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Interview no. 1501

Jose Luis Lopez

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University of Texas at El Paso

Institute of Oral History

Interviewee: Jose Luis Lopez

Interviewer: Arlina Palacios

Project: Paso del Norte Entrepreneurship Oral History Project

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: 18 October 2010

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Biographical Synopsis of Interviewee: Jose Luis Lopez was born in El Paso, Texas in 1954. His father was Jose Lopez and his mother is Amelia Lopez. Joe is the oldest and has three brothers and one sister. Joe attended Bel-Air High School and he is a graduate of The University of Texas at El Paso. Joe is the owner of Lopez Marketing Group and is married with children in El Paso, Texas.

Summary of Interview: After graduating from The University of Texas at El Paso in 1975, Joe worked at Safeway groceries and with two advertising agencies. He worked for Coca-Cola selling Minute Maid orange juice as an unpaid worker in order to gain experience in the advertising field. Coca-Cola hired Joe and he began working in New Products bringing new items to local grocery stores. Joe did well and was moved to run a small division within Coca-Cola that allows them to test new products, come up with new names and then work on the selling and distribution of the products. Joe was the first Hispanic in the Coca-Cola Foods Marketing Department and he also worked for the company in Houston, Texas. After working for Coca-Cola for five years, Joe worked for another agency for five years before starting Lopez Advertising in 1989. George Thomas, a local homebuilder was a big client of Lopez Advertising and a friend to Joe. George Thomas also helped Lopez Advertising with their first real office space. Joe's company also received assistance from The United States Small Business Administration. In the late 1990's Lopez Advertising closed and in 1998 re-opened as Lopez Marketing Group. Tom Cardenas helped Lopez Marketing Group with their first office as well. Joe is a part of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and he was the first El Pasoan on the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce board. Lopez Marketing Group is minority owned and certified and is 8A certified and received help through the National Minority Development Council. The advice Joe would offer entrepreneurs is to prepare well, make sure you understand where you're going, know whether the market is there, how you're going to make profit and make sure you're very conscious of the growth.

Length of interview: 85 minutes

Length of Transcript: 34 pages

Name of Interviewee: Jose Luis Lopez
Date of Interview: October 18th, 2010
Name of Interviewer: Arlina Palacios

AP: Today is October 18th, 2010. The interviewer's name is Arlina Palacios. This interview is part of the Paso del Norte Entrepreneurship Oral History Project. This interview is being conducted in El Paso, Texas.

Good afternoon.

JLL: Hi. How are you?

AP: I'm fine. Thank you. Will you state your full name and the name of your business, just for the record?

JLL: Full name is Jose Luis Lopez. I go by "Joe." The name of the company is Lopez Marketing Group.

AP: Thank you, Joe. Thanks for meeting with us.

JLL: Thank you.

AP: We're gonna start off with some background information. When and where were you born?

JLL: Do you really wanna know?

AP: Yes, I really wanna know.

JLL: Okay. In 1954, El Paso, Texas, Hotel Dieu.

AP: In Hotel Dieu?

JLL: Hotel Dieu.

AP: So what were your parents' names?

JLL: Parents' names were Jose Lopez and Amelia Lopez. My dad is no longer with us. My mom is still with us.

AP: What were their occupations?

JLL: My dad was a dairy farmer. He and his brothers ran a farm that was a family farm, a dairy farm. It was here on Lafayette and I-10.

AP: All right. So are they originally from El Paso?

JLL: Yes, they're originally from El Paso. They were born here and raised here. My grandparents were from Mexico, from Chihuahua, on both sides.

AP: On both sides?

JLL: Yeah, on both sides.

AP: What did your grandparents do?

JLL: On my mom's side, my grandfather was a salesperson. He used to work for different hardware stores. He worked for companies like JC Penney or other companies like that in California.

My dad's side, he was the one who started the dairy business. He worked for Price's Dairies at one time and started getting some of his own cows for himself, and pretty soon, he had a dairy farm. The fortunate part is that my father learned a lot from running a dairy. The unfortunate is that he had to give up his high school to help run the dairy. So the person that was gonna graduate from high school at least never graduated from high school. He went through sophomore, and as a junior, he dropped out to help the dairy farming.

AP: Where was he going to high school at the time?

JLL: He was going to Ysleta High School.

AP: Ysleta High School?

JLL: Yeah.

AP: He started that business on his own after working at Price's?

JLL: No. My grandfather was the one who started it. He went and got the cows and, pretty soon, got some land, and that was before there was I-10 or anything else like this. He just happened to be lucky that he bought the land right where I-10 was going to go right next to it, and so the dairy was placed right on I-10 when I-10 finally was built through where his land is.

AP: Tell me about your mom.

JLL: My mom is probably one of the smartest ladies I have ever known. Very loving, very caring, and tough lady. She was tough on us because she was always pushing us. So was my dad. Always do the best. We don't care if you get Bs or Cs or As, whatever; we just wanna make sure you did the best. So my mom was the housewife but also had worked at JC Penney and had worked at different stores, like Gibson's, which is now a Wal-Mart.

AP: So she was?

JLL: She was a salesperson basically, attending people as they came in. But she did that part-time. We grew up with her at the house all the time, until we were a little bit older, about 14 or 15. When my dad broke his leg, then she had to go to work.

AP: How did your dad break his leg?

JLL: A cow broke it in three or four different parts.

AP: So, after that happened to your father, your mom –

JLL: She had to step in and help. Even though my dad was able to go to the dairy, he wasn't able to really work, and so she had to help a little bit with the house costs, expenses, et cetera. They didn't have insurance, so they had to pay for it somehow. There was no health insurance, at least in our family, at that point.

