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Interview no. 1500

Jose Luis Villanueva

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University of Texas at El Paso

Institute of Oral History

Interviewee: Jose Luis Villanueva

Interviewer: Arlina Palacios

Project: Paso del Norte Entrepreneurship Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: 13 October 2010

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Biographical Synopsis of Interviewee: Jose Luis Villanueva was born in the state of Chihuahua México in 1959. His parents are Salvador and Aurelia Villanueva. Joe has five brothers, one sister and is the youngest of his siblings. In 1970, the Villanueva family migrated to the United States, a move that was made possible since Joe's mother was born in California. His family moved to Chicago where Joe spent his adolescence and young adulthood before his father moved to El Paso, Texas. Joe has a degree in electronics from DeVry and a master's degree in Business from the University of Texas at El Paso. Joe is married with children and currently resides in El Paso, Texas. Joe is the owner of

Length of interview: 85minutes

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Name of Interviewee: Jose Luis Villanueva
Date of Interview: October 13th, 2010
Name of Interviewer: Arlina Palacios

AP: Today is October 13, 2010. This interview is being conducted in El Paso, Texas. The interviewer's name is Arlina Palacios. This interview is part of the El Paso North Entrepreneurs Oral History Project. Good Afternoon.

JV: Good afternoon.

AP: Will you state your name and the present name of your company for the record please?

JV: Jose Luis Villanueva and my company name is ProTech Global Solutions.

AP: Thank you for meeting with us today Mr. Villanueva.

JV: My pleasure.

AP: We are going to start off with some background information. When and where were you born?

JV: I was born in 1959 in a tiny little town called Estación Conchos in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico.

AP: What were your parent's names?

JV: My dad's name is Salvador Villanueva, and my mom is Aurelia Villanueva.

AP: What were their occupations?

JV: Oh, wow. My dad had many. My mom was always a housewife, but my father in his earlier years was everything from a cab driver to a [inaudible] to a land owner, cattle owner, and then when we migrated to the United States, he actually worked in a steel factory, making train wheels, before he retired.

AP: Did you have siblings?

JV: I do. I have five brothers and one sister. I am the youngest of seven.

AP: You're the youngest of seven? So your mom was a housewife?

JV: She was. She took care of all of us when my dad would have to leave to look for a better life for us, and he had to go to the United States, and worked out here, and she held the fort for many years my herself, and sort of brought us up, raised us.

AP: Tell me about your hometown.

JV: My hometown, wow. It's a tiny little town. I think last count was about population of 1,000 people, one church, a canal running through it, and really not much else. There is a bus station, a train station, and that's it. Largely inhabited by people that are farmers, career farmers. Their whole life they've been farmers, owning farms, passed on generation after generation. So the town is still there. It's still about 1,000 people, give or take a couple hundred, and we visit there once in a while. I still have my oldest brother living there.

AP: Really?

JV: Uh huh. Yeah, when we migrated to the United States, he wanted to stay behind and sort of look after, or continue the family business of farming. So he is still there.

AP: So your brother is a farmer?

JV: My brother is a farmer, yes.

AP: You mentioned your dad was a taxi driver.

JV: That was there. In fact, such a small little town, but from there – There's a bus stop, which is a big deal. So the bus stop drops people off that actually live 15 kilometers or 15 or 20 miles from there in different directions, so he made actually a pretty decent living picking up people from the train station and bus station, and taking them to the various little towns, so the cab service or the taxi service was not for the town itself, but rather to take people to adjacent villages, if you will, or towns.

AP: Was this his own business?

JV: Yeah. My dad was always an entrepreneur. He was born with it. He always looked for ways to have his own business and to control his own destiny. From day one, I don't think my dad had any thoughts of working for somebody else for a long time, so he's

always an entrepreneur. So he started with one simple little cab, and then he made it into two, and then sold the cabs when he had an opportunity to buy a piece of land. He bought that piece of land, was successful with it, got some funds, and brought a truck for freight, so he was doing freights to Mexico City for many years. After that, he got enough money and bought another piece of land, and after that another piece of land. My dad was quite the entrepreneur. I guess that's where we all get it from. I come from a family of seven, and we are all entrepreneurs. All of us. We all work on our own business.

AP: Tell me. Tell me about your siblings.

JV: Well, my brother, the oldest, Abel, works in Mexico like I said, mining after the family's farms. My brother Daniel owns a very small trucking company. Ismael, the same thing. He owns a different trucking company. Salvadore owns a dealership where they sell heavy-duty trucks with his sons. He's in business with his kids, and they sell trucks. Victor, probably the most talented of us all, ended up being a machinist, a machinist for large engines and things of that nature. My sister is in real estate, and then I am in this business. So we all ended up eventually owning our own business. I think we had it in our blood from my dad.

AP: Tell me what else did your father do. You mentioned several others.

JV: Oh, well, let's see. He did farming. We had dairy cows at one time, many dairy cows, and they produced and sold a lot of milk in that region. After that he bought another piece of land. He bought a lot of equipment, and he used the equipment to service other land owner's needs with equipment that they didn't have. So he leased out the equipment. He was always looking for ways to make a buck, to be honest, and he was very good at it, despite the fact that he only attended school until the third grade, elementary. The town that he was born in didn't have a school system in Mexico, in Durango. So the school that he went to was actually a lady's house, and the lady was a self-proclaimed teacher, and she took him through what was supposed to be three grades, first to the third. He basically just learned how to write, to read, to do some basic arithmetic functions, and that's it. That's the only formal education my dad ever had.

AP: And was this your grandparent's decision, do you know about that?

JV: Yeah, I guess it was. My grandparents are from the state of Durango, and it was very – I guess it must have been the turn of the century, and they lived in a small little town in Durango, and they lived a rural life. They were farmers, and so forth. My grandfather on my mom's side, this is kind of an interesting story, he went to work in the United States as well. He worked in California, and that is where my mother was born, and that's how we eventually became citizens. We didn't tap into that until much later, but my mom was actually born in California. They were there for four years.

At the age of four, my grandmother, my mom's mom passed away with pneumonia, and he left my mom and her sister orphans with just my grandfather. My grandfather took the kids and went back to Mexico, to Durango. Once in Durango, when my mother was about 14 years old, my grandfather was killed, shot by mistake by somebody who was trying to shoot somebody else. It was a pretty wild time back then. There was a lot of activity with the Yeastas and all that stuff, and my grandfather got caught in the crossfire. So he left my mom and her older sister all by themselves, to fend for themselves. My mom's older sister was of the age of marriage, and she married and took in my mom, and helped continue to raise her until my mom married my father.

AP: How did your parents meet?

