy we did it.

EV: You have mentioned the customer service [and] the managerial skills. In addition to that, what factors have helped your company grow and expand?

TG: I think number one is our energy level. We have a great energy. Carlos is ridiculous. I mean, if you could bottle Carlos, you could sell him everywhere. He's here at three thirty in the morning. Of course, he goes home at twelve o'clock and I close down the office in the afternoon. He goes and he runs, and he does all his other things. And sometimes, he'll invite me to come early in the morning with him, and I'm like, "No." The other thing that's played a big part is we're so different, he and I. But we find that medium ground that we need to go forward with. I mean, there's always disagreement and fights and whatever, but then we say, Okay. Where are we going? What are we discussing this for? And we find that meaningful ground, which has both sides to it, which is really awesome. So we come and we merge and decide what's best. And we go down that trail. So being able to do that has been very beneficial. Our energy level and, I think just our being proactive. We don't like waiting for stuff to happen. We're always looking ahead, Let's plan for this, let's plan for this, let's do this. We don't want this to happen. Let's take care of the customer. Before the customer

calls with a complaint, let's make sure that we've called them and checked on them, and stuff like that. So just that and our independent skills that we bring.

EV: We can go back to when you were starting to talk about the 8a and SBA. Describe major successes you have experienced as a business owner.

TG: As a business owner. We're still in business, number one. That's huge. Number two is we've had a constant growth. That is huge. That's huge nowadays. Even now we're growing. When the economy is having it rough, we had our best January ever, knock on wood, and let's hope it keeps going. As a teacher, I never put a lot of emphasis on awards and trophies for kids, but I know the role they play. And we've gotten acknowledged by our community on three different occasions. One of them was the entrepreneurial award from the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in 2007. In 2008, we got the statewide Small Hispanic Business. That's where you guys heard about us because they did the article on that. That was huge because that was statewide. And we're like, little old Pencil Cup. Woo hoo. So that was neat. And then last year we got the Hispanic Chamber's business growth award, too. So if you consider successes being, not so much the trophy or award, but what they stand for, our community which is El Paso and the outlying, knows that we're committed to them. And we've proven it.

We've gone from three customers to more than seven hundred. So we're growing, competing against those guys. That tells you, and that tells them, that we're taking care of them. Because it's an honor. Every time someone does business with us, that is a success. Every time we open a new customer, that's a success that bills to our company's being acknowledged by our community as someone who's supporting them. When they give us the award, it lets us know that they're aware of our commitment to them. The fact that we're still in business, still making money, and being acknowledged by our community are probably the three biggest successes.

EV: How was the process for obtaining the funding from SBA?

TG: We've never gotten SBA funding.

EV: Oh, no?

TG: Well, ACCION, I don't think ACCION is SBA. The only funding we have is a line of credit with our banker. So they said, Okay, you have this much inventory and stuff. Based on that, we can lend you this much money. We always pay it back down. But when we need it again, we build it back up. And we need it, and then we pay it back down. So that line is always open. SBA, we've never gone through their funding programs. Not to say we won't, my dream is to own my own building, and I'd like to do that in the next couple of years. In that case, I'd go through the SBA 504, and get funding through them to help me buy a building, build my capital, which would be the building, and back me in the purchase of a building.

EV: I'm sorry, then I got it wrong. So the 8a, what is that?

TG: The 8a is a program that's federally run through the SBA. We call it the government kiss. In order to be 8a certified, that's a certification, you have to prove first, that you're a small business. Secondly, that you are a HUB, which is a historically underutilized business. In other words, see that map right there? All the green area, the United States government has said all this area here is underutilized. Notice everything from the freeway, I-10, everything from the freeway down, according to the federal government, is underutilized, it's poor areas. Very few people know this, I wish more did. In the United States, from the freeway down, is the poorest part of the United States. So when you start your company in one of those areas, you're called a HUB, historically underutilized business. Since we started, we've been a HUB because we started south of that

line because we wanted to make sure to have a business where we could put something in. Just by being here, we buy food from them, and ice cream from them. It's important to have your businesses where the district needs support. Federal HUB means that thirty three or more percent of our people live in assigned areas. So we're state and federally HUB certified. We've been that since we started opening business. I knew that 8a was very hard. Everyone had told me, Oh my God. It's so hard and it is. This is my 8a binder.