AP: Tell me; do you have any siblings?

JLL: Yes. I've got three brothers and one sister.

AP: Where are you? Are you –

JLL: I'm the oldest.

AP: You're the oldest?

JLL: Yeah, I'm the oldest. I've got another brother that works with us here, helps us with promotions. The brother who's after him is also more of a small businessperson that basically sells items. He sells anything that people need. He finds them and goes and sells it to them. He's been very successful at it, believe it or not.

Then, my sister Priscilla, who is in San Diego, was a sales manager for some of the TV and radio stations here at one time, went to San Diego with her kids, and that's where she lives right now.

Then I have a brother who is in Houston and works for Hughes Tools, Oscar. He is a programmer, and not only a programmer but he's got five or six people under him. He's been in Houston I'd say about 15 years.

AP: Where did you go to school?

JLL: I went to school at Bel Air.

AP: Bel Air?

JLL: Bel Air High School. Went to university at UTEP. Graduated in '75. I worked for Coca-Cola. I wanted to be in advertising all my life. Why I don't know, but I wanted to be in advertising. Couldn't get into advertising. When I graduated from college, I went and talked to two agencies here. They wanted to pay me minimum wage, which at that time was \$2.25, I think, or \$1.75. I was wanting \$6.00 an hour. I was about to get married.

So I decided to work for free. What I would do is I was working at Safeway. I changed my hours so I would go in at 4:00 in the morning and get off at 12:00, go take a shower, and then became basically a gofer. The agreement was, I'll work for you for free if you'll let me have some experience in writing commercials and stuff like that.

I worked for two different agencies here in town and then decided that it was time to go find something and pull away from advertising. It looked like I wasn't gonna get in because of the low wages they wanted. I didn't have any experience, like I said. So I went to work at Coca-Cola Foods selling Minute Maid Orange Juice. I was selling Minute Maid Orange Juice to all these small stores, big stores, and was calling on headquarters accounts, which was Safeway and First, at that time.

AP: This was after college?

JLL: It was after college. Here in town.

AP: Here in town. So you worked for free after you had your –

JLL: After I had my degree, yes. When they told me I didn't have the experience and they said, "You'll have to have experience," and I couldn't afford what they were gonna pay me, I said, "I'll work for you for free. Just give me the experience." I think they liked that,

and they said, “Okay. Come on in.” So they would allow me to do some copywriting, and I basically got to know what was going on. But I only did that for about nine months, maybe a year.

I had put some applications in, and Coca-Cola called me. I went in and became a salesperson for them. I did that for about a year and a half and was fortunate enough to have a person who was pretty high up in the Coca-Cola area. He had family here, so he came in and checked the market every once in a while, and he started becoming my mentor. I didn’t realize he had become my mentor. He started watching over me, recommending me. He would work the market with me, and he saw what I was doing in the market.

I just didn’t know any better. I think the story of my life has been “Why did you do that? You weren’t supposed to do that.” I guess I didn’t know any better, so I went and did it anyway and was able to do things.

For example, I was able to get a lot of items into the grocery stores here that they weren’t able to get before because we had not only Minute Maid Orange Juice but Minute Maid Pineapple Juice, Minute Maid Tangerine Juice, and different sizes of Maryland Club coffee and different flavors of Hi-C fruit drinks. I would go out and just knock on doors, work hard.

It turns out that the man who owned Big Eight at that time went in one day. He came in and said, “What are you doing here?” It was like 6:00 or 7:00 at night. I was what, 22 years old, 23 years old. I got all “blah, blah, blah,” like this, and he starts going, “What are you doing here?” I go, “Well, I’m here working the store.” “Why are you here so late?” I said, “I didn’t realize I couldn’t be here this late.”

They called him the *Oso*, Mr. Powell. He was a great man. But it was also because he was always “roar, roar, roar,” like this. I said, “I’m here picking up stuff, and I’m taking care of some of the damage,” because I’m supposed to pick up damage.

He says, “You’re one of the few salesmen that picks up damage. Most people throw it in the trashcan and don’t even pay me back from the damaged stuff that I’ve already paid for.” I said, “Well, sir, that’s what I was trained to do.” It was all, “Sir, sir, sir, sir.” He said, “Okay. Well, don’t be scared.” He said, “I’m just not used to – everybody else comes in and leaves by 5:00. I’m not used to having somebody working this late and taking care of my store. I went and checked what you did, and you rearranged

everything, cleaned everything up, so thank you very much,” and ordered a whole bunch of products from me for all his stores.

So he and I became real good friends. In fact, Ronnie, his son, I got to know him also, and we used to talk about his father, how he was, and he was a very smart man. He helped me show that I could do a lot of stuff within the industry.

So my mentor came in and recommended me to the Houston sales office, which basically had all of Texas. There was a job opening, and they asked me if I wanted to come in and interview.

They flew me to Houston. I went down there, met with some people there, and lo and behold, I got the job. It was Houston sales operation manager. I was a go-between, if you will. I was a liaison between sales and marketing. Coca-Cola National and Coca-Cola Bottling, they're out of Atlanta. The Foods Division, which is a division of theirs, their headquarters was in Houston, so their headquarters was right down the street. I was able to go in and get to know people in headquarters, marketing, et cetera.