JV: They were actually from the very same town. They have some stories. My mom loves to tell the story that when they were babies – they are the same age, and when they were babies, they were cared for by the same lady in the town. Not babies, but like when they were four or so, and they used to play together in that same house and stuff. They met from the same town. They married, I guess in their 20s, and they moved to [inaudible]. My dad worked in the mines for a while. He didn't see a future in that, and he kept moving North, and he kept moving North until he ended up in [inaudible], and they basically got off the train, didn't know anybody, and they ended up staying with some folks that gave them lodging for the night, and from that, he built out this business of land, cattle and trucks, this and that and the other. We lived there, and I guess the majority of us were born there. Only two of my brothers were born in Durango, their trajectory from Durango to Chihuahua, one was born in Durango and the other was born in Chihuahua. The rest of us were born in that tiny little town. We helped my dad with his business. I remember getting up real early in the morning to help my brothers milk the cows, and so this went on for a while, until my dad developed some health issues. He had

diabetes, very strong. He wasn't taking care of himself. He was stressed. There were too many things going on, and he was spreading himself too thin. It was that time that the doctor advised not only him, but the oldest kids in the family and my mom that if we didn't get him out of that environment that he was surely gonna die within a couple of years because it was just killing him. The conditions were through the roof, and he was just not taking care of himself.

During that time one of my oldest brothers had come to the United States, just like an adventure, let me go see what's going on, and he came over for a couple of months, renewed his Visa and so forth, and news got to him that my dad was very sick, so he said, you guys really should come to the United States. It's a different pace, a different type of life, and you could probably get better care here, and so he started the paperwork being that my mother was American, started the process of getting us legalized. We went through a long process, had to go to Mexico City to get a Mexican passport, and the whole nine yards. Eventually on February 16th of 1970, we migrated to the United States. We were actually legally crossed into the United States. I remember that time very vividly. It was the coldest I've ever felt, landing from a little town in Mexico dropped right into the middle of Chicago on February 16th at night. It must have been 10 below 0 or something. I just could not understand how something could be so cold. So that's what happened. That's how we came to the United States.

AP: And you were 11?

JV: At the time I was 11 years old, yes.

AP: And how is it that you ended up in Chicago?

JV: We had family, my mom's older sister, the one that cared for her. Her husband at the time, and kids had migrated to the United States, at least some of them, and so we had some contacts in Chicago. Why they ended up in Chicago, I have no idea, but for some reason it came to be that it was Chicago. It wasn't New York. It wasn't LA., but it was Chicago for some reason. I never understood why. When my brother came to Chicago, he stayed with them, and they helped him out, and so forth, and so on, and that was the place that we ended up in.

AP: How did you travel over here?

JV: To Chicago?

AP: Uh huh.

JV: We hopped on a plane here at the El Paso International Airport, and I remember, it was so different back then in 1970. They didn't have the jet ways, so you had to actually walk out into the runway, and board the plane that way. Yeah, that was before they all this stuff. I remember going into it. I don't remember what kind of plane it was, but we entered it from the rear, from the back. So here's an 11-year-old kid, who didn't know anything but cows and farms, boarding a jet. It was kind of impressive. It was overwhelming. The whole experience was surreal. I remember landing in Chicago. I remember being in the airport, waiting forever for my brother to finally show up, and pick us up. Then I remember going out to the car, to the parking lot, and that experience of cold was unbelievable. Chicago is a pretty cold city in February. It was pretty intense.

AP: Where did you go to school?

JV: We landed in Chicago, and I was a fifth grader. It was the middle of the year of fifth grade. They pulled me out of school in Mexico and enrolled in a school in Chicago, about four blocks away from where we lived. It was called Augustus Burley Elementary School. It's still there. I was enrolled in fifth grade, I was the only Hispanic in that class, and it was quite an experience too. I remember my aunt walking me to the class after they registered me, talking to the teacher, and saying something to the teacher. Something was going on, and I didn't understand a single word, and I looked, and there was nothing but blond hair kids just staring at me like who is this kid, and I don't know what my aunt said to the teacher. I remember this vividly. She must have said something like he is such a good kid, and this and that, and she grabbed my cheek, and went like this, and everybody just laughed, and I was like oh. Earth swallow me now, right. So that's how my initiation started. It was a great experience. I learned English right away. I remember my teacher at the time, Mrs. Winchell, I'll never forget her. She would send me out of the classroom with Doctor Suess books, and I remember being so confused, the culture must be so different, why are these people eating green eggs. What's that all about, and why is there a cat in his hat, I don't get this. It was just hilarious, but that's how I learned English, and by the start of the sixth grade, I took part in the class as normal, so I really absorbed English. I don't know why. Necessity I guess. I remember such things like the first word I ever learned in English, that was my dad teaching me to go get milk from the corner store.

He kept going over it, milk, and I couldn't pronounce it. I finally went to the corner store and told the guy milk. He laughed and took me to the milk, but that was the very first word I learned. I remember coming home from school really excited to tell my mom that I knew ten words in English, and I recited them to her. I was real proud of that. I'll always remember that. Those times of just grasping the language, understanding the culture, it was quite an experience for an 11-year-old, let me tell ya.

AP: What language is primarily spoken at home?

JV: Where, at home?

AP: Uh huh.

JV: Oh, Spanish. It still is. We all speak Spanish. My mom is still alive. She speaks nothing but Spanish. My brothers, when we get together – I think there's only one brother that I sort of speak in English with. The rest is all Spanish.

AP: Interesting. Did your father ever tell you any stories about his days as a bracero?

JV: He sure did. Some good stories, and some not so good stories. He mentioned stories about when we first wanted to come over he was really opposed to it. He knew that he was sick, and he knew he was ill and needed to take care of himself, but he why the United States? We're like, well why not? He said, well, I didn't have such a good experience over there. When we asked him why, he remembered the time during segregation, where you couldn't eat. It was only whites, and the colored, and my dad was considered colored at the time, so he couldn't eat at the places where the whites ate. He couldn't drink from the same water faucet. He remembered all that stuff, and he was like, I don't think I want to go back there. It was only after everybody assured him that those things had changed, that he was like okay, we'll give it a shot, and we moved to Chicago. When he was young, he worked in California a lot, and he worked in the vineyards. I would imagine it was NAPA Valley. I don't remember asking him exactly where, but he lived with an Italian family, and they spoke nothing but Italian, and he picked up Italian, and he spoke it fluently. None of us knew this, well at least I didn't know. Maybe my brothers did, but it was at a dinner that we went to one time in Chicago celebrating my graduation from a school in Chicago. We went to this Italian place that we loved, and we were eating and stuff, and the owner of the place, Enzo, he came over to the table, and my

dad just started talking to him fluently in Italian, and my jaw just dropped. I just could not understand what the heck was going on. He just spoke fluently, joking, and he would tell my dad stuff, and my dad would answer, and that's when I knew that my dad spoke Italian. He never shared that with me at least that he spoke Italian.

AP: At that moment, did you ask him?