EV: Oh.

TG: Oh, exactly. This is my 8a binder. So in order to get 8a certification through the federal government. See this, this is all 8a. You have to show that, basically, you have the finances and resources, personal property, to support your business. And you have to prove it. They don't just take it at face value. You have to prove it to them. Once you submit all your paperwork, it goes back and forth. And if they say, You know what? You are a viable company. We will certify you 8a. It's real important that you get that certification because the federal government has, what they call, set-asides. The government says to anyone who gets federal funding, it's all different with every organization, "You will spend so much million dollars on 8a, HUB certified. You will also spend so much million on woman-certified. You will also spend so much million on minority-certified and veteran-certified." Well other than veteran, guess what? Pencil Cup's all of them. So it serves a very important place, especially now that we're dealing with Fort Bliss. And I didn't do that until I came over because I knew the time and energy it would take. Neither did I submit my woman-owned or my minority-owned certifications until I was here full time. We submitted HUB. But I didn't feel that I would feel comfortable submitting the other ones without actually being here. So this is what you called the kiss of the government. The government had said, "You know what? We have reviewed all of Pencil Cup's books." And talk about a business plan. Woo. This business plan is amazing. That really put our company in perspective, when we did that business plan. But 8a, it makes you do

the business plan. It makes you do outlooks. It makes you do all the things that you should be doing. Is it a lot of time? Yes. Is it a lot of energy? Yes. Did I do it on my own? Yes. Was that dumb? Yes! Because I found out later that the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce would have helped me with it. That's why I say people have to go there first, before they do these things on their own. But that's when I started finding out about the chamber. As a matter of fact, I had submitted it once, and gotten it back, which to me, my ego couldn't handle that. I don't like getting things back. But I went to the chamber. They helped me. We submitted it again, and it was accepted. So it's just the government saying that, "You know what? Pencil Cup's books, they're good. Their finances are good." So that when we deal with the federal government, they don't have to do all that. They already know we're 8a certified. And it's a yearly process. So we have to do this every single year. So that's what that is. Now, having said that, if I go look for an 8a loan, an SBA loan, I'm going to get it real quick, compared to the guys who are not 8a certified.

EV: I see.

TG: Because I've already gotten the kiss from the government. If I go to a bank and I say, "You know what? I'm looking for a building loan." And they say, Are you 8a certified? If I say, "No," that's hard. If I say, "Yes," oh, right away. "Oh, you are 8a certified? Come on. You've already been kissed by the government. Let's talk." So it plays a huge part in opening doors for us.

EV: We're going to go a little bit away from that. What role has your family played in the growth of your business?

TG: Well, as you know, my succession plan, as I call it, is my son. My son went off to college for two years. As much as I push education, I mean, I go and do things for the schools as often as they call me to. I'm scheduled to go in March to speak, as an entrepreneur to students, and tell them all this. I'm always pushing

education. It's not for everyone. It wasn't for me, the first time. My son tried it for two years. It wasn't for him. So we said, Okay. That's fine. Find a job. It meant everything to us when he asked to have a job here. And poor guy, we give him no slack. He started in the warehouse and throwing the trash. He thought he was going to waltz in and be a salesman, and make commission. No, no, no *que* salesman, *ni que* commission. Start at the warehouse, clean, trash. Then we moved him up to delivery, a year and half. Then he's come over. Now he's here. He's sales, and he's also operations. He runs that warehouse for us. So knowing that my husband and I feel very comfortable that, in the next couple of years, should we decided to retire, we know that our family business, rather than just closing the doors, it means so much to us that my son would be here to continue it. And he's getting more and more involved in it. He's feeling the ownership more himself. He just became a stockholder so that had a big part to do with it, for him.