So I did that, and then in 1976 or '77, I got promoted in six months, and pretty soon, I'm in New Products doing national marketing on new products, analyzing everything from products that weren't doing well and trying to come up with new approaches before they got rid of them. For example, Minute Maid Reduced-Acid Orange Juice. At that time, they had invested a lot of money in the technology on how to pull out the acid from the orange juice, and they didn't wanna give up on it. They just hadn't been able to make any money on it.

My supervisor and myself, we worked on how to figure out a different marketing plan, how to reduce expenses, and how to find a niche for it. That's exactly what we did. We looked at who was gonna buy it, who was interested, because there were certain people that wanted regular orange juice and some people that wanted reduced acid, and it's still on the market.

Minute Maid Apple Juice. They came in and asked me to test two or three different products. They didn't tell me – they just said, “Drink these apple juices,” and it was weird because they just said, “Hey, come on down.” They took me to the Research Department. “Try these apple juices.” They said, “Which one do you like?” I said, “That one.” “That's good because that's gonna be your product, and we need you to come up with a name. Whether we use the Minute Maid Apple Juice name or we come up with a

different name, you need to do research on what will work and what won't work.”

I got the chance to basically run a small company, is what it was, within a company because we would have to choose test markets that represented the industry of apple juice and the per capita purchases, et cetera, and we did all of that out of Houston. I was involved in all of that: directing all of that, packaging, how are we gonna package it, is it different.

Apple juice had issues that orange juice didn't have. It would leak in what we call the milk carton containers, and so we had to come up with different ways of making sure it didn't leak.

I worked with advertising agencies out of New York that were reporting to myself and our team as far as how we were gonna advertise it, what were the recommendations, developing a marketing plan, developing a pro forma, what were gonna be the sales per month, what do those sales translate into, what are the expenses, what is the expense goal.

Bottom line, at the end of the year, I had to project what sales were gonna be. If that product went national, was it gonna make money, how much money, and return on investment. Coca-Cola had certain criteria as far as return on investment. In other words, if a product doesn't deliver an X percent return on investment, they'll say, you know what, it's not worth it because we could invest this money in stocks or invest it somewhere else and make more money that way than to take a risk with a new product. So it had to have certain criteria for return on investment, and it was our job to present that to the president of Coca-Cola Foods Division as well as present it to the president of Coca-Cola USA.

It was a great, great experience for me. I was the first Hispanic to be in the Coca-Cola Foods Marketing Department. There was one African American, and everybody else was non-Hispanic.

It was a great learning experience. I was aware that I was opening roads for others because, if I did that, then it would be very easy to say we brought them in because they're Hispanic. I came in as a result of diversity numbers that they had to meet. I had the background, the knowledge, the sales, everything they needed, but there were other people within the company that had it. But because my last name was Lopez, they gave me the opportunity. But because of that opportunity, I had to be very careful and not mess it up because the people that followed me would also be

judged on how well I did. So it was a responsibility that I was very conscious of.

AP: What were the challenges that you faced as the first Hispanic?

JLL: Challenges? It was funny because I was the only one who didn't have a master's. Everybody else had a master's. A lot of them had come from University of Houston and Rice. Some people had come up from maybe not the Harvards and the Yales of the world but some of the higher – Stanford was represented. USC was there. UCLA was there. When I say they were there, they represent students that had gone there and gotten their master's there and now were at Coca-Cola Foods. University of Wisconsin, et cetera. It was one of those “We know why you're here,” and you could feel it. In other words, you're here because you're Hispanic, not because you meet the criteria.

The good thing about it is the Man Upstairs always takes care, and the sales experience gave me so much knowledge. When I walked in, I was three steps ahead of everybody because I was the one who was executing whatever Marketing decided they were gonna do. So I had a lot of, if you will, the kids with master's come in. At first, they had a little chip on the shoulder, and after a while, they started seeing that I was having success with some of the stuff.

The Sales Department was calling me on a regular basis because I understood it. I'd get knocks on my door. “Hey, Joe, can you help me with this?” I was giving them advice on whether projects, promotions, different messaging they were gonna do within the Sales Department was gonna work or not. I guess, in a way, I had the last laugh as far as let's see who can really do what can be done, what needs to be done.

The other advantage is that, because of the responsibility, most of the product managers had one, maybe two products, and I would always make sure I had two to three products I was responsible for. But it gave me a real good education on watching products that relied on heavy, heavy advertising, products that relied on advertising with some sales push, if you will, from the retail aspect of it, or products that were selling only because of price. They had a good product, but it was how cheap were they compared to other products. I was able to see different models and learn how to work with different tools that I would have.

In other words, Bright & Early breakfast drink. It was artificial orange juice with Vitamin C. It's almost like a Sunny Delight of

today. It was frozen. It had vitamins. It had all the positives of orange juice, but it was less expensive because it wasn't real orange juice. There was a little bit of orange juice in there, but very little. The success was built on price and promotion, so it was very different from Minute Maid, which had the aura of carrying the Minute Maid high quality, et cetera.

I got to work on the Minute Maid products, so that helped me a lot to see how much harder it is with a Bright & Early name versus a Minute Maid name, and how to use the tools that you were given to work and how to create tools. It was positive.

AP: I didn't ask you what your mentor's name was.

JLL: His name was Gerald Able.

AP: Gerald Able. What did he think of you getting this position?

JLL: I didn't know he was my mentor until several years into my career. Gerald just always happened to be around, and it turned out that Gerald became one of the top sales managers or VPs. He was an executive VP. There were four areas of sales for the United States. The United States was divided into four areas. He was one of those. The only person above him was the VP of national sales and VP of marketing. He would report directly to the VP of sales, who reported directly to the president. He later became VP of sales.