JV: I'm like, what's going on? He's like, oh yeah, I lived with an Italian family for so many years, and I picked up a word or two. I said a word or two? My God. My dad was a pretty remarkable guy. My mom is a very remarkable lady, and I feel very blessed, and very fortunate to have such strong parents. They were just incredible, they really were, from every sense of the word. My dad instilled in us, really strong values, work ethic, honesty, business, even though he only had a third grade education he was an amazing businessman, he truly was. This is a man that got to Chicago and in six months after he landed in Chicago, he bought us an apartment building. We lived in one flat and we rented the rest. So we basically lived free because the rents were paying, and from that he made more money, and bought more apartments. I mean, just like that, he was just an amazing person. He had that gift. He could have done so much more, but I think he ran out of time. He didn't take care of himself, and he was also not at the right place. He got started late, but he did the most that he could with his tools, with what he had and what God gave him. Here's a man limited in education, limited in language, none of those things meant anything to him. Nothing was gonna stop him.

AP: So you lived in the apartment that belonged to your father?

JV: Yeah. When we first moved to Chicago, we rented a place and lived in that place for six months. My dad said enough of this, why am I paying this kind of – so he looked around and he found a house. He said I like a house, and he negotiated a price. I guess he had some funds wired, this and that, got qualified, and bought that house. We rented two flats, and lived in one of them. In Chicago, in the city, a lot of the houses are like cookie cutter. They're all kind of the same. Three stories, three stories, the neighborhood is the same, slight variations, but I can tell you what the inside of every house in Chicago looks like because they're all the same layout, and same plan. So he bought that house. We lived on the first floor, and he rented the second and the third, and then from there he bought another house, and from there another house. So he bought three houses in total before he called it quits, and moved to El Paso.

AP: How was the neighborhood there? Do you have any childhood memories?

JV: Yes. Again, I am blessed in so many ways. I had an incredible childhood. We lived in this neighborhood. My cousins lived across the street, next to them was a Puerto Rican kid who was such a neat kid, and then some other Anglo kids, and we all got together and were best of friends. We all loved baseball. We all loved sports. Behind our house, down the block were some railroad tracks. They are no longer there. But the railroad tracks took you straight to Wrigley Field where the Cubs play. It must have been six blocks. If you just follow the tracks, six blocks later, you're at Wrigley, right in front of Wrigley. So in the summers, my mom would give me \$2.00 for a grandstand seat, and put a sandwich in a paper bag, and I would go off to see the Cubbies. In the summer, that's how I grew up. When we weren't doing that, we were playing baseball in a sandlot behind my cousin's house. There was an empty lot next to a factory. There was nothing there except dirt. We made a little baseball field out of it, that movie, the Sandlot. I don't know if you ever saw that. Oh my God, it was identical to how I grew up, identical, right down to the pool scene when they go down to the pool. We would go after the game, and everything, we'd go down to this one pool that was about ten blocks away, and I mean it's identical to the movie. It was like reliving my childhood. It was really nice. My dad bought another house after that, always with the aim of improving our living conditions and our standards. So we moved from there. I was really sorry to move. It was when I graduated from eighth grade, and was going into high school. We moved to another location, and we lived there through my high school years. As soon as I graduated from high school, my dad had bought another house. I remember that house so distinctly because my dad was looking for something better for his kids, and he went to this neighborhood that the realtor suggested. My dad had said, I want this, this and this type of house, and he took us on Sundays. I was his interpreter, so on Sundays we would go and see houses, and he saw this house, and we went to see it, I remember walking through the house. It was really nice, and I will never forget this, the house –

Again, in Chicago, there is a house here, and then the backyard, and then the garage. So you have to walk through the backyard to get to the garage, and there – In Chicago, there are no rock walls between – There is no rock wall, they are all chain link fences, picket fences, and so forth. If you stand in your backyard and look to your left and to your right, you can see everybody's backyard,

left or right. I remember that Sunday, we went to look at this house. We got out of the house going toward the garage, just to see the garage, we were in the backyard, and the next-door lady was a European lady, and it was Polish or German, one of the two, and started yelling at the realtor and us that they didn't want our kind in their neighborhood. She was like, you have your place, you don't have to live here, this and that. I understood exactly, but my mom didn't understand at first, and my mom was like what is she saying? I was like, nothing mom. Nothing, don't worry about it. My dad knew exactly what was going on, and the realtor was very apologetic and stuff.

We saw the house, and my dad bought it because that's the kind of guy he was. So he bought the house, and my mom knew what was going on, after a while she understood what was going on, but my mom taught me a lesson that I will never forget. Within the next few months after we moved in there, my mom made a batch of **[inaudible]** bananas for everybody. She was an incredible cook. She made some **[inaudible]** and put them in a basket, and told me to take them to the neighbor, the lady. She was outside, and I took them to the lady, and the lady was shocked. I gave them to her, and turned around, and walked away because I didn't like that lady. A couple of days later, the lady gave me back the basket full of fruit that she had from her garden. I took it to my mom. After a while, my mom sent her **[inaudible]**. Same thing, and then the next day or a couple of days later, the lady made preserves, and she sent my mom jars of preserves, and stuff. This went on for some time. I remember coming home from school one time, and my mom was in the backyard, and she came in and I go where were you? Oh, I was talking to Lena. I go, you don't speak a word of English, and she doesn't speak a word of Spanish, how are you talking to her? When she left Chicago to come to El Paso, I remember Lena being in the front yard crying that my mom was leaving. She was just hugging her and kissing her, and my mom the same to her. She taught me a lesson of community, you know, that community starts with one, and if you extend the hand, it erases a lot of discrimination. Can we stop for a minute?

AP: Sure. We can take a break if you want.

[Audio Stopped]

AP: This is the continuation of the interview with Mr. Jose Villanueva.

JV: So, when they were getting ready to leave, this lady comes out and gives my mom a hug, and everything is just beautiful, and to this

day I remember that story fondly because that's the day that my mom taught me very important lessons about community. The community is what you make it. Community starts with one, and it should be you that starts the community. She once told me, there are good communities, and there are bad communities. There are communities of hate, and there are communities of love. Be the one that starts the community of love. So I'll always remember that, and I was always very positive.

From there, my parents moved to El Paso. My dad retired from the steel mill. I'm not sure if I am jumping ahead too much.

AP: Well, tell me about his work at the steel mill.

