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Interview no. 1486

Elma Rodriguez

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University of Texas at El Paso

Institute of Oral History

Interviewee: Elma Rodriguez

Interviewer: Arlina Palacios

Project: Paso del Norte Entrepreneur's Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: 13 July 2010

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Transcript No.: 1486

Transcriber: GMR Transcription Services

Biographical Synopsis of Interviewee: Elma Rodriguez was born in El Paso, Texas and has nine siblings, five brothers and four sisters. Her parents were from Chihuahua, México. Elma attended Lamar Elementary, El Paso High School and The University of Texas at El Paso. She is married to Gus Rodriguez with three children, one son and two daughters. Elma and her husband Gus are the founders and owners of Basil Glass Incorporated in El Paso, Texas. Gus served in the United States Navy and is a veteran of the Vietnam War.

Summary of Interview: Elma met her husband Gus when they were in high school and they married five years later. Gus served in the Vietnam War and when he got out he was given \$500.00 so he and Elma decided to start a business. At the time they lived on Basil St. and they started their business out of their home garage and so they named their company Basil Glass Incorporated. Another reason why they named their company Basil Glass instead of their last name is because they wanted to avoid as much discrimination as possible. As Hispanic entrepreneurs starting a business in the late 1960's early 1970's in El Paso, Texas, they received a lot of discrimination. They were given the run around on loans and would not receive a loan though they had excellent credit. They had a hard time buying glass and were sold glass at very high prices. Elma recounts that what she paid 40 years ago is what she is paying now. Elma also recalls being discriminated against because she was a woman in a male dominated business. Their growth was difficult with all the obstacles, but Elma and Gus persisted and worked hard through those barriers and their business has grown enormously. Eventually Elma and Gus were assisted by the United States Small Business Association loan. They are members of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce. They were 88, or government contractor approved, for nine years. Basil Glass is a woman-owned certified as well as minority certified business. Elma's advice to women entrepreneurs is to fight your way in because some are still not use to seeing woman in front and the challenges you face are good because they help shape your business life.

Length of interview: 66:00

Length of Transcript: 27 pages

Name of Interviewee: Armando Rangel

Date of Interview: July 13th, 2010

Name of Interviewer: Arlina Palacios

Arlina Palacios: This is an interview with Elma Rodriguez on July 13, 2010 in El Paso, Texas. The interviewer is Arlina Palacios. This interview is part of the Paseo Del Norte Entrepreneurs Oral History Project.

Good morning Mrs. Rodriguez.

Mrs. Rodriguez: Good morning.

Arlina Palacios: I would like to start off with a little bit of background information. We can begin with when and where you were born.

Mrs. Rodriguez: I was born in El Paso, Texas to a family of ten. We are ten. My mother was from Chihuahua and so was dad from the state of Chihuahua. We are the third generation here, some of them are – we got some fourth generation and had a beautiful life as a member of a family of ten.

Arlina Palacios: How many brothers and sisters?

Mrs. Rodriguez: Five boys and five girls.

Arlina Palacios: And you are in the mid –

Mrs. Rodriguez: I am in the middle.

Arlina Palacios: In the middle. You said your parents were from Chihuahua.

Mrs. Rodriguez: From the state of Chihuahua.

Arlina Palacios: Did they own a business or?

Mrs. Rodriguez: No, my dad was a carpenter by trade and my mom was always a housewife.

Arlina Palacios: With ten kids it is a lot of work.

Mrs. Rodriguez: It was a lot of work but we lived a beautiful life together. A lot of music and very good food in the family so that kept us very close to each other.

Arlina Palacios: So were you born in Chihuahua?

Mrs. Rodriquez: We were all born in El Paso. She migrated from Chihuahua when she was about fifteen and got married at seventeen. My dad was also seventeen.

Arlina Palacios: So did they meet here?

Mrs. Rodriquez: They met in El Paso.

Arlina Palacios: Is that an interesting story?

Mrs. Rodriquez: Very interesting. My mother and her sister and her grandmother crossed when the bridge – when you did not have to declare your citizenship. So, they were light complected and blue eyes, my grandmother so they passed without saying anything. My dad, I do not know how he got here, but he lived here in El Paso.

Arlina Palacios: Where did you grow up, where did you go to school here.

Mrs. Rodriquez: I went to Lamar school, grammar school and then I went to El Paso High and about one year of college.

Arlina Palacios: And you went to Utech?

Mrs. Rodriquez: Utech.

Arlina Palacios: What did you study there?

Mrs. Rodriquez: We studied how to love my husband more. We were already going – we were already sweethearts. After I met him all I could think of was getting married so I just went one-year grade school but didn't keep going to get a degree.

Arlina Palacios: So where was it that you met your husband?

Mrs. Rodriquez: I met my husband when I was in high school and he went to the wrong school. He went to Austin high school and I went to the right school El Paso high so we went around for five years.

Arlina Palacios: For five years and then you got married.

Mrs. Rodriquez: Got married after five years and we have been married fifty-two years.

Arlina Palacios: That is quite an accomplishment there. That is excellent.

Mrs. Rodriquez: We consider it a very – when we got to fifty years it was a beautiful milestone for us. We started all over like when we were sweethearts by him opening my door. He was on probation a year before so he had to pull out my chair and he had to act like he was my boyfriend for a year. It was a beautiful experience to reach that milestone of fifty – two years is a lot of years I mean fifty years is a lot of years, but now we have been married fifty-two.

Arlina Palacios: And how many children?

Mrs. Rodriquez: We just have three, Gus Jr. and then Monica Vanessa and Alma Dolores.

Arlina Palacios: Okay, any grandchildren?

Mrs. Rodriquez: No grandchildren just grand dogs. We have I think it's like six grand dogs. That is it.