But I found out later that Gerald was watching me. I said, "How did you find out I had done this?" They said, "Don't you know Gerald has been watching you for quite a while? Remember when you got this opportunity over here?" "Yeah." "Gerald's the one who put your name in the pot to be at least looked at and gave you a high recommendation." "Remember when you went to Marketing?" "Yeah." "Gerald, again, was the one who recommended that you be put in the pot and people look at you. He was the one who was always looking and making sure you were given opportunities."

I think I've been a big push for diversity. People say that diversity is negative. I think it's positive. It would be the best of all worlds if we didn't need affirmative action, if we didn't need diversity opportunities, because that would mean that everything was even, that people were allowing everybody to participate no matter what color, background, ethnicity, whether they were born poor or born

rich, whatever. It didn't matter; it's what you have and giving them a chance.

Unfortunately, there's a lot of – I don't wanna say prejudice. I think it's just a lot of people that are very comfortable with the group that they've grown up with, and so they feel comfortable with having that group around them and hiring that group. They understand that group. Sometimes they give opportunities to people that are like them instead of giving opportunities to people that are not like them, also.

At that time, it was very prevalent. In '66, '68 was the time for Black Power and Brown Power, when the system was being challenged as far as opening doors. I grew up during that era. The fact that I was the first Hispanic at Coca-Cola Foods tells you that the diversity change had not been really implemented as well as it could have been within at least this company.

But I found out that Coca-Cola wasn't the only company. It was a whole bunch of other companies. To me, it was a big advantage because, pretty soon, I started getting headhunters calling me left and right because Hispanics in packaged goods with experience were very, very few, if any. So I got a lot of calls, but I was very happy at Coca-Cola. They treated me well, and they gave me some great opportunities.

AP: Were you married at this time?

JLL: I was married at that time. That was my first marriage, but don't tell my second wife that. No, she knows that.

Married at that time. In fact, I got married when I was 20. If anybody is listening to this message, do not get married until you're at least 25 because you grow apart. It's not that you're not meant for each other. It's just that you grow apart. You still don't know what you wanna be when you grow up at that point. So it was one of those where I was going one way and she wanted to go a different way, and I think it just didn't mesh and we decided not to be together anymore. But I've got a very beautiful daughter that came as a result of that, so thank God it happened because I would not have my daughter, the oldest.

AP: Did you meet the wife at Bel Air?

JLL: I knew her from other times. Through family and friends and stuff like that, we knew each other.

AP: Tell me about your time at Bel Air. How was that like during –

JLL: It was great. It was great. I was very fortunate that Bel Air was a good mix of cultures. You had a big Hispanic segment, a big Anglo, non-Hispanic segment, and you had probably one of the largest African American segments besides Northeast. So that gave me a chance to basically be around everybody.

There were some other schools in the area that were all basically Hispanic or all Anglo. It wouldn't have made me as rounded as this opportunity. The Man Upstairs has always blessed me. He's always put me in the right place at the right time with things that later on come back and help me in the future. So when I go to Houston, where there's a big African American community, it was a nonissue for me. To go and work in just an Anglo environment, it's a nonissue for me. So it was great. I was aware of my heritage. *Hablo español* and the whole bit, but it didn't affect me, so I'm here.

It was funny. They were more conscious of my color than I was of my color at that time, or my ethnicity, if you will, "they" being the people that I went to work with.

But I learned a lot. Unfortunately, I wasn't prepared. When I wasn't prepared, I wasn't prepared by my school. UTEP is not what it is now. Unfortunately, community college is three times better than UTEP was at that time. The school business department wasn't that great. It isn't the business department that it is now, thank God. There's a lot of stuff that I should have learned.

When I came back later on and I started meeting with some of my professors, it was funny. A lot of professors wanted to meet with me and have lunch with me – they found out that I was here – because they wanted to find out what the real world was. At the same time, it was one of those where I wanted to help. I went back and started asking are they teaching certain things that I had to learn at Coca-Cola.

Coca-Cola was my BA, my bachelor's, my master's, and my Ph.D. It was great, great learning, and it was reality. It wasn't La La Land, if you will. I think a lot of the universities sometimes don't put enough of reality into it.

But when I came back to UTEP, and this was even before Dr. Natalicio was there, UTEP had changed. They were teaching a lot of the stuff that I had learned at Coke there. So it was good because I saw one of the young ladies that used to work in advertising that I got to meet was also teaching there. She was doing a heck of a job of teaching. She had also learned it in Mexico working for one of the advertising agencies over there but had also worked with, I think, Santitas, or Frito-Lay at that time, so she had that background, also. She brought it back and was teaching at UTEP.

AP: What motivated you? You're at Bel Air. Most people during that time would graduate. They wouldn't think about getting –

JLL: My parents always told me I was gonna go to college. "You're going to college." When my dad was growing up, it was, "We're going to high school and we're gonna finish high school." My generation, it was, "You're going to college. Even if you get two years of college, it'll be better than no, but you're going to college."

We didn't have the money. At that time, we didn't know we were poor, but now that I look back and look at it, we were poor. We were very poor. But there were grants. There was working. The university was a lot less expensive, so I was able to pay for my college. But that was the thing. I was gonna go to college.

It's funny; now, with our kids, it's not a matter of if you're going to college. You will go to college. It's are you gonna get a Ph.D. or a master's? Which college are you gonna go to, depending on what you're gonna study.