JV: My dad worked – It's tough for a 50-something-year-old guy in Chicago, who doesn't really speak English, and really has no trade, no skills to get a job anywhere, and I remember my dad worked at a job at a laundromat. This is a man that by the time we moved to Chicago, he had accomplished quite a bit of things in Mexico, and so there was a little pride swallowing there to have to work at a laundromat along with the laborers and so forth, but he did it. To him, pride was putting food on the table for his kids, and taking care of his kids and his wife. So he did that for a while, and I remember him coming home sometimes, and his nails were just like raw because he would have to take the clothes from the hot washing machines that were steaming hot, grab it, and throw them in a dryer, and his nails were taking a beating. Right around that time – I think he lasted there for about a year-and-a-half. After that, my brother started working at this place, I don't think is there anymore, it's called Griffin Wheel. It's a company that makes wheels for trains. They made these big ole' train wheels, and my brother started working there, it's a foundry steel mill. They got him a job there. My dad was a custodian. I mean, from being a landowner to being a custodian. That's quite a drop, but my dad was the best custodian they ever had. So now matter what the job was, my dad would be the best at it. So he taught me a lesson there of humility, knowing your roots, knowing what's important in your life. It's not the kind of car you drive, it's not the kind of job you have. It's how you provide for your family that matters, and when to provide for the family. He did that, and they loved him. He finally retired when he was 65, when he turned, I'm sorry, 64. He retired from that job.

AP: And then you all decided to move to El Paso?

JV: No. My dad because when we lived in Chicago, we went back and forth to Mexico to visit the brother that we had left behind, that stayed behind. Every time we would go by here because we would drive, my dad said, you know I like El Paso. I'm going to live here one of these days. When I retire, I'm going to come to El Paso. It's got the best of everything, great weather, everybody speaks Spanish, I'm close to Abel, Mexican food, what else can you want. Okay dad, yeah, yeah. Sure enough, when he retired, he packed everything up, came to El Paso, bought a house in the lower valley, and bought another house in the lower valley, rented that so that he would – he was always thinking one step ahead.

After that, he bought another house, and on and on. He moved to El Paso in 1979 I think. My dad was having more health issues as a result of his diabetes. He developed some heart problems. He would go back to Chicago. He had prostate cancer. He'd go back and forth to Chicago to see his doctors, and stuff. The trips when he went back to Chicago, I would see him, and I'd see him starting to deteriorate. My dad's not doing well. I had just graduated from a school called DeVry, the Institute of Technology. It was an electronics associate degree. I was working for Xerox. I had a nice job for a kid that was 19 or 20 years old, or whatever – 20 years old. I sensed that my dad wasn't well, so I would come in the summers to visit him. I came one summer to visit him, and I said you know what, this is not good. I went back, gave my resignation. I put everything that I owned in the car and moved down here, and spent time with my dad. He passed away the following year.

AP: Sorry to hear that.

JV: It was a good decision, you know? I decided to leave – forgo my career, whatever it was, and decided to move, not matter what. I had no job or anything. I spent time with him. I was the only one at the time. My sisters and my brothers followed after his death because then my mom was alone, and we've always been very united. We are a very tightly knit group. The brothers are always very close. So when he passed away, she was left alone, and I was with her, so I decided to stay. My brothers soon followed. Now they're all living here. My mom is still alive. She's 93 years old, but she's an Alzheimer's patient, and so I go visit her. I just came back. I go visit her every day, and spend time with her. She's a neat lady.

AP: Where in the valley did your father and mother end up?

JV: We lived by Lancaster Elementary, by Corpus Christi Church.

AP: Okay.

JV: It used to be all farms when they first moved down here, and their neighborhood, there were just a couple of houses there. Before it was Corpus Christi Church they used to have mass at people's driveways, and they would use the garage door as the backdrop of the Altar. The priest would come and people would gather. I still have pictures somewhere of Mass being given outside in the driveway, and that was the birth of the Corpus Christi Church, so my mom and dad facilitated some of those Masses outside on Sunday mornings. We were outside, just put up a table here, let's call this the Altar, and the priest would go out there, and say Mass.

AP: Do you think that the whole agricultural feel is what attracted your father, what was it?

JV: That attracted my dad?

AP: To the valley.

JV: You know, I think what attracted him to the valley was the fact that we had friends of the family that had come from the same town in Mexico, and sort of settled in that area, and so when they came, they went to see them, the Morales Family, and it was like what do you think, oh yeah, well there's a house right there for sale, and another one, and before you know it – It's almost like they had no choice. They just came, and that's all they saw at El Paso. When I came, and I started investigating El Paso, I said, I wish they would have moved somewhere else. It was a nice area at the time. The people were very friendly. The church was a very central part of that whole community, at the time. I think it's changed quite a bit, but at the time it was. It was really nice, and people were just awesome, fantastic people. I lived there for a while. I would say I lived there for about maybe ten years before I moved away from there.

AP: So tell me about DeVry and your education. You went to high school where?

JV: I went to High school at a place called Schurz High School. Carl Schurz High School. It's still there. It's a beautiful school. The architecture is just impressive. I tried to take my daughter to see where her dad went to school, and what I got was such a rude reception. They had metal detectors everywhere, and one of the

officers was like, are you crazy, what are you doing here. I said I came to see my school. He was like absolutely not, you're gonna get killed. So the neighborhood changed quite a bit, and I was very sorry to see that. It was a nice school. It was a really nice school. I really never got into the school spirit. I was kind of an outsider, kind of a loner, terribly shy.

My parents really didn't, how can I say this. They didn't really facilitate the whole education thing because they just didn't know. They didn't know what came after that, and how do you go about applying for this, and applying for that, and seek this and seek that. They kind of left it up to me. I don't hold them responsible. One of them barely spoke English, and the other one didn't, so they couldn't advise me. I was the only one that went to school, so nobody knew. So I go through this high school process, all four years, and I graduate, and the only institution that came to talk to us about continuing education was DeVry, and the Army. At the time, it was the '70s, '77. We had just gotten over Viet Nam. There was kind of a bad taste in people's mouth about the Army, although I looked at it. I thought maybe the Army was the thing for me, but my mom would have wiggled out because there were still some leftover conflicts with Viet Nam, and so forth, and stability. So I thought I better not, and was like what other choice do I have. These guys came to talk to me, they're called DeVry, maybe we should talk to them. They came over the house, and the next thing you know, I'm going to DeVry. I didn't know what to take. I ended up enrolling in a course for electronics. It was a two-year course. I absolutely hated it. I hated it. I don't know what my calling was, but it certainly wasn't that. It was just terrible. I survived the whole thing, and I went to school there. They got me a job at Xerox. It was pretty cool. They gave me a company car, and I was working downtown, it was really neat. I felt like I was on top of the world, but I hated it, and I hated my job. I hated what I did. So I graduated from DeVry, and worked for Xerox for about maybe, from '79 to '82. Three years, and then that's when I moved to El Paso. In El Paso, I tried to hook up with Xerox again. No openings. I looked everywhere. I think the only people that hired me were the – There was a company called Gus Manufacturing. Ever hear of them?

AP: No.