Arlina Palacios: So what compelled you to start a business? You were married for some time and,

Mrs. Rodriquez: We were married for some time and then his – he was in the navy reserve and they activated the unit to go to Vietnam and when he came back they had given, I don't know what they call it.

Mr. Rodriquez: It is your mustering out pay. What the Navy holds.

Mrs. Rodriquez: And they gave him like \$500.00 so we thought we better start a business with \$500.00. We started our business in our home and then we were forced to get out of the neighborhood. Having a business instead of Sienna Vista so then we rented a warehouse and then from there we kept going in from one [inaudible] to another till we reached our present one.

Arlina Palacios: And what is the present name of your company.

Mrs. Rodriquez: It is Basil Glass Incorporated.

Arlina Palacios: And has it always been Basil Glass Incorporated?

Mrs. Rodriquez: It has always been Basil Glass. We have had it for about forty-one years.

Arlina Palacios: Forty-one years and so you had to move out of the Sienna Vista area.

Mrs. Rodriquez: Yes, because they did not allow you to do business in your home so we have our little truck going back and forth. He would go buy one piece of glass and then get the money and re-buy some more glass and that is the way we started the business. Buy one piece of glass then go do a job, coming back, and we would buy some more and that is how we wound up starting our business.

Arlina Palacios: Well tell me a little bit more about how you started up the business. You had some money; did you have to take out any loans?

Mrs. Rodriquez: No in that time it was very hard to take out loans as a Hispanic and that was the reason that we did not call our company Rodriquez glass or any Hispanic name we decided to call it Basil glass because we lived Sienna Vista on Basil court. So, we said why don't we use the name of the street so we used it. We had a hard time getting loans they would not lend us money and then – it was very hard to get the business started.

Arlina Palacios: Can you tell me a little bit more about that, about the business climate during that time and some of the challenges that you may have faced because of the lack of loans available or them willing to loan Hispanic Entrepreneurs.

Mrs. Rodriquez: Well we would apply for a loan and we had excellent credit. We had very, very good credit amongst both of us, we would apply for a loan, and they would not give us one, the credit. They would come up with something, the reason we did not get it but, we knew why we were not getting the credit I mean we could not get a loan to buy a truck or anything. We had bought a little truck before he left so we started it with that, then we would go to the bank, and it was the same thing. You know they would not give us the loan. It took years and years and years of establishing ourselves before we could actually go to a glass company and buy glass because they did not even want to sell us glass. So, it was a hard start for us for the business because we were in an era where the Hispanics were having a hard time starting up a business.

Arlina Palacios: So you had excellent credit, were there any reasons that they gave you?

Mr. Rodriquez: They would say it is too much money or they would say it is not enough; it is a small loan and cannot lend it to you. Or, it is too big a loan we cannot lend it to you. But, we always knew what it was. It was a Hispanic name.

Arlina Palacios: For the record that is Mr. Gus Rodriguez, Mr. Elma Rodriguez's husband.

So, this wasn't very uncommon during that time.

Mrs. Rodriguez: It was very common to be refused credit especially to start a business.

Arlina Palacios: So what did you end up doing to get your business going?

Mrs. Rodriguez: I said we kind of fought it all the way. Pushed ourselves on what we were going to do and what we were aimed to do. A lot of the businesses also like we do now a lot of service to company's and they would not even let you come in unless the name of your company was then Pittsburgh Glass because it was a big company. We were amongst the very, very few small companies. I guess as an Hispanic we were probably the only one.

Arlina Palacios: And you said you even had a hard time buying glass.

Mrs. Rodriguez: We had a hard time buying glass; they would not sell it to us.

Mr. Rodriguez: They would not sell it to us or they would not give us a – take it out on credit and I finally told them what do I have to do to establish credit. Well at this and that but they never gave me a straight answer and I look at the prices now, what I was paying for glass then is what I am paying now. This is forty-one years ago.

Mrs. Rodriguez: So the growth for us was very, very hard and we just kept growing just limited our budget and growing and growing and growing to the point that we were able to build our first warehouse and then we sold that warehouse and built another one a little bit bigger until we finally agreed to this warehouse.

Arlina Palacios: So the first warehouse that you built was located where?

Mrs. Rodriguez: On the East side on Carnegie Street.

Arlina Palacios: And the second one?

Mrs. Rodriguez: The second one was on Blukner also eastside.

Arlina Palacios: And this one.

Mrs. Rodriguez: And now this one.

Arlina Palacios: And the present name of your company is I didn't ask.

Mrs. Rodriquez: Basil Glass Incorporated.

Arlina Palacios: In El Paso, Texas.

Mrs. Rodriquez: In El Paso, Texas.

Arlina Palacios: Growing up, getting back to growing up here in El Paso, going to the right high school, what language did you speak at home?

Mrs. Rodriquez: We spoke Spanish at home because my mom did not speak English. My mom coming from Chihuahua she thought everybody in El Paso should speak Spanish. I lived in a neighborhood where everyone spoke Spanish and so we were brought up with Spanish but, my dad spoke very good English because he was adopted and the family that adopted him they spoke English. So, he would speak English to us but we still went in and really were not fluent in English, we had a hard time too in school. Being that we were not fluent in the language they would even sit the Hispanic children to the back of the classroom and the other children, white children would sit up in front.

They paid a lot of attention to those so they could gear them to go on to college and that's – we were left like we would pronounce the words wrong it was okay. So, we grew up from the very beginning having a hard time being Hispanic.

Arlina Palacios: Those stories are very difficult for me to hear but I would like to know a little bit more about how you perceived the way that you were treated at school compared to the other kids. Was there a determining factor for you that said I am going to do more than they are going to allow me too in the town?