As far as my daughter goes, she acts as a consultant to my husband because she graduated with her bachelor's in business. So he feels very comfortable talking to her about things. She's just twenty-three years old, but he's always asking her, "What do you think about this? What do you think about this?" You know, having a friend to talk to is so important, and she serves that role. I mean, our family has been fantastic. Now, as far as family, I also have my nephew here, who sells for me, and my niece, who sells for me. So this is truly a family business. They bring in money, and they help and support, and we all believe, strongly, in this little organization we call Pencil Cup. This little bitty company pays for the livelihood of fourteen people. And that to me is huge. Not many people can say that. And not mentioning the other people it supports with that paycheck. But family has played a huge part in our success.

EV: What challenges have you faced growing a business as a Hispanic?

TG: In El Paso, the challenges are so much less than anywhere else because we're ninety percent Hispanic in El Paso. So they're not there as much as I think you see them in other places. Having said that, I know that I've seen and I've been around, people who are not Hispanic. I disagree with people, and people disagree with this with me, as well. But it's my contention that there is a very strong divide, in El Paso businesses, themselves, among Hispanic and non-Hispanic. And there's a few of us who cross both barriers, but not a lot. As far as the challenge goes, it's been more of a benefit than a challenge, being Hispanic. Because people like dealing with people they know and understand. Our biggest growth has come, I think, as being part of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and being known as part of the Hispanic Chamber. So it's not so much of an obstacle. Having grown up, that whole cultural thing of me supposed to be the family—that was a huge obstacle or challenge. But in the business world, in El Paso, I don't think it plays that much of a challenge.

EV: What percentage of your customer base is Hispanic?

TG: Oh, just about, I'd say, ninety percent. Well that's the population in El Paso. So you're not going to escape that. And I've never done a demographic survey on who and what. Just about everyone we deal with because that's the population of El Paso. You can't escape that.

EV: You already mentioned something in this regard. Does your company enjoy any advantages of being a Hispanic-owned business?

TG: Yeah. Like I said, people like dealing with things they understand, or people they understand. And people are creatures of habit. The Hispanic culture is one that is very supportive of itself. I know that people are saying, They pull each other down. I don't see that. I see Hispanic business owners helping each other out. I know that whenever anyone needs help, I'm there. I tell them, "If you're filling stuff out, give me a call. I'll help you fill it out. If you need help this and that."

The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, here, is the number one in the nation. And that says something about El Paso. Not just the chamber, it reflects the commitment the El Paso community has to supporting each other. So just being *familia*, that's what it is.

EV: To what extent have you been exposed as a leader or role model?

TG: Oh, I've had tons of them. Like I say, at the schools, they call me back to talk to the kids because of my commitment to education, and my commitment to defining yourself based on your skills and on who you are, and not based on what society expects you to be. Define who you are to yourself. Find out what you're good at and go out and do that. As a leader, I've made sure to commit myself to business because I have a tendency to go out and do everything. And I need that energy to run my business. So I have purposely not gotten involved in a lot of things. But I'll always be involved with kids and education. We sponsor, those are my two little rugrats that we sponsor through the La Fe clinic, and through the school. We sponsor them with their uniform and stuff. So I have that leadership role with those kids. As far as the community, we were the sponsors of the Paraprofessional Conference last year. So we had an opportunity to prove leadership in that role, also.

EV: Do you belong to any other chamber besides the Hispanic Chamber?

TG: We belong to the Hispanic Chamber, to the Greater El Paso Chamber. Are you asking just for chambers or for certifications or what? Because we are definitely Better Business Bureau, Hispanic Chamber, Greater El Paso. We're woman-owned, which means we are members of the Women's Business Enterprise National Council. We're minority-certified, which means that we are MSNBC [CSTMBC], which is the South Central Texas Minority Business Council [Central South Texas Minority Business Council]. That's about it. I'm sure I'm forgetting something. Because I believe so strongly in supporting your local

community, I'm on the board of directors of Homegrown El Paso, which is, in my opinion, very important to us.