JV: They made geological units that people use in oil explorations. They're data recorders. I worked there for a while. The company closed down. Then I got another job at a place called Dale Electronics. That company closed down. I couldn't get any job

anywhere else. It was in the '80s. There was a recession going on, in the Jimmy Carter days. The only job that I could find was at a TV station. It was KCIK. Channel 14. Now it's FOX. Back then it was an independent station. I worked there as a broadcast technician. Hated it. I remember on Sunday nights because I was the lowest man on the totem pole, on Sunday nights I would have to go up to the top of the mountain, the transmitter at midnight, so that I could turn the transmitter off because they didn't have remote back then, and do maintenance on it, and try to go to sleep out there, and then at 6 o'clock in the morning I had to turn the transmitter back on, and then come down.

AP: Where did you sleep out there?

JV: They had just a building, and they had a little cot there, and so when you finished your work, which was around 2-3 o'clock in the morning, you would try to get another 3 hours of sleep or something. It was an interesting view up there. It's a beautiful view.

AP: I can imagine.

JV: Yeah. I remember those days. There's a tram that takes you all the way up. You get up there, and there's nobody there. Some strange animals here and there, but there's actually nobody there. So it was kind of interesting. I did that for a couple of years. Then that's when I decided that I needed to get a different degree. I need to go to school again. This whole electronics thing didn't work out for me. So I enrolled in the Community College, and I finished that, and then transferred over to UTEP until I got my Master's Degree in Business.

AP: Oh, okay. So you're a UTEP alumni?

JV: I am. In fact, I am on the Executive Board of the Alumni Association. I am the Treasurer. Yeah, this is my last term.

AP: So what changes have you seen since you've been – as a student, and now?

JV: Well as a student, a lot of positive changes. The [inaudible] building, the College of Business Administration is much nicer. They've added some things that we didn't have before, and then of course, the growth of the University with all the buildings that have gone up, it's amazing, and there's more to come by the way. There are a lot more things to come. I remember being handed a

diploma by Diane [inaudible], and that was one of the highlights of my career, of my life actually. I had a daughter at that time. She was four years old, I think, or three years old. I remember her yelling from the stands, Daddy, so that was really nice, when I got my degree.

AP: What motivated you to get a degree in business?

JV: Kind of the same thing, you know. I really didn't know what I wanted to do, and business seemed to be very, all encompassing, if you will because with business you can go into accounting, finance, economics, management, marketing, and I knew that my dad was a businessman, and I knew that business was in my blood somewhere along the way, so I figured I might as well get prepared with a business degree, and I did.

AP: Did you work while you were going to school?

JV: Oh yeah. I worked at various places. After the TV station, I went to a place called Rockwell International, right down the street here, in fact. I worked there until they closed it down, and sent it to Longview, Texas, and then from there, I got a call to work at a place called Honeywell Keyboard Division, which was on Executive in Mesa. The Commons, those buildings there, I worked there, while I was going to school at UTEP. I tell people this. I love the University so much because I can honestly say – A lot of people say my life is kind of better because of the University. My life literally changed for the positive the actual, the same day that I announced that I was graduated from UTEP.

Let me explain. I worked in the engineering section of Honeywell. I was a components engineer. I hated it. I would see these marketing guys on the fourth floor having all the fun, and the cool jobs, the suits, and the travel, and all that stuff, and I said, that's what I want to do. I kept applying for jobs up there. I kept applying, and nothing. They wouldn't even interview me, until I said, you know, why won't you at least interview me? They said Joe, you don't have a degree, a business degree, or any kind of degree. Oh, okay. I was a junior, so I kept at it, and I remember taking 9 hours, 12 hours sometimes, and working full-time with a baby, so it was tough, but I wanted to see it through. So, when you get to – I don't know if you guys will. You get to your last semester, and you go to your advisor, and they clear you for graduation, they give you that piece of paper, where it says okay, you can graduate. I remember that day.

I went back, I had applied for a position, and they were actually considering me. They knew that I would be graduating soon, so they interviewed me. I remember that day I took that piece of paper, and went to that supervisor that was interviewing, and I put it on his desk, and I go, look. I'm cleared to graduate. That made his decision to hire me into marketing, so as of that day, my life turned for the better because of that degree from UTEP. I mean, it's a true story. So I am very much in debt to that University. My life turned around completely. So I worked in marketing for a while at Honeywell, loved it, absolutely loved it. I traveled a little bit, and then they closed, and I got picked up by a company in [inaudible] Juarez called Pollak, Pollak Electronics. It is a part of a larger company called Stoneridge. They are still there, they're still making the same thing. I went to work for them in their Marketing Department, and kept getting promoted, and promoted, and kept going up and up. They made me a product line manager, which is like a business unit manager, and then I went and got an MBA from the University of Phoenix, and I just kept getting promoted until it got to a point, while I was Marketing Manager for the Latin American Market, which meant I had to go to Brazil a lot, and then I handled Mercedes Benz and Volvo, which meant I had to go to Europe a lot, it gave me a great experience. I went to Mexico City for Mercedes Benz Mexico, so it was very nice. I learned a ton at that company. I am very grateful for that opportunity that they gave me.

During that time that I worked there, I met this gentleman named Leonard **Lachman**, and we hit it off. He's just a terrific gentleman, and we hit it off, and we would go out to lunch all the time, go eat, and talk about stuff, and he comes from a family of entrepreneurs also, so the main topic of conversation was, you know, we gotta do something. We gotta do a business, you and I. We have to open our own shop, and do something. We had discussion after discussion until it got serious, and it got so serious that we finally picked a venture type of thing that we wanted to do, wrote a business plan, and actually followed through with it. We both left our jobs at the same time, and with \$5,000 each, we started ProTech Global Solutions. That was in 2001.

AP: In 2001. So tell me, what is it that your business provides, but let's first talk about how you got started with it. Did you have to go out and get a loan, or was it just you and your partner who invested?

JV: It was actually three of us. There was a gentleman from Brazil that I am very fond of, Angelo, and all three of us had the same idea of getting this business started. So I had \$5,000 saved up, Leonard

had \$5,000, and this guy had \$5,000. So we put \$15,000 together, and by this time, we had talked to a supplier of Stoneridge from Taiwan. They supplied Stoneridge these gauges, these very hard to make, very hard to find air gauges. If you are familiar with the heavy-duty trucks, the big rigs, they have air brakes. When you press the air brakes, you want to know what the pressure is. Well, that pressure is read by this complex board on two gauges. Not many suppliers in the world supply them. These guys did, but we always had problems with them because we couldn't understand how they operated, and we had communication issues with them. Leonard and I talked to the lady that would come every year only to visit. He said you know what, you really need somebody to represent you here in the states. You a sales arm, if you will. She went back and talked to the owners of the company, came back and said, how about you guys? At the time, we said okay, yeah, that sounds good, that's what we'll do. So we got the \$5,000, \$5,000 and \$5,000 together, the \$15,000 together, and we decided, let's go off on our own. We got our first client. We'll represent this company. We agreed at a stipend they would pay us every month for our expenses, and that was our seed account, if you will. From there, we were to grow. Our mission at the time was to be representatives of off-shore companies that serviced the United States. That is what we set out to do. That was our business plan.