Mrs. Rodriquez: Even if you had that determination it was not allowed. It was not allowed. You were just Hispanic and that is all there was to it.

Arlina Palacios: And your brothers and sisters they went to the same school?

Mrs. Rodriquez: We all went to the same school except my older brother went to Bailey school. They just treated – we were treated a little different and so it made it hard except some of us in my family are very determined to do what we have to do and so I myself am one that I am going to push for my position even if they didn't – we still had discrimination maybe up to about when we moved to maybe this warehouse.

Mr. Rodriquez: Just about.

Mrs. Rodriquez: Just about it. I remember that one day I went to the bank because my car had broken down and I was going to buy a car and the salesman told me why don't it a couple of days and I did. Called the bank and said I am ready to buy a car and he took the information down and then he calls me back and he says I have question Mrs. Rodriquez, what is it? You cannot afford this car because you cannot even afford the repairs and I said do you think I want to buy something that I cannot afford. He says well no you will not be able to buy that car. You did not qualify for it and I am talking about an inexpensive car so up till about then, which would have been up to about,

Mr. Rodriquez: Ten years ago or fifteen years ago.

Mrs. Rodriquez: Fifteen years ago there was still a lot of discrimination.

Arlina Palacios: And that drive and pushing for your position do you think that you were given that drive by parents? Was there anything?

Mrs. Rodriquez: I would say of my mom and dad, because my dad went through a lot of discrimination being a carpenter. He would get a job and then before he knew it his job was terminated. He used to take like food for the superintendents and the supervisors and take all his tools and still when they were ready to get rid of people all the Hispanic carpenters would go out and so I think just seeing that I always told him dad don't let them run you away because you are such a good person and you are good to them and he says well they don't want to hire me anymore.

So, that was his life all the time as long as I can remember and I was determined I wasn't going to let anybody push me down. I said no – like I told that man I will just go to another bank and get the loan. I said and I know why you are not giving me the loan. You are not giving me the loan because my last name is Rodriquez. Then he says no because one of your brothers went broke and I said what does that have to do with me? I said he is up again he went down but came up again. I said what does that have to do with me. He says, I am just telling you and I said I am asking you. I said I am going to go to your president of your bank and I am going to tell him what you told me and he says well call me tomorrow and we will see and then I called him for about three weeks I have to call him and he finally said until – it was a funny thing but I called the bank president and they had it on speaker so I started telling them about this loan officer and I was real upset.

I mean I was not being a nice lady and so it just went all over the place and everybody was happy that I had done that because all Hispanic people use to have a problem with him. He said you should have come to me and I said I went to a loan officer because that is where they sent me. They will never forget that I was on this loud speaker letting them know why he would not lend me the money. I said it has to do with my last name. He said no it does not and I said I'd bet you it does. I said you do not want to tell me but I know that that is what the problem is. So, we were both – we will not let people push us down. We aim to grow and we have done it in the right way but it was a very hard growth having a business at our age.

Arlina Palacios: Tell me about that growth. Tell me about starting off on Basil Court and expanding. Tell me how that worked and a little bit of history on your business.

Mrs. Rodriquez: Well we have the business on Basil Court for about three years, four years.

Mr. Rodriquez: Three or four years and then the neighbors complained so

Mrs. Rodriquez: They complained about us having a business.

Mr. Rodriquez: So we had to move out. Which we knew that we would eventually have to move out because we wanted to grow so were not going to grow in the garage. So, that's what we did. We rented a warehouse and kept growing and finally we decided to buy a warehouse and it was hard to get a loan but the contractor helped me, it was John Johnson helped me get the loan. That was, you might say our start getting [inaudible] but it was always hard to get a loan or material. We also had to send money up front.

Arlina Palacios: So you rented a warehouse first.

Mr. Rodriquez: We rented a warehouse first and then we moved into our warehouse and then from there we moved into a bigger warehouse. The economy was not too good so we were forced to sell it or lose it so then we rented another warehouse for about twelve, thirteen years and then that warehouse was sold. Then we had to go back to more or less the first warehouse that we had that we rented and then from there we bought this lot. We always had to wheel and deal whichever way we could. We were always scrapping to get up there and finally we got this warehouse. It was a small warehouse, we expanded it, and that is where we are.

Everything had been real hard and it is simply because we are Hispanic. Not really – they would not call us Hispanics, Mexicans. Well you Mexicans, I said wait a minute I am an English speaking Mexican, I speak English so do not call me Mexican. I went to Vietnam and I fought for the United States. I am not Mexican I am American. And, what really upset me is that I am eighth generation American. I must have missed the descendant. I just happen to have a Rodriquez last name but my grandmother was from here and we both look white. People always mistake us for white but as soon as we say Rodriquez then everything changes. Up until now it is still - you do not see as much but you can feel it. It is still in their eyes, like your Mexican. They speak to you real nice and then when they say what did you say your last name was Gus Rodriquez. Oh, oh. So.

Mrs. Rodriquez: How did you get that name?

Mr. Rodriquez: And even when I was in Vietnam there was a lot of prejudice and finally I told this guy you keep it up and the next [inaudible] let these white guys that go and fight the war I am not going to come. He said what are you going to do. I said I 'm going to stay home and if I have to I will go back to Mexico or go back to anywhere where I came from and he was like what? That is a fact I told him I told him I am a Smith descendant, I am an eighth- generation American. We probably came across on the Mayflower who knows. I said just because I have a Rodriquez Mexican name so but it was real bad.

Even when my dad, he started his own business and we used to do – I used to go with him so I said we used to do – people used to take me on the trips so that I would see Lubbock or there is small little towns, I would help him and they would have some nasty signs not allowing Mexicans.