So that's what people don't understand. When I say "people," I run into other ethnicities and cultures and they say, "Well, you guys only go to high school. Most of you don't go to college." Well, that's incorrect. I think it's just that we have allowed the generations to go through the system. Now, my kids' generation are going to college, gonna finish, going to hopefully get a master's or a Ph.D., and their kids will do the same thing. I think it's just a matter of going through the process of going through the different generations.

But again, my parents were the ones who told me, "You will be going to college."

AP: Period.

JLL: Period. “You will be going to college.” I was very scared of my dad and my mom. Not scared in the fact of them hitting me; scared in disappointing them, scared of letting them down. So a lot of my life was to make them happy, which was real positive for me. Some people feel like it was a negative for people who have gone through that. For me it was great.

That was the culture. That was my generation. My generation is you don’t leave, so I broke one of the rules of “I don’t leave my family.” But I came back because I wanted to be back with my family. I felt guilty, unfortunately, of leaving El Paso and leaving my family here, my mom, dad, and brothers, and following my own career. The good thing is that our generation doesn’t think that way. Our generation is, if you can be here, that’s great. For us as parents, it’s fantastic. But if you have to go chase your life somewhere else because of what you wanna be or wanna do, so be it.

But that’s why I came back from Coca-Cola or from Houston. I was there almost five years. I told my dad I was gonna be back in five years. My dad was the one who really took it hard when I left. It was tough. But every vacation, I was here. Every summer, we were here. Christmas vacation, we were here. We’d drive back or we’d fly back.

AP: Was there a culture shock between El Paso and Houston?

JLL: Not as much. The culture shock was when I had to fly to Boston, not understanding what they were saying. There were hardly any Hispanics at that time in the Boston and New York areas and stuff like that. Even though you have *puertorriqueños*, they weren’t as visible at that time.

AP: So, did you go to Boston after you returned to El Paso?

JLL: No. I went to Boston when I was at Coke. Because of the products we handled, I’d have to go check the markets. So I’d have to go to Boston, Seattle, Portland – well, not Seattle – Portland, Chicago, New York for advertising. We’d go check California, Florida, et cetera. We’d just have to be in the market and see what was going on in the real market.

AP: Did all of your siblings get degrees?

JLL: They all went to college. I think my only one that may not have gone is my sister Priscilla. She started selling in retail. My grandfather and my mom had natural sales, and she picked up that gene and she just started selling at the mall. Pretty soon, she was the store manager, and she did very well that way. I think she was the only one who didn't go to college. She got married very young, right out of high school. No, not out of high school. About 20 years old. Decided to take a different route.

But all my brothers went to college, but the only ones that really finished were my youngest and the oldest.

AP: You graduate from Bel Air and you enroll at UTEP. What was your experience like just in general? What was the climate during that time?

JLL: The climate was one more step. I remember one of the guys we went to school with, a good guy. He said, "Man, this is like a city of its own." He was really caught up in the school thing. For me, I hated school. I hated college.

AP: Really?

JLL: I hated school. It was a waste of my time because I understood everything. I've humbled down since then, but I think it was one of those where I knew they were teaching me history. They taught me history in grammar school, they taught it to me in junior high, and they taught me in high school, and history hasn't changed. George Washington was our first president. It's the same.

So I had that kind of an attitude. But when it went to getting into the business aspect of it, then I really loved it because I was learning something different. But what do you call it? The histories and political science and all that kind of stuff. English, I had no issues. But I struggled. My grades were not that great. They were Cs and Bs, I think, and even some Ds in there until I got to the business aspect, where my grades started going back up because I was interested.

But I hated school. I finished school in three years because I hated it that much. It's like medicine. You take medicine. You know medicine is good for you, so you take the medicine quickly so it doesn't come back up. That's how I treated – I'm glad you like my joke.

[Laughter]

JLL: But it was one of those where it was a necessity. It was a means to an end.

AP: Tell me about what your father thought when you were moving to Houston.

JLL: He had major depression. It affected him a lot, at least for a while, for a few months. My brother would call and say, "Hey, man, Dad's really taking it bad." He had never had anybody leave, so I'm the one who opened up the door for everybody else where they could leave, but they all stayed. The only one that left is Oscar, but that was way beyond. He was here for a while and worked here for a while, and then he went to work in Houston.

So it affected him, and I had that guilt on me for a long time. It was tough; it was tough. But I knew I was gonna be back, and I came back.

AP: And how about your mom?

JLL: My mom also it affected, but I think Mom is sometimes a little bit more progressive because I had the same issue with my kids. When one of them wanted to go outside of El Paso, at first I had some major internal things. I know it's good for him, but I was a little bit selfish because I thought, in my mind, everything can be done at UTEP. I have very, very high respect for UTEP. I've seen kids that go to some of the high colleges, some of the well-known colleges and stuff, and in my mind, if the university is a good one, it's up to you now to make the success or not.

I've since learned that there are some things that UTEP may not be as strong at. Aeronautical science. One of my kids wanted to be an aeronautical engineer, and so, obviously, this is not the school for aeronautical engineers. So you learn. The good thing is he decided he was gonna be a seismologist, and he's into geology and seismology. UTEP has a great school for that, and he's done very well there. So I'm lucky.

My daughter didn't live with me most of her life, but we got to see her all her summers. She went to New Mexico State. I've had her here in El Paso and Las Cruces since she was 18, and she lives here, so it's been great. I still have a 16-year-old that, when he graduates, he may go to UTEP. He may decide on a career that he needs to go somewhere else. We're still waiting on that one.

AP: Have any of them caught the entrepreneurial spirit?

JLL: No. My daughter worked with me here for a year while she was getting her certification, and she's got it. Everybody called her Little Joe here because she's got it. She can really do it.