Six months into that, this was in 2001, the bottom fell out of the Taiwanese auto market, and they were in financial trouble. They said sorry guys, we signed a contract, but they said, sorry we can't support you anymore, you're on your own. I remember this e-mail from her came when Leonard and I were in Mexico City attending an auto show there, where were supposed to promote their products. I remember we were in the hotel in the business center looking at the e-mails and we saw the e-mail from this lady and we were like, oh man, what now? That was the longest flight back from Mexico City. We had no job. We had no business. We had nothing, except the lease that we had to keep going.

That was a pretty dark time for us, six months into it, and of course then 911 happened, and nobody was buying anything or doing anything, or investing in anything. So 2001 was like horrible. We borrowed, and borrowed just to keep us a float, to keep the payroll going for us two. We cut our wages to half. We were making just the essential. We talked, should one of us go back to work, and the other one hold the fort, what should we do? Should we both go back, and abandon this idea. I said, you know what, absolutely not. We've taken the step, we knew it would not come without hardship, so this is it. As advertised, this is a hardship, let's plow

through it. We did, we started making sales calls, and I started cold calling. My strength is in marketing. I have this thing for getting customers, and contracts, and so forth, and Leonard is not too shabby either.

So we set out, and would just go out, and during that visit to Mexico City when that lady gave us the bad news, we had met a company there that supplied Volkswagen in Pueblo. They supplied the emblems. These beautiful emblems that go on the engine, the VW, and we had met him, and we had just talked to him and stuff, and so we came back, and we said remember that guy we met, they had those emblems that they used, well in my travels to Brazil, I met a company that made those things in Brazil. So I called them, and said how would you like some representation in the NAFTA region. They said absolutely. So we struck up a deal with them. We went back to the German guy that owned this company that produced for Volkswagen, and we said, well, we can supply that for you. We can supply it probably at a better price, and better service, and we got his business. So that kind of started things.

From there, we started supplying those emblems. We came back here, and supplied a company locally called AO Smith with nameplates for their products for a while, and then we went to a company called Cummins, which is right down the block here. They make engines for heavy-duty trucks, and so they needed a nameplate that went on the side of the electronic module. We can do that. We can supply that for you, and so we started supplying the engine nameplates, and stuff. In talking to him at one of our meetings, they said do you guys know anybody that can actually make the module. We are looking for somebody to make this moderate for us. I said, give me a couple of weeks, and I'll find out.

In those couple of weeks, we found a company that does electronics, and we struck up a deal with them, and went back and said yeah, we'd like to quote that module. We quoted it, and we got it. Now, we got this on the good relationship that we had because they don't just handout business to people that are not proven in the industry. We did a lot of selling, in short, to get this job. We still have it. We will supply Cummins with these engine modules. We've been doing it now for eight years. So from there, we got another contract, and another contract, and another, and on and on. So now, do we supply emblems, yeah we still do, but very little, very few. We supply decorative emblems to Cadillac, to the GM assembly plants. Every Cadillac has one our emblems on

there. Corvette has one of our emblems. That's about it. Most of our business comes from electronic board manufacturing.

AP: How many employees do you have?

JV: Right now, I think there is 17 of us. It started with just Leonard and I, and oh, the third gentleman from Brazil, we could never find an opportunity for him to join us. He had some changes in his personal life that kept him from leaving Brazil, so we ended up buying him out, maybe about six years ago. We bought him out. He got his money, and then some. We parted ways, but we are all still very good friends, all three of us, but now it is just Leonard and I as business partners. It is going to be our tenth year celebration here in February of next year, February 1st, God willing, it will be ten years in business. We went from literally nothing. We were in an office about the size of this room here. Him and I, just looking at each other. We had nothing else to do like who do we call? We are now in a position, very fortunate to be able to hire people, and give people the opportunity to do something positive with themselves.

AP: Were there any specific challenges besides –

JV: Being dropped? Yeah, you know, there always is. It's always a David versus Goliath kind of thing because here are these two guys from El Paso, going to see some of our bigger customers. I went to the GM Design Center. Who are these guys? They're both working in this tiny little office. They don't know that. It's presenting ourselves and presenting our capabilities to a point that it doesn't matter that we're in a small little office. It doesn't matter because we are supplying something that is of service to them. So there are always challenges like that. You always feel like the little guy in the fight, but as long as you have fight in you, there are all kinds of possibilities. So we always knew our potential, Leonard and I. We knew what we could do. We always were very confident in our capabilities, both of us, and we knew that we could handle customers very well, present ourselves, and so forth. That was never the issue. We always said just give us an opportunity, that's all we wanted. We'll take it from there. So far it's been good.

AP: Did you face any challenges as Hispanic?

JV: You know what, not really, no. Since moving here from Chicago, I don't think that I have, no. In fact, we had discussed some opportunities, and switching the ownership of the company, so

where I would be a 51 percent owner, so that we could get minority status, that never went anywhere, but difficulties, no. I'd like to think that as a society we have sort of evolved beyond that, but there are opportunities out there. Your capabilities can actually erase some of those racial lines. Your drive, your determination, your experience. You can overcome those things. You can make them go away.

AP: Were there any people in particular, any mentors that you may have had here in this region?

JV: Yes, lots. Oh, well besides my dad, at Stoneridge, there was a gentleman that was a mentor to me. He was my first boss there. Can I mention his name?

AP: Sure.

JV: His name is Bill **Househalter**. He is no longer in the area. He is a CEO of a company in Canada now, the last I heard. He was definitely a mentor. The guy was phenomenal. He really understood how to deal with customers, how to price things, how to approach a situation, how to solve a problem, and he had, I guess, such a temperament about him, the way he spoke, the way he taught, really resonated with me. He taught me so much. Sometimes I think that he taught me things that they would have never taught me in business school, that is how much I am indebted to him, and I've told him this. He is just a brilliant guy who I owe a lot to, so yeah.

AP: What do you feel that he taught you that they couldn't have taught you in business school?

JV: You know, when you are sitting across the table from a customer, and there is a negotiation of pricing, there are different ways to skin a cat, as they say. There are different ways to approach. You may say, you know what, he just wants a lower price, and he showed me that this is not the case, at all. If you approach things from different angles, you will find out that his sensitive spots may lay elsewhere, and maybe the lowest price is not his biggest problem, and you just keep asking, you keep working with that customer to find out what his sensitive areas are.