Arlina Palacios: Going back to the man that helped you take out the loan.

Mr. Rodriquez: John Johnson.

Mrs. Rodriquez: He was a builder in El Paso.

Arlina Palacios: He was a builder in El Paso.

Mr. Rodriquez: John Johnson.

Mrs. Rodriquez: He passed away probably a couple of years ago.

Mr. Rodriquez: He passed away about three years ago. His son now has the company John Johnson Jr.

Mrs. Rodriquez: I can attribute a lot of our growth to being allowed to be in the, [inaudible]

Mr. Rodriquez: [Inaudible]

Mrs. Rodriquez: They helped us a lot.

Arlina Palacios: So you took out an SBA loan.

Mrs. Rodriquez: We took out an SBA loan when we bought the,

Mr. Rodriquez: Yea we paid it off as soon as we could. [Inaudible]

Mrs. Rodriquez: To help us they made the road easier to go through being Hispanic.

Mr. Rodriquez: We also joined the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and that helped us a lot.

Mrs. Rodriquez: The Chamber helped us a lot in our growth so I attribute a lot of our growth to the SBA and the young Hispanic Chamber beginning and now the greater Chamber.

Arlina Palacios: So you are members.

Mrs. Rodriquez: We are members of the greater Chamber and our son is the chairman this year.

Mr. Rodriquez: What we always did was we kind of pushed our way in and we did not care. We just, if there was a meeting or something we kind of muscled our way in, talked to the right people and introduced ourselves and that is how we broke the ice.

Arlina Palacios: So the first loan, or one of the loans you got through the SBA, how was that process?

Mrs. Rodriquez: No the first loan we got – we got it through the bank, we had to mortgage whatever we had so that they could give us a loan. Even we had to mortgage our accounts receivable to get the loan, we did it, and since it was a small loan we paid it off pretty fast. Then to expand the business our son suggested getting an SBA and did that and they helped us a lot. By then we started to get government contracts, which was another thing of pushing yourself in to get in

to get government contracts. Finally pushed ourselves in, our daughter and our son were the ones that helped us get in to government contracting and made it easier for us by being SBA.

Arlina Palacios: Well tell me a little bit about the government contracting. I have heard that it's very difficult to get in. It is the 88.

Mrs. Rodriquez: The 88. Yea we were 88 also for nine years. They took you under their wings and what they do is they teach you how to develop your business so then when you get through after it's nine years you can go out and look for contracts yourself because they could have helped you all how to develop a business.

Arlina Palacios: And what kind of paperwork does that entail. What do you have to give them?

Mrs. Rodriquez: A lot of paperwork

Mr. Rodriquez: About that much paperwork.

Mrs. Rodriquez: I mean a lot of paperwork but we were very proud to say that our son and our daughter worked on them and when they turned them in the SBA said they have never seen such a perfect set of books for them. There was nothing wrong with the paperwork. Others they sent them back and forth, this is wrong, and this is wrong, come back and it might take months. Ours was the first time we submitted it it was approved.

Arlina Palacios: And what do you have to submit.

Mrs. Rodriquez: There is a lot of financials and everything. It goes back through a lot of history on the business.

Mr. Rodriquez: How you got started. What did you do? What did you deal with? Basically the same questions you are asking. They wanted to know how we did it. They wanted to know the same thing. They just ask you the same questions sometimes they ask them two or three times. I think what they do that is to see if you are lying somewhere because they will ask you a question here and the same question but in different ways here so maybe you can tell. They say wait a minute he answered this way here and this one. Like kind of like a detective. But, we did not care anything you tell us we will do it. We will just go.

We were just determined since we – when we were both in because the first time when we first got married we needed to buy a

refrigerator, well you don't have anything right when you get married right to buy a refrigerator they needed the money. I said you know you can always repossess the refrigerator. Well no that is not the way it works. If you do not have credit. I said oh what do I have to do there again what do I have to do to get credit. Well, we will lend you the money after pushing on him, but we will see how you pay. So, we paid that refrigerator off in six months instead of a year.

Then we decided to buy something else and same thing. Didn't the refrigerator tell you that we paid? It is all the same.

Arlina Palacios: So your son and your daughter, you made reference to them helping with the 88 are they a part of the business? Do they work with you?

Mrs. Rodriquez: Yes they work with us. Our son does the HR and anything, any legality he takes care of it and then our daughter has her own business, its beak and services. They both were very good about filling out paperwork for us. In fact we are to the point of where they fill out papers and we just sign. It got to that point which is great so they have been taking care of a lot of paperwork for years.

Mr. Rodriquez: What we did is when they were small we would bring them in to the business and start giving them the responsibility. They were still young and well daddy I don't want to, I said no, no, no you got to work. But, I thought I was going to go out and go swimming I said swimming; you go swimming after we get through get with work then. That is the way my dad brought me up we learned how to work so they became very good at business because they have been working and so it is not hard for them to think of different things because this is their nature.

Mrs. Rodriquez: In fact our biggest growth now we can attribute it to them.

Arlina Palacios: What was that?

Mrs. Rodriquez: We do a lot of government work and then the dream of having a hotel was my daughters. She said mom what would you think if you ever opened a hotel I said I do not think I will ever get to that point. She said let us look for some land and we found the land so they are very, very aggressive, very assertive in growth. They like growth.

Arlina Palacios: Let us get to that in a minute. I would like to ask you before we get to your new business venture. I would like to ask you about

how many employees you have here and what kind of goods and services you provide.