The one who is really an entrepreneur is the youngest one. I see him running his own business one of these days. He'll probably go to the corporate world or something like that and then go into his own business.

The one in the middle, he likes science, geology, chemistry, and all that kinda stuff. Running your own business, unless you're gonna create chemicals and stuff like that, I don't think so, unless he becomes a consultant of some kind. But he's gonna have to go through a company or the government that also uses seismologists a lot.

AP: What language was primarily spoken at home when you were a child?

JLL: Spanish.

AP: Spanish?

JLL: Yeah. Remember both my mom and dad were born here. My mom was raised in Mexico. My dad was born and raised here, but we spoke Spanish at home. I remember being five or six years old, living around a scary area, and asking my mom, "When will I be able to speak like Jesse?" Jesse was one of the kids in the neighborhood, and all he did was speak English. He spoke very little Spanish, and we spoke mostly Spanish.

I remember it was like a semi-head start program that helped me when I went into school because, even though my parents spoke a little bit of English to us, it was basically all Spanish. It was very Spanish-dominant. It still is; it still is. We still speak to my mom in Spanish even though she's very bilingual.

AP: What middle school did you go to? You mentioned –

JLL: Mesa Vista in Loma Terrace.

AP: What did your mom have to say about when you were gonna be able to speak like Jesse? What did she think of that question?

JLL: I don't think she – it was natural. Speak to them in Spanish, and when they get older, they go to school and they'll learn English. It was part of the routine. To them it wasn't anything. It was gonna happen. That's why you go to school.

AP: The five years passed in Houston, and you came back to El Paso. What motivated you to come back?

JLL: My family. The guilt. Not being completely happy. There was something missing, and it was the family factor. I'm a very family-oriented person, I guess, and I still am. I'm the one, I guess, who makes sure my brothers and sister, as much as we can, we stay in tune with each other.

I'm hoping my kids do the same thing. My wife is a little bit more progressive and is more willing to see them – she loves them, but she's a little bit more progressive and willing to let them go out and search their own life. If it was up to me, I'd have them here. They'd all be working for me, or I'd be working for them; it doesn't matter. If that's what's gonna keep you here, that's great. That's the way I am. But I just swallow hard. When everybody says, "I may be going out of town," I go, "Okay. Whatever you want. That's fine. How can I help you?" and walk away and go "Phew." But that's life. That's life. The story repeats itself.

AP: What did you do when you got back? What were you doing?

JLL: I went to work for an agency, the **Brian Reddick**. I worked there for five years. Worked for another agency for two years, and things didn't work out very well there, and opened up Lopez in 1989. Opened it up with one secretary and myself, and then hired another person who is at UTEP right now, Caroline Garland. Caroline had worked at another agency. She became our media buyer and copywriter. I'd come up with the creative.

Then there was another lady that we used to know that I knew from working at the other agency that had gone out on her own. She had her own business, her and her friend, so we started using her. Now she's one of the partners. We asked her to come over and start working with us a little bit more. We said, "Most of your work is with us, so why don't you join us?" Her name at that time was Angela Soto, and now it's Angela Esquivel.

So Angela became part of the team, so we had creative, written, being Garland, Caroline, and myself, and then Angela doing the artwork. Then, pretty soon, we hired some other people to help

with promotions. Then we started growing, and we hired Lily, who you just met. Lily was fresh out of high school, working at one of the print shops, knew Macs very well, just like Angela had learned at Macs, and they started liking each other as far as talking. We'd go print with them. Pretty soon, Angela says, "If we're gonna hire somebody, I'd like to hire Lily." So we hired Lily.

Angela joined me in 1989, and then Lily joined us in 1990, so it was right afterward. Both of them have been with me since 1989 or 1990. This is what, 2011 almost? So they've been able to put up with a lot and seen us go from Lopez to becoming part of another agency and back to Lopez again.

AP: The first name –

JLL: Was Lopez Marketing. Well, Lopez Advertising. That was '89 through '94. Our second year, we went and picked up a company called Procter & Gamble, and that was one of those instances where people asked me, "How did you pick up Procter & Gamble? How did you get to talk to them?" I said, "I just called. I just got to meet with them and stuff." They go, "Well, you're not supposed to do that." I say, "Well, I didn't know any better." So I guess part of my life has been I don't know any better. I just go do it. Pick up the phone and *vaminos*.

AP: I'm gonna ask you the same question. What motivated you to pick up the phone and call Procter & Gamble?

JLL: A friend of mine and I, we had done a little bit of work for them. He was working for Crest at that time. He said, "Can you help me out with this?" He said, "I don't have a lot of budget." I said, "Sure, I'll help you." So we hardly made any money on it. It was just to help him. The project went very well. He says, "Hey, I've got some more money. Can you help me with this other project?" So we went and did it, and then, pretty soon, another friend came in from Procter & Gamble, "Hey, can you help us with that?" So we started doing a little bit here and there.

So Cincinnati heard about it. Some of the people said, "Hey, what's going on over here?" So he told them what's going on. He said, "Why don't you call them?" So I got a number and I called. I said, "Hey, this is Joe Lopez. We've been doing this, this, this, and this." I closed my eyes and just went into a spiel. They said, "So you're the one who did that? You're the one who did that? Well, maybe you need to come up here."

So Caroline and I flew up, met with them, came back, and they called us back and said, “We’re having some meetings and we want you to come back.” This was about two months later. So I flew back, this time by myself. They had said, “We want you to present some ideas, and these are some of the products we want you to work with.” So we came up with some ideas.