At the end of the day, he showed me that not only did we keep the account, but it had nothing to do with price to begin with, nothing to do with it. We approached it a different way. You serve the customer a different way, and the end result is that you kept the

customer, and you didn't have to lower the price. So he taught me a lot of that stuff. He taught me things like even how to present. He was big on presentations back when they had the photos in the carousel, and the clicker. He was a master of that, so I learned a lot about how to give a presentation from him. He was just really, really good. He would give me pointers. It's just the way you hold the clicker, and things. Bill, hold the clicker? Give me a break. He taught me a lot. He taught me the nuts and bolts, as well as the big picture. There were other people. Some people are – The plant manager was a very good mentor to me. He is no longer alive, but he was very good. He taught me about confidence, about believing in your product. Even though they come and tell you this and that, it's so terrible, I need a price reduction because it stinks. If you believe in what you do, and if you believe you are supplying a good service at a fair price, it goes a long way. He was very instrumental.

AP: Do you remember his name?

JV: Sure. He was Harvey **DeJuan**. Good guy, very good guy. Along the way, I've had various bosses, some from whom I picked up a thing or two. We actually employ one of my former bosses. One of our guys used to be my boss at Stoneridge. He found himself unemployed, so he came to us, and we always thought the world of him, and so it was absolutely, come join our team. He's here with us. He's a very astute gentleman. So yeah, there are a lot of people that have influenced me, definitely.

AP: Let's see, I had a question for you.

JV: Okay.

AP: The role of your family, how much family support did you get during this venture? Did it play a role?

JV: This particular venture?

AP: Yes.

JV: Wow. As far as brothers and sisters, they were there for moral support. I think that's about it. They were always behind me, and they always believed in me. That's one thing. My brothers and my sister are very proud of me. They are. They just talk about me, and are very proud of me. I am the only one with a degree in the family. So they are quite pleased at the way things turned out for me. So outside of just being there for me when I needed them for

moral support, they're always there, and I can always count on them.

AP: How would you compare the business climate when you started, and how things are going right now?

JV: Well, when we started, it was a very difficult year. The year 2001 was a start of a recession, if you can remember, and then again, 911 hit, and it was very similar to what we are seeing now actually. There are a lot of parallels in 2001 to 2010 or 2009, the market crash, and all that kind of stuff, unemployment being high, and all those kinds of things. It was very recessionary back then as it is now. So the situation is very similar, and the one thing I've learned is that if you can survive – In retrospect you look back, and say 2001 was a terrible year to start a business. The economy was so bad, but not really because if you can survive that year, you can survive many other years, and this one in particular.

The reason we survived, I think, is the approach Leonard and I took to business. We're very conservative in the way we plan, the way we spend, and how we allocate money, and who we hire. We are extremely conservative. We always looked at things, when we had nothing, we got the first account, which was Volkswagen, and we'd say okay, well how much is coming in? Oh great, well now, this pays for the rent, and another one, oh this pays for that, and this pays for that bill. So we took that approach in covering our expenses and getting to break even. That was the main driving factor, but if you learn to live and operate under very tough conditions, when the good times come, you are just that much better off, I think. So, last year was kind of a challenge for us. It was tough for everyone. The year 2009 was brutal, but we grew. Ever since the second year in business when we went through that problem, we have grown.

Every year has been a growth year. Every year is a record year for us. If you look at our growth chart, it's like that, and this year is going to be a phenomenal year for us, thanks to God. Next year our projected revenue – We're doing the plan right now, will be another 15 to 20 percent growth from where we are right now, so it's been good. It's been good. Recessionary times are difficult because not many people are buying, but the ones that are buying are looking for a better deal, and looking for a bigger bang for their buck, so it's actually an opportunity time for us because we can provide better service and better prices than some of our competitors. Why because they're heavy with overhead, and we're not. We're very lean. We're very conservative, so when we go to

price something, our overhead is lower. Our prices are lower, and it gives us an edge, and it gives us an edge when people are looking for an edge. People are looking for suppliers that have a better answer, a better solution. So we've actually done better. In 2009, we've got maybe three or four programs that are kicking in in 2010 now, and so we're doing much better and some that we got here that will be kicking in in 2011. The word recession scares us a little bit, but it's more of an opportunity. It's how you present yourself, and what you do, so it's been good to us.

AP: Building relationships, and networking, how important do you think those things are?

JV: Huge. I would say that a lot of the opportunities we have had are as a result of relationship building. We ended up supplying the company that we came from, Stoneridge. We supply some of their products. The relationships that I built in Brazil have helped us quite a bit. This is no longer a world where you can go about as an unknown. You have to build bridges. You have to build relationships. We are in an era now where vertical integration is non-existent, and a lot of business run under the scheme of outsourcing. A lot of people outsource.

Our business has grown because of outsourcing. Companies say, you know what, we are very good at designing, and we're very good at marketing, but we're not good at manufacturing. Let's find somebody that can do that for us. Well, here we are. So outsourcing and relationships from that standpoint have helped us quite a bit. This is the age where industry is going into an outsource mode, if you will. People are focusing on their core competencies, and anything that doesn't fit in their core competencies, they outsource. It's actually a smart move because you are getting experts at that to do the job for you. So it's working very well.

AP: Locally, do you belong to any of the Chambers?

JV: I don't. We want to join the El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. We were, in the very first two years, but I want to join again. I am very active with UTEP, the Alumni Association. So we are active also – My partner is active with the Texas Society of Professional Engineers. He is an engineer. So we are very active in that. He's actually being considered for a position on the Board, as we speak. So yeah, we stay connected. We try to recruit from UTEP, and we try to reach out to people that have certain skill sets. We try to hire as much as we possibly can.

AP: We've talked about mentorship. Do you see yourself as a mentor?

JV: Oh, wow. You know what, I would think so. I hope so. I think some of the people that we have brought on board – I used to teach Community College. When I got my Master's Degree, one of the persons in the group that I was getting the Master's Degree with was actually a leader there in the Community College, heading the business group, and she said, you have to come and help me teach. I did that for about four years. I taught Principles of Management at the Community College part-time for quite a while. I taught a couple courses of leadership. In there was a student that just stood out, and I hired her. After I left, she was looking for a job. She was at Delphi, and I hired her. I sort have taken her under my wing because I think the potential for this young lady is phenomenal, so I am trying to pass along information that I've gathered through the years, the way to approach things, problem solving, organizational skills, how to approach a problem, pricing, and that kind of stuff. So yeah, I guess I am becoming a mentor to this person.

AP: You taught leadership?

JV: I did. I did. I taught a couple of courses of leadership at Community. It was a brand new class that they had just added to their curriculum. I don't even know if it's still there or not, but I remember teaching Leadership for two semesters. It was taught one semester before me, so it was a pretty new class that was added to the degree plan, and so I did that. Then the leadership changed at community college, new persons took over, and they brought their people, which was fine because things were picking up a lot here, and I just didn't have time. It takes a lot of time to prepare for classes, and so I was kind of thankful that it sort of ran it's course, if you will.