Mr. Rodriquez: We have four employees doing government work and four doing outside work. In other words not at ford base or government work so we have eight installers we call them installers and we pick them up from job core. We try to give those kids a chance, some of them have turned out real good, and some of them have left us and gone somewhere else. I know one guy is working for community college and he is pretty high up now as far as workers are concerned. That is what happens when you – when people tell kids no, no, no don't do it because you are going to mess it up. Like they won't let him fill the garbage, no you will throw it and I got to go pick it up. Its okay let him do it.

My daughter doing cooking because she will make a mess out of it. I say it's okay she used to put our kids, our three kids including our son to help her cook and kids make a mess and we would just let them. Its okay honey, its okay you can clean it up afterwards and then I would take them to work of course I would tell them you got to learn how to do these things. I remember before I went to Vietnam I told – my son says I've got a flat tire daddy and I said oh let me show you how to do it because maybe one of these days I may not be here and little did I know that the following year I was going to be gone. So we let him do things. Fix the air conditioner, get up there and do it. But, I don't know how to do it, well let me show you how to do it and so that's how the growth has been because we kind of push, we push ourselves and we push the kids.

Mrs. Rodriquez: We have eight workers now outside and we have four in the office.

Arlina Palacios: Four in the office and eight outside. And, you take boys from the community like you mentioned job core.

Mr. Rodriquez: Job core.

Arlina Palacios: So how has that worked for you? What advantages.

Mrs. Rodriquez: It has been employees working outside in the construction end of it. It's worked – some of them have – two have been good and some of them they don't really want to work but the ones that have wanted to work, we have one that has been with us for about fifteen years and he was very young so as they grow we kind of lead them because it's more of a family environment here and so we care for them just like we care for our children and so it gets to be a tight relationship between employees and the bosses. We

guide them as they are getting older and they want to get married and they want to have children so we are always teaching them things.

You know how to be a father, how to be whatever so it has been a great experience for us to have a family owned business because it's a very, we are all very united.

Mr. Rodriguez: We had one young man that he told us that he wanted to be an engineer but he came out of job core. Talking to him he did not speak English very well and I told him I say this is the last day I am going to speak to you in Spanish. Por que? Because I want you to learn how to speak English. So he did learn and we encouraged him to go to school and he graduated and he is an engineer.

Arlina Palacios: Fantastic.

Mr. Rodriguez: And we would tell him okay let me have your report card. What kind of grades did you get and let me see your schedule you fix it up so you can work. He said I could only work two hours today. I say that is fine. But, I can work all day tomorrow. I said fine. This went on all the way through till he graduated and now he has a job where he travels. He has gone to France he has gone to England, Puerto Rico, Mexico and he always calls us and his name is Francisco I would call him Cisco, hey Cisco. But, that's a – it depends on them, it also depends on what do they want to get out of life. Where you are is what you are. If you are lazy than that is where you are going to be. If you are assertive this is where you are going to be. This is what we tell them. You get out of life what you want to put in to it. The guy that has been with us for fifteen years he also was struggling with English, he learned it real well, and he is an excellent worker.

The other guys are good too, but this one is good and some guys they come in and they think that we owe them a living. The first thing I tell them is I don't owe you anything so you better find another job and we call job core and they send us another one so it kind of rotates until we find the right guy. You are never going to get a perfect guy anyway but if they are willing to work we are willing to help them. This one that has been with us for fifteen years just had a baby and I told him I said you need to go with your wife when you take the baby. Why sir? I said so you will know what is wrong with the baby. His wife says thank you very much because he is a real macho man.

Arlina Palacios: Well you seem to be very family orientated and you discussed your family dinners earlier I would like to hear a little bit more about your family and about their involvement in the business as well and then, oh but first the products that you provide here it's glass but what kind of glass to who, what.

Mrs. Rodriquez: We are commercial glass installers. We used to do residents but we stopped doing the residents and the reason was because we wanted to pay our employees more and doing the residents it would take away a lot of our – the growth wasn't there is residents so we said the only way we can help them and help ourselves more is going commercial so we went commercial.

The growth has been very good for us and we have grown in to – we also brought in – we went to a show, a glass show when we decided to bring in automatic doors, you know these doors that you go to the hospitals and grocery stores, department stores and they open up by themselves. They are automatic doors and – we do a vast majority of our business has grown into the automatic doors. We take care of just about all the hospitals in El Paso and grocery stores, department stores and quite a bit. We have had a lot of growth in the automatic doors.

Mr. Rodriquez: Before we use to get excited about a five thousand dollar job now our estimator said I picked up a job I said how much is it, a hundred thousand.

Arlina Palacios: Okay.

Mr. Rodriquez: Now we are getting six and eight hundred thousand dollar jobs.

Arlina Palacios: So what has been your best year financially?

Mrs. Rodriquez: Financially? I guess it is going to be this year.

Mr. Rodriquez: This year.

Mrs. Rodriquez: With the growth from Fort Bliss. The growth from Fort Bliss has been very good for the city of El Paso. It has done a tremendous influx as far the economy is concerned here. We speak for ourselves; it has done a lot for the company so we are very committed to Fort Bliss, a lot of activities that we do with them. A lot of acquaintances that we have developed from Fort Bliss. We still see them and they write to us and because of the growth that we have had here I would call the success in our business this year is the best one.

Arlina Palacios: So do you see yourself as a woman, as a pioneer in business especially for – this company is owned by both of you but it is very rare to find women who own business, minority women. How do you see yourself in terms of being a pioneer here in El Paso for other woman to emulate to follow do you see yourself in that position?