At that time, Raymond Mesa was working at one of the radio stations. He’s also a graduate of UTEP. I asked him to do some commercials, and we went and presented some commercials, some artwork, et cetera.

The funny thing is that, when I walked in, it was a long table. People would come in and say hi. They presented themselves and said, “Hi, I’m so-and-so from **Camille**,” which was one of the big advertising agencies, a Hispanic advertising agency. “Hi. I’m so-and-so from Camille, also.” Then I turned around. “Hi. I’m so-and-so. I’m the unit manager for Procter & Gamble in Miami.” I didn’t realize it was gonna be so many people. I didn’t know what to expect. All I know is I had my little case with artwork that we were gonna present. I had one of the guys that had worked with me that was there that I had done some stuff. He was there, also.

We presented to a whole bunch of people, but it seemed like there were four or five national agencies, not a little, small startup agency out of El Paso. When, in fact, my time came around, I said, “I’m Joe Lopez with Lopez Marketing Group.” At that time, it was Lopez Advertising because I was Lopez Advertising. I said, “This is it. There’s just me, and I’m Joe Lopez,” and everybody just started cracking up. Everybody else had two or three people there.

I called Caroline before we were supposed to present because we went and introduced. They told us what they were trying to do, et cetera. We took a break. I called Caroline, and I said, “Caroline, what the hell am I doing here?” I told her the whole story. Caroline said, “Joe, Joe, Joe, you’re there. Go ahead. Go for it. It’s okay.” I said, “Caroline, we put this on our credit cards. We don’t even have money for that.” It was an expensive trip because it was last minute. I said, “I wasted our money.” She goes, “Make the most of it. Go for it.”

So I went and presented. The other agencies presented. They closed the doors. They got all the agencies out, made some decisions, came back and said, “This is what’s gonna happen.” By the time that day was over, I had 60 to 65 percent of the United

States Hispanic promotions. The other agencies couldn't believe it. Even the areas like San Francisco said, "We're gonna use the agency we've been using, but for December, can we use that promotion Lopez presented?" "Yeah." "So we don't have to go all with one agency?" "No, you can pick and choose." Miami said, "Well, if that's the case, then we wanna do some of his promotions, too." So that's how we got 65 percent.

We had Texas, southern California, which is Los Angeles and San Diego, Phoenix, and Chicago. New York went with their New York agency they were using. Miami used their agency, and then San Francisco above went with the agency they had been using but used some of our products.

It was like The Little Engine That Could. We came in, and I couldn't believe it. It was one of those where you don't know any better. Close your eyes and you just jump, and it worked. I've had a lot of those situations happen in my life where I just don't know any better and I go for it.

AP: Tell me, first of all, how did you start Lopez Advertising?

JLL: It was necessity. It was one of those where the agency basically was either gonna fire me or I was gonna resign. I got on the wrong side of the daughter of the owner of the agency. The daughter had decided that I was getting too close to her clients because they had called me and asked me about Hispanic promotion and how could we do it. I thought I was supposed to share with them because it was part of the agency, but unfortunately, she decided that I didn't fit her guidelines and went and complained to her dad.

Dad brought me in with two people, the president and vice president, and they said, "He's gotta go." "We're gonna give you an option. Either resign or we're gonna fire you." I thought I was gonna be a partner because they had brought me in and said, "We're gonna make you a partner." No, no longer. So it was one of those.

I went and told my wife. My wife was fantastic. She said, "Don't worry about it." In fact, my wife Lupe works at UTEP. She was, "Don't worry about it. We'll figure it out." So I went and talked to some other friends, and my friends said, "Hey, you should start up your own agency."

So when I opened up Lopez in '89, it was out of necessity. Again, I didn't know any better. We're not supposed to open up an

agency that easy, just open it up. I learned very quickly how hard it was because one of the things that happened was that one of the radio stations here told me that they weren't gonna give me any credit. Well, I had already brought some clients that followed me. They said, "We'll follow you. We've been with you since ever" – I said okay. "We'll follow you."

Then the station said, "Sorry, we're not gonna give you any credit." It was the salesperson that I had been talking to. I'm sorry. The account rep says, "They're not gonna give you credit. I can't take any of your clients. They'll have to pay cash up front." I said, "I don't have the cash." I said, "But that's not the way you operate. You give us credit and we pay you back when we get paid."

The sales manager had to come in and talk to me, and said, "What's going on?" I said, "I've been here, what, seven years now in the market. I have a record. I have several clients. One of my clients is the biggest homebuilder in town, George Thomas." I went down the list. "I've got Flowers Baking as one of my clients that we're gonna do some stuff." I just went. He said, "I'm sorry. We can't give you any credit. You're a new agency. We've had a lot of problems with agencies."

I said, "That doesn't make sense because I've seen you give credit to other people." He started going on and on and on. Thank God, my mind just was sharp as heck, and I said, "There's another agency that just started. They were started by two women, Anglo women." But I said, "Hey, well, you're giving credit to so-and-so and so-and-so." I didn't know it, but I said it. He could have said, "No, we're not," but because I acted like I knew, I said, "Hey, you're giving credit to so-and-so and so-and-so. Why aren't you giving credit to me?" "Oh, well, that's different." I said, "Oh, okay." I said, "So I know they're getting credit." He says, "Yeah."