AP: How would you define leadership in just the broadest sense?

JV: Wow. Geez. To be a leader – Leadership is, I guess, the ability to get people to follow, but it's even more than that. It's almost the ability to get people to sell fleet, to become leaders themselves. That's what I would strive for. You can get them to follow you, but then once you are out of the picture they are like lost sheep. Leadership is the ability I guess to get people to become self-leaders, so you have to be able to teach them to organize, how to motivate, how to direct, and how to manage, and become good leaders. But leadership, it includes so many things. It is a full

range of things from leading by example, to the values of the system that you instill. It's just a whole host of things that come through mentoring. I think the best way to describe it is that leadership is the ability to get somebody to self-lead.

AP: What is your opinion on the location, the strategic location of El Paso considering NAFTA and this whole global trade?

JV: Well, we've used it to our advantage, that's for sure. I think we are centrally located, east-west, and then we are right in the center of one of the busiest ports of entry, [inaudible] Juarez, and with all the activity that is going on in [inaudible] Juarez with the [inaudible], and the industry, and just the talent level that's there, the talent level that's on this side, and the support of a great University not only here, but there, it's a great place to do business. It's a nice little hub form where trucking, rail, and air kind of right in the middle of things, to try and shoot out from here to all of NAFTA. So it is a great location. We always use it as a sales tool, that we're right in the hub of things. It's an area with pretty decent wages. It's not exorbitant like it would be in the Northeast or just simply in the North or in the West. It's got pretty competitive wage structure still, and the talent level is pretty decent. So it's a sales tool, for sure. It's a place where you want to be, definitely.

AP: So when you tell young entrepreneurs or people with an entrepreneurial spirit who want to start a business that will be listening to this interview, what advice would you give them?

JV: That location is only so important. If you have that drive in you, if you have that motivation, if you have that entrepreneurial spirit, what that means is that if you are willing to risk, and if you're willing to endure the pain because the rewards will come later, if you truly believe in that, then location is not all that important. You can start a business anywhere. I have heard people say, yeah, I want to start a business but I need to move to New York to do it. No you don't. If you have it in you, you can start a business anywhere. I mean, you can succeed anywhere. Case in point, you can succeed in El Paso.

AP: So what do you think of this concept of braindering?

JV: It's sad. It's unfortunate. I think some of our best young minds are leaving El Paso for opportunities elsewhere. It's unfortunate because if we harness those talents, and do something productive with them, if the opportunities develop here, where we can keep

them, I think everybody gains. I think the region gains because the talent level, the talent pool is greater, is better, and so companies that would be looking for a place to establish a business would look to El Paso, and say, you know what, that's a suitable area. Look at the talent pool, but with the people leaving, the talent pool is kind of shallow, and it's a shame. There are some bright, bright people that come out of that university, incredibly bright, and it's a shame that not all of them stay.

AP: Are you minority certified?

JV: No.

AP: You've never thought of – Do you have any certifications?

JV: We did. We were minority certified. In fact, I think there is still a certificate on the wall over there, where we did that. Chrysler was thinking of giving us some business, but they needed us to be minority certified. We became minority certified, and then the leadership at Chrysler changed. I think this was the time where they were going through bankruptcy, and all that stuff, so that went away, and we really never saw any other benefits to do minority certification. We could do it. We can apply, and so forth. The door is open. An opportunity has not presented itself where we need to be minority certified, to obtain a contract yet.

AP: So you don't have – do you think that you have had advantages being a minority, or any disadvantages?

JV: Neither. Not at all. A lot of people make too much, I think of race, the color, and so forth. Some may have a point. Some may have some validity to their arguments. I don't discount that. In our case, really no. I think we have been judged by our talent, and our capabilities, and I'd like to believe that it's those decisions that have put us in the place we are at today, and have been largely colorblind, so I'd like to believe that. I think it is, for the large part, true.

AP: And just to wrap it up, by all reflections, is there anything that I should have asked you that I didn't ask you that needs to be said?

JV: If I had to do it all over again, that's probably one thing that I was expecting you to ask me – If I had to do it all over again, I would definitely be my own boss, again. I would have taken a different path, out of high school, and all that kind of stuff, and hopefully made my journey a little bit easier, but the end result would be the

same. I would still be an entrepreneur. I would still strive to be a mentor in the community. I would strive to be a mentor to other Hispanics, and show them that opportunities do exist, and that yeah, you too can be an entrepreneur, and don't let the color keep you, and don't let the language, or your background keep you. I mean, I'm an immigrant. I'm not a son of an immigrant, I'm an immigrant. I actually came from Mexico, and this country has given me every opportunity that one could hope for. The opportunities are there, if you work for them, if you look for them, and if you honestly pursue them.

The opportunities are there. You just have to be, what can I say, diligent about what you do. You have to keep at it. You have to persevere. They are there. So when I hear things like you know, I'm a Hispanic, I don't get the same breaks, that's kind of a copout because I am a living example of that is not the case. I hope that we can embrace that a lot more because Hispanics need a lot of role models. We are desperate for role models. We really do, we need more. I think it is a new generation of Hispanics coming, very bright kids out there. Hopefully they will take us to the next level, but if I had to do it all over again, absolutely, I would. I relish the opportunity to be a role model to other Hispanics, absolutely.

AP: Fantastic. One last question. Where do you see yourself in ten years from now?

JV: Retired. Ten years from now? Gosh, it wouldn't be a bad idea to be doing something else. I would love to teach again. I would absolutely love to teach again. I actually liked it a lot. Standing in front of a class, and seeing the potential. It's too bad that they can't see it themselves. But the instructors at UTEP and community, as they are looking out in the room and kids are answering questions, they can see the potential of some of these kids. They see the diamonds in the rough the way I saw them. I told them, I wish you could see what I am seeing. There is so much potential here guys, and it is just a matter of motivation, opportunity because it's there. It's unharnessed. It is there, ready to be polished into a beautiful diamond. So I would love to teach again. I would really like that opportunity. I don't know that I would want to be doing this. I'd like to be doing something different. I'd like to turn the page, and maybe move into teaching, but that's 10 years, 10 to 15 years from now. Hopefully, holding my grandson or granddaughter, that would be nice, too.

AP: For your business, do you see any thoughts of maybe expanding, or are there any new avenues for this business, or any new plans that you have?

JV: There are. We just hired this gentleman that I told you about. He is bringing a lot to the table. It's hopefully taking us to the next level. What that next level is, it's a different tier, and there are opportunities to expand on the contract manufacturing concept. Whether we set up equipment ourselves and do it, or continue with the outsourcing, that is yet to be determined, but I can definitely see a lot of growth potential for us, for this market, as it continues to be more and more outsourced. So definitely, yeah.

AP: Okay. Well, thank you for your time today.

JV: Thank you. It was a pleasure.

AP: This concludes the interview.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 85 minutes

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