Mrs. Rodriguez: I am a president of the company right now so I tell him what to do. I guess it's my assertiveness that I have of growing more that makes me – it's makes a challenge for me to get up every day and come in to the office and sell and I do some estimating. I do all the smaller job estimating and I find it a challenge just coming in and we kind of compete with the other estimator. I will say look what I got today and he will say oh I have a contract coming in too and I will say okay. He will show it to me and maybe I won or maybe he won and my husband does estimating too so it's kind of a competition between the three. I don't like to let the men beat me so I am always very aggressive in selling and estimating, I find it a challenge and I don't see why any woman – because I came from being a – I didn't last as a housewife too long I was a housewife probably for about four years before I stepped in to working and I started to work at a fifty dollar job a week. Was not contributing too much but I was still working, then when he went to Vietnam we started our own business. So, I had to learn to be a housewife, mother, friend and employee of the company. I find myself having time for all the different roles that I do and I find them all to be very exciting in my life. I am seventy-four now and I still feel that I have a lot of energy to go. I don't even think of retiring because of the challenge of being in the business.

Arlina Palacios: Were there any challenges that you faced when your husband went to Vietnam you were here you already had a son?

Mrs. Rodriguez: We had two children and were expecting the third one.

Arlina Palacios: And he was drafted for the war?

Mrs. Rodriguez: He was drafted.

Arlina Palacios: And so that left you here working a fifty dollar a week job.

Mrs. Rodriguez: At the time I was working at Planned Parenthood so I was not supposed to be seen pregnant there. I had to stop working because it was the era when they were pushing the pills and so they saw me and I was one of the speakers on birth control. I had to stop

working because it didn't look right for me to be working there. So, by the time I stopped I already had my baby for about three months or four months when he came in and met her for the first time and that's when we started our business.

Arlina Palacios: Is this business minority certified?

Mrs. Rodriguez: It is a minority Hispanic woman owned.

Arlina Palacios: Certified business.

Mrs. Rodriguez: A ha.

Arlina Palacios: And besides being a minority can you discuss the challenges that you faced starting up your business then dropped the business. Were there any specific challenges that you may have faced as a woman business owner?

Mrs. Rodriguez: Yes I did face challenges because our work is in the line of construction. In the line of construction you have a lot of men that don't like to deal with women. Though my role in the company was in the office I still found a lot of challenges because they did not want to speak to me, they did not want to hear a price from me, and they always would want to speak to Mr. Rodriguez and I would say he is out. I will have to give you the prices.

Mr. Rodriguez: I had to tell them that when she talks you listen. That is the way it is. I am not here, she is telling you something you listen, and you do it.

Arlina Palacios: And what was their reaction to that?

Mrs. Rodriguez: [Inaudible] you know the Hispanic families if you do that, they will tell you that your husband does not know how to defend himself or you have a lot of power over your husband and I said we have a lot of power amongst ourselves. I said so he gives me my role as a wife, as a mother, and as a businessperson so I have not had any challenges even – I had the challenges of the men accepting me in the construction area but no challenges in the office.

Arlina Palacios: And how did you handle the men not wanting to accept you.

Mrs. Rodriguez: I would not let them talk to my husband.

Arlina Palacios: You would not let them.

Mrs. Rodriquez: They said I want the price from your husband and I said go ahead, keep calling all day, and see if you find him because he is out on the construction sites. They would take my price because they would say I need to give this price tomorrow and I cannot speak to your husband I said I am here in the office and my job is to give you the price.

Arlina Palacios: Did you lose any business to that?

Mrs. Rodriquez: I think we did. Some men that didn't want to deal with a woman but to me it didn't make any difference I thought my price was my price and there is only one way to grow and it was not by giving my business away and I still have that motto don't give the business away because I aim to grow.

Arlina Palacios: And speaking about growth. You mentioned earlier about a hotel.

Mrs. Rodriquez: now our daughter that asked me would we like to be hotel owners and I said I never even gave it a thought suggested it. I said its way beyond my expectations of growing. So my son-in-law and her were riding one day around and said we found a property and we said for what? For the hotel it's for the hotel. So, I told him what do you think about building a hotel. He said yep let's go for it. The men in our family which is our son and husband do not keep the woman from having major decisions that we decide on our own to do they back us up and so we started it, we all got in to it and it's a family owned project.

Mr. Rodriquez: It is a ninety-five room hotel [inaudible]

Mrs. Rodriquez: Candlewood Suites and should be opening God willing in March ready for the basketball tournament here.

Arlina Palacios: You mentioned that that's across from Colin stadium?

Mrs. Rodriquez: Across the street from Colin stadium.

Arlina Palacios: Did you choose that location because of the sports event mentioned?

Mrs. Rodriquez: Mainly we did take sports a lot into consideration. It was our daughter and son-in-law that chose it and bought it and we took it into consideration that there is no hotels in the Northeast area so they needed a hotel and now since we started to build it they are anxious at Fort Bliss to see it open so –

Mr. Rodriquez: The Northeast was anxious too.

Mrs. Rodriquez: And the Northeast represented –

Mr. Rodriquez: A lot of people tell –

Mrs. Rodriquez: And the Northeast is very anxious too. Mr. Roberts –

Mr. Rodriquez: They say like when are you going to open. My in-laws are coming and they do not want to go way out there. There are a lot of people living in the Northeast.

Mrs. Rodriquez: It will be the only hotel down there.

Arlina Palacios: And the Northeast has been around for a long time.

Mrs. Rodriquez: There is very little hotels that they are [inaudible]

Mr. Rodriquez: [Inaudible] Dyer Street.

Mrs. Rodriquez: Dyer Street, like where we are at we are the only ones and there is a lot of growth in the Northeast, a tremendous amount of growth.

Arlina Palacios: Do you have any other business ventures or do you plan on expanding any more besides the hotel.

Mrs. Rodriquez: We are thinking a second hotel now. That is our goal, another hotel in the Northeast area.

Mr. Rodriquez: She is a very hard working woman.