EV: Could you talk a little bit about that organization?

TG: See this paperwork here? This is what I have presented so far to Elliot Shapleigh. When you look at those numbers, when people are made aware of the amount of numbers that leave our community. When you buy from big boxes, when you buy from a restaurant chain, instead of Chico's Tacos, that money leaves. It doesn't stay here. And it leaves to go somewhere else and circulate somewhere else. When our city and our state and our schools buy from the other guy that money's gone. That money leaves El Paso, which to me, is a huge travesty because the people that we elect should have a fiduciary responsibility to take care of the monies and make sure they stay among their elected people. I believe strongly in this because of all the research I've done. Like I say, I've purposely not got involved in a lot of things. I'm very committed to this because I see the affect that big boxes have on communities. When they come in, when they minimize opportunities, half the people at these big places are part time, they're not full time. They're not getting full benefits of a full employee. When they leave, it devastates a community. These huge rental spaces that can't be rented. Look at Bassett Center. Mervyn's left. I don't know what's going to happen to Bassett Center because that huge area can't be rented again. Who is going to rent that? But when you keep it local, and when the money stays local, and it goes back to the local environment, the local community, it does so much good, compared to having the money leave and support someone's golf course. When you buy from Pencil Cup, when you buy from something from me, Terri Gándara lives here. Terri Gándara pays taxes here. We pay fourteen other people. We pay our bookkeeper here. We pay our CPA here. We have our attorney here. We have all those people in El Paso. When you go buy from the big guys, their attorneys aren't here, their bookkeepers aren't here. Their families aren't here. They live somewhere else, and that money leaves. And it's huge. And when you see that

communities are having a hard time. I could tell you where you could find a couple of million dollars to keep in El Paso if people would understand the importance of buying local. That's just the money aspect, never mind the people aspect. You call Pencil Cup; one of us is always going to answer the phone. You're not going to get an 800 number. You're not going to have to send us forms and faxes and triplicates, and all that. We are people, and we take care of you. So in case you haven't noticed, I'm very strongly committed to my leadership role in informing people about the importance of buying local versus from other companies, big boxes out of El Paso.

EV: Now we're going to go into the reflection time. Looking back on your business, if any, what would you have done differently?

TG: Well, it's hard to say we would have done anything differently because remember my philosophy. We're exactly where we want to be today because this is where we've chosen to be. Every decision we made in the past got us here. I don't believe in going back and saying, "We should have, we could have." Everything we've done, even if we did it wrong, allowed us an opportunity to correct it and get better. And learn the most important lesson because, in my opinion, you learn a lot more from doing something wrong than from never doing it at all. So anything we have done, that has made us reflect and commit more, has only made us stronger.

EV: In your opinion, is the business climate better for Hispanics today?

TG: The business climate where? In El Paso, or in the United States?

EV: Well, we could start in El Paso. Then if you want to, comment on the United States.

TG: What I would challenge you to do there is find out which of the bankers are Hispanic bankers. That's where the money comes from. And I told you, people do business with what they're comfortable with. We don't have a lot of Hispanic bank owners in El Paso. So does that make it harder going out the door? Yeah. It's all who you know, not just what you know. You look at the lawmakers. (laughter) We got Sylvester Reyes, and I guess you could consider Elliot Shapleigh part Mexican. He tries hard. But until we start getting more and more Hispanics in positions of power and decision-making, it will always be harder for the Hispanic population, harder for Mexican women than Mexican men. If we continue educating our youth, getting them through colleges, putting them in positions of power where decisions can be made, both legally and financially, that's when we'll see a shift of things being a little bit more equal.

EV: What are your views within Hispanics, the separation between women-owned and men-owned?