Mrs. Rodriquez: Tell me about it. I am very determined I like to make money and spend money and the only way you can spend money is if you make it so I will do anything to get my wishes fulfilled.

Arlina Palacios: What advice would you give to a young entrepreneur starting out, a woman?

Mrs. Rodriquez: As a woman you still have to fight your way in because some of the men are still not use to seeing woman in front and it is a challenge every day. Different kinds of challenges that you go through to open up your business and go forward, you know just go forward with it.

Mr. Rodriquez: My advice to husbands is to let your wife show her potential because there is a lot of men who say oh no my wife is not going to do that; oh no I am the man of the house. Well, but you do not know your wife is probably smarter than you are. And my dad was one of those guys he told me he says you let your wife do a lot of the things there, you better watch her. I said why? He said well she needs to be the housewife and I said that's okay dad I will let her do whatever she wants I think she is pretty smart. Well no, no, no. I never kept her from saying I like this or maybe we should do this so if she would give her advice when we were amongst other couples at a party or something and the wives are quincing. Some guys would actually tell me your wife is pretty vocal. I said yes, she could speak for herself. Well that's what it is then. But, she is very hard working because right now she has got shingles and she is still working and people say how can she go to work with shingles. I said she – I said I don't know but she has not stayed home so.

Mrs. Rodriquez: What helps too in being a family owned business is for you to be able to get along. Because a big percentage of husband and wife teams in a business wind up in a divorce. For us I think we – I take care – my place is in the office and his is the warehouse so I don't interfere in the warehouse and he doesn't interfere with the office. He wants a paper he says I cannot find it I said you did not ask me for it. I can tell you where it is. Open up the drawer, give it to him and so we each have our own place, enjoy each other a lot being high school sweethearts and we kept enjoying ourselves and having a lot of respect for each other.

Arlina Palacios: We are coming to the reflection of the portion of the interview. But, before we get there I would just like to ask you one more question about the business climate here in El Paso. In your opinion do you think that the business climate here in El Paso is better today or better before or have you seen that much difference? We talked about the discrimination and how it's carried over in different ways to the present day but in your opinion how is the business climate here in El Paso?

Mrs. Rodriquez: It's a whole lot better. I mean I see a lot of woman opening up businesses and are successful with businesses. I see it much easier for them now and El Paso lends itself to women's growth in business. It accepts the women in business a whole lot better than a lot of places but I see a lot of women in top positions and like the administrators of hospitals and a lot of different businesses, you have now women at the top of the rim and they are doing a great job. I see it much easier for them now.

Arlina Valaseos So, what do you envision for your family and for yourself. Was there anything that I didn't ask you that you would like to add to this interview?

Mrs. Rodriquez: Well the only thing like I said it is a family owned business and you learn to get along so that things can grow better for you. Because, if you are constantly arguing amongst even yourselves you can't make a business grow, a family owned business grow. So. I have taught them, we have taught them a lot of respect for each other and a lot of respect for ourselves. They can play and joke with us but it's up to a certain point and being together all the time, getting along as a family has helped the growth of the business tremendously. Where one does not think of something the other one did or our son goes out to the business area and he comes back with look in to that, look in to this and this is where it is headed.

He has a lot to do with the city of El Paso's growth as far as Fort Bliss is concerned, so it's just developed into everybody's strength coming together. Our younger daughter was a schoolteacher, math mentor with her masters and she decided to come into the business. It's just been very – it's been a great experience for all of us to be able to get along during the day and then still get along in the evening where we enjoy supper together.

Arlina Palacios: You mentioned the suppers together, they are also involved with the business now, and you just mentioned that your son was a big factor in the growth in El Paso is that through his work with chamber?

Mrs. Rodriquez: It's been through, first he was in the Hispanic chamber there was a lot of growth like we said, like we mentioned before a lot of growth in our company because of the El Paso Hispanic chamber and then he moved on to the greater chamber. There is a lot of growth from being a member of the chamber and then just letting him go out and work and introduce himself and he is at Fort Bliss a lot of the time. In fact they are always kidding us that they should put a tent there for him and I said there are days when we feel you should.

The woman here are more insiders as far as the growth of the business is concerned and the three of us work together, our two daughters and me we work on the inside of the business and our son works on the outside PR, doing PR work.

Arlina Palacios: Do you think that your daughter, the one that was a teacher, do you think her decision to come in to the business because you have such a business orientated work ethic. Do you think it led in to the family like your husband mentioned that you would bring them to work with you? Do you think that that ethic has crossed over into something that is in you or is it something that is learned? Do you think being an entrepreneur is something that is inside of a person or can it be learned? Is it chance, is it luck or is it raw guts and drive.

Mrs. Rodriquez: I guess she saw herself as a teacher she loved it because she loved being amongst the kids but found it to be a little bit – it gets harder and harder for a teacher to perform in a classroom and so she just decided one day can I come back to the business. She has been here with us like for three years now back again and enjoys it because there are a lot of benefits of working together. You know we take trips together and we can make our own schedules. The other way we would always have to wait for the schoolteacher. Spring break and do all this stuff but we still made room for her.

Mr. Rodriquez: We also let her grow the way we let the kids grow. We never said you have to be in the business and she said I want to be a schoolteacher. Okay whatever you want and then she said would the door be open daddy and I said sure if you want to come back. She was a schoolteacher for about nine years and then she said is the door still open? Yea so she came back but the other two older ones our son and daughter the same thing. We told them you don't have to be in the business. We showed you the business so that you can have something to fall back on but you don't have to be. But, they never left.

Oh our son went to work at some donut place, Dunkin Donuts or something for about three months and he said I want to come back. We gave them an opportunity we don't tell him you have to.