TG: It's all who you know. And people who say different, they're crazy. Look at the way the vote has run its course in the United States. And this is where I say people have to be put in positions of law-making and financial decision-making. Landowners, when we started in the United States, were all white male. All the decision-making was made to benefit the white male. Now they come over here and although the white protestant landed, in the Mayflower, coming over, Christopher Columbus, all those guys, we had Mexican landowners that weren't part of that. Those decisions were made to benefit the Mexican landowner who was usually male. The woman has always been the family supporter, with good reason. We birth the children, we care for the children, we raise the next generation, which is, in my opinion, as important, if not more important, than the guy who runs the business. In our own homes, we've run our businesses. We have certain amount of dollars to buy groceries with, and clothes with, and school supplies with. A woman's always been a business owner. Have the legal and financial institutions benefited her in anyway? Hardly. They are made by the

people that make the laws. It only makes sense. I'm not crying either. I'm one of those who loves someone to tell me, "No." Because if they tell me, No, they're gonna have to find out that it wasn't a good thing to say. But you had the white landowner, you had the Mexican landowner. The vote belonged to the white landowner. As he came across, and took over more property and more land, it still belonged to the white landowner. When suffrage started, and the fight for the black vote started, the vote was given first, to a black man, than to a woman. We had to fight another fifty years just to have an opportunity to vote. But as long as women do not get in positions of legal decision-making and financial decision-making, it'll always be harder for the woman than the white man, the Mexican or the black man. The woman will always have a harder time. But we're made for that. We're made a lot tougher than the guys. Because if you guys had been a little bit tougher, maybe you would have been able to raise children, and have children. But God saw fit to give it to the stronger of the species. (laughs) When I was a coach, and I used to talk to my kids, I always used to tell them, "There's always a question of who's stronger and who's weaker." And I always used to give them this analogy. If some great, horrendous virus hit the world some day, and all the women died, the *tías*, the *hermanas*, the whatever. How long would the human race continue after that? If all the women were gone, how long would the human race continue? You answer my question.

EV: Just the generation that's alive.

TG: That generation. But if the same mutated virus hits, and all the men are gone, how long would the human race continue?

TG: As long as—

TG: As long as there's a woman around, we can have more babies. We are the ones who bring forth the next generation. And there was a time when we needed a man for that. Now, here we go with the decision-making and policy-making, we

have women who are doctors, who can in vitro and help with the decisions. We could continue the whole human race again, and start it again. Men couldn't do that. So it makes you stop and think. But it's still harder for the Mexican woman, until we get more people up there.

EV: What advice would you offer a Hispanic starting a business today?

TG: Don't go after anything you don't know. You've got to know what you're doing. You got to find what you're good at. You've got to know, without a doubt, that you're going to do what you're good at. You've got to get help and support where there is help and support. Don't be so proud that you're not going to ask for help. There's help out there to get. But more than anything, if you don't have a passion for what you're doing, go work for somebody else. Because you have to be passionate about your business if you're going to be an entrepreneur because it's hard. And the hours are long and the pay sucks sometimes. But you have to have that passion that you're better than anybody else at what you're doing. And you have to have faith and confidence in yourself.

EV: This is the last question I have, unless you want to add something else. What hopes do you have for the future?

TG: I would love to kick the big buys out of El Paso, and be able to say that we can take care of El Paso's needs. Not just Pencil Cup. There's two or three other companies here local that can supply El Paso's needs without bleeding it out to somewhere else. My hopes would be that El Paso would know that. My hopes would be that we would get to the point where the small business would take care of its own local community, continue to support that community, and make our community strong. El Paso's an awesome place to be. It's a great place to live. And it's sad that we lose so many of our kids. But it's also awesome that so many of them come back. There's no place like El Paso. But we have to be able to support each other, locally. That would be my hope; that we could get there

someday. And just keep focusing on our kids and our communities, and make it better.

EV: Well, is there anything else you would like to add?

TG: I can't think so. You covered just about everything.

[End of interview]

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