Mrs. Rodriquez: The men kid the women along and they will say you know the girls said that it's going to be done dad, doesn't really matter if you say no. The girls all raise it yes. We also did a lot of remodeling, my daughter and myself. We did up till about when the recession if the houses not selling started. But in one year we had thirteen homes remodeled and sold them and we were like little ants, wake up in the morning get our contractor going and then go by them all the stuff that they needed to do the – we remodeled according to what style home it was and we did thirteen homes in one year.

Arlina Palacios: In one year.

Mrs. Rodriquez: And we would come in to work at about eleven everyday so we were coming in late according to them and we would say yea, but we are going to bring you some nice money so we did thirteen homes.

Arlina Palacios: And what was it that motivated you to do that.

Mrs. Rodriquez: We like construction. Especially my daughter she loves construction in fact she is the general contractor for building the hotel.

Mr. Rodriquez: That plus anything that has a dollar mark on it we will go for it. Sometimes it does not pan out but sometimes it does.

Mrs. Rodriquez: I think the majority of time it has panned out for us because we make it pan out.

Arlina Palacios: So you had this business going and then you and your daughter were out there with buying?

Mrs. Rodriquez: Buying and buying everything that houses needed to be remodeled and then by the time that we were through with the houses the homes were already had contracts on them, because, we were doing a great job with them. But when we got through that after a year I said you know I'm pretty tired because one day she said sit down mom and see how we did on all the homes and I said I'm pretty tired today. She said I am too mom. Let's do it some other week.

Mr. Rodriquez: They use to come in, they use to work on the remodeling houses and come over here and do this work and then they would have to finish the paperwork for the remodeling. They would get home about one o'clock in the morning. I called them and said are you going to stay there or are you going to come home? Then they would get up at six o'clock in the morning and start again. This went on for a whole year. My job was to load up the – hook up the sixty foot trailer that we have and go to Pada's and pick up material or wrought iron work and cross it over to go to [inaudible] and so all of us were like little ants just going.

Mrs. Rodriquez: As women I would say that the women here are very assertive. Very assertive and another time if a recession comes we are not afraid of it because we know that we are going to do different things. In that recession, the recession of '87 we started to go on Sundays because business was slow so we started to go on Sunday

to sell at the swap meet. So, we would fly in the morning to Los Angeles, buy makeup, buy clothes, then be ready, price everything on Saturday, and then open up on Sunday so we did it until the recession was out.

Arlina Palacios: And this was in '87.

Mrs. Rodriguez: And we did it well. We were bringing food to the table.

Mr. Rodriguez: My jobs was the gopher, the driver and go take the clothes or whatever they were buying, go put them in the car and come back and we would get to LA early in the morning and then fly back at night and load all the clothes ourselves. A lot of the week I had it shipped and as soon as it came in we would open the boxes, start pricing, and hang this over here and this over there and I am just the gopher. Talking about men not wanting to deal with women, we would go over there and she would say to the guy like this and that and the guy would look at me like what are you going to say and I said sir I'm just the gopher. You listen to what she wants if you want a sale listen to her, I'm just the gopher.

'Oh okay yes ma'am what did you have in mind. Then after what two years and something like that they knew her so they would not even talk to me. Mrs. Rodriguez how are you. Oh hi sir.

Mrs. Rodriguez: It's a challenge. We live with a daily challenge and a lot of faith that we are doing the right thing and we know we are blessed. We are blessed by the Lord to do what we are doing and work a lot in the church and work a lot in our business.

Arlina Palacios: And this business you mentioned going to pick up material for the swap meet okay. For the remodeling you went to Pada's to pick up building material. Does this business does Basel Glass also do business in Mexico and Latin America or just –

Mr. Rodriguez: We have done work in Mexico.

Mrs. Rodriguez: We haven't done. We have an area that

Mr. Rodriguez: We have done Sadeale, which is outside of Monterey and then set up some by Samabiuka that is the only two places. Samabiuka is just south of us.

Mrs. Rodriguez: We really do not do that much.

Mr. Rodriquez: It is really hard to do business in Mexico so we tried it and then we said no forget it.

Arlina Palacios: Okay Mrs. Rodriquez is there anything that you would have done differently looking back at your business now. Is there anything that you would have changed?

Mrs. Rodriquez: Being in the time that I grew up I do not think there was much that I could have done. Educated myself more is what I should have done. Finished school even if I had fallen in love, just finished school. But I figured if I don't marry this guy somebody else is going to get him from me so I better just get married and I didn't go to school anymore. So I am more of a business minded self taught. Of all the girls in my family when we get together they all say you are the only in business Elma. I'm like I can go to lunch but you know the most I can stay with you girls is like two hours and they say why don't you just take the day off and I say I can't I have things to do in the office.

I won't leave my business for just anything And they know it's like I plan my dinners with my sisters, luncheons on Saturday's and they will say you couldn't get out for a little bit during the week and I said I can but I got to come back. So, I think of all the girls in the family I was the one that came up to more of a businessperson. They say that it's because I look Jewish which I am – they always ask me if I am Jewish or Lebanese you know and I just enjoy being in business. Especially since we have a family here and it's a joy for us to see them develop into the company that they have developed because they have a big company and it's been a tremendous joy for us to see that happen.

So, it is kind of gives us a shot in the arm to keep going to see what they are going to do and thanks to God that they have done a tremendous job in all their business.

Arlina Palacios: And just one more time before we end this interview is there anything else that you would like to add or do you think that you have said everything that you feel that needs to be said.

Mrs. Rodriquez: I just feel that depending on the Lord you have to have faith in your life so that you can keep going and be blessed the way we were blessed in opening our business.

Arlina Palacios: Well thank you Mrs. Rodriquez, this concludes the interview with Elma Rodriquez.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 66 minutes