"They started at the same time. In fact, my clients are bigger than their clients. So what's going on?" Well, he just hemmed and hawed and said, "Oh, no, no, no." He goes, "You're gonna make it difficult?" I said, "No." Then I went, "Is it this?" He said, "What do you mean?" "My color. Is it because I'm Hispanic?" I said, "I've been told that I will not succeed because a Hispanic-owned agency or an agency owned by a Hispanic will never succeed in El Paso." All of a sudden, he just went back. "Well, maybe we can work it out. Maybe we can figure out how to make this work."

He started telling me how they were gonna do this for me, they would do this, and maybe we could figure this out. “But we’re gonna have to be watching you.” If it was now, I’d say, “You know what, screw you. I don’t need your shit. Let me go talk to the general manager. Let me go tell everybody what the heck you’re doing.” At that point, you just fold your hands. You’re starting up a new business. I just folded my hands and I said, “Okay. I’ll abide by your rules.”

I think that was the only time that I really felt that I didn’t challenge back. I challenged with this, caught them, but I should have said, “You know what, screw you. I don’t need you.” But because my clients needed them, I went and basically played by the rules and, pretty soon, became a good client. We did well, et cetera.

But he’d come out, “Hey, Joe. How’s it going? Hey, Joe.” And “partner.” “Hey, partner, how it’s going?” Stuff like that. That station was Y96, very country, very Anglo. At that time, they were No. 1 in the market, followed by another station. I didn’t know Jim Phillips. If I had known Jim Phillips, I would have been able to go to him and he would have fixed it right away.

AP: Jim Phillips is?

JLL: Jim Phillips is one of the icons here in radio. He’s been very involved in the community, et cetera. But I didn’t know Jim. If I had gone to Jim, he probably would have said, “You’re crazy. Of course, we’re gonna give you credit.” But this guy, the sales manager, decided he was not gonna give me credit.

That person is no longer in the market. He, from what I understand, moved to Alabama. Perfect place for him. He can stay there because he doesn’t belong in this market.

So, yes, that’s how we started. We started with no money, no income. My accountant looked at my numbers and he said, “You’re not gonna make it. Why are you getting into it?” The accountant was a friend of mine that I went to school with from a long time ago, and he said, “You’re not gonna make it.” I closed my eyes and went for it, and 2011, we’re still here.

AP: Did you have a business plan?

JLL: No. This is what we’re gonna do, this is how we’re gonna do it, this is why we’re here, et cetera, et cetera. We had a business plan,

but not the way they had the business plans that you have to analyze your clients, analyze what's this. I didn't have time. I got laid off and I had to either make a decision or go find a job very quickly. So I just went in and projected my sales, projected my income, projected my expenses. So it was basically more of a pro forma than a true business plan, and a list of which clients I was gonna go and projected what they would bill and what my expenses would be, et cetera.

Then I had George Thomas. When I told him I was gonna open up Lopez, he said, "You know what? I have some extra space here. I'm not gonna charge you rent." So he didn't charge me rent, so I had no office rent for a while, for six months, eight months, so it was great. It was great.

When George Thomas died, it meant a lot to me. It hurt me a lot because that was a man that was very instrumental in Lopez. He helped me a lot with a lot of stuff. My first house in El Paso after the divorce. Found out that I was living in an apartment. "You're helping us double our sales, and you're living in an apartment?" "I just can't afford it." He said, "Well, let's figure out how to make it happen." "I don't have the down payment." "We'll figure it out." He figured it out.

AP: Which apartments were you living in?

JLL: Right behind Skaggs, which is now Albertson's, on Yarbrough and Montwood.

AP: Where was it that your first office was with Mr. –

JLL: It was right off of Lee Trevino, behind – oh my God. What – Golden Corral. On Bessemer.

AP: Did you try to take out a small business loan from a bank here?

JLL: Um-hum.

AP: How was that?

JLL: It was tough. Nobody wanted to give me a loan. Chase came through. We started getting to a cash flow issue. They came in, looked at my numbers like a month after, and said okay. They saw that we had income that was coming. They said, "We're gonna give you" – they signed. Bob Snow and Joe Fernandez were the ones who gave me a loan. I got backed by SBA. They said,

“We’re gonna go the SBA route. If SBA decides that they’re not gonna back it, we’re still gonna give you the loan. Don’t worry, we’ve got you covered, but if we can go SBA, it’ll be better for us with corporate.” So they went SBA.

So my first loan was an SBA-backed loan, \$75,000.00. That was more for cash flow than anything else because I bill and it takes 30, 60, maybe 90 days before I get paid. So I’ve got to pay some people, plus, even if I get credit from the radio stations and TV stations, I still have to pay the rent or I still have to pay insurance and I still have to pay payroll and a whole bunch of stuff. That doesn’t wait until 60 or 90 days. So you need cash flow to get you going. Once you get going, then it all takes care of itself.

AP: Tell me about the challenges that you faced before you got your loan. You had a hard time getting loans?

JLL: It was tough, but I was basically just not paying myself and waiting until there was enough money in the system to pay myself. That’s what most entrepreneurs will do. They won’t pay themselves for a while. They pay everybody else. But that’s what you do. The little money that comes in, you use it. It’s like running your own household. What do I have? This came in. What do I owe? Let’s prioritize what we pay first. What do we have to pay, what can we pay, or what can we put aside. That’s how we handled it.

AP: What role did your family play in terms of moral support, for example? That must have been difficult.

JLL: My wife was right next to me. Lupe was fantastic. She was there. We had a baby boy, and it was great. It wasn’t an issue. I had child support I had to pay every month, expenses, et cetera. She was working, and I had a little bit of money in savings, and that’s what we did. We lived off of that. But we were able to make it go.

AP: How was the business climate in –

JLL: The business climate was great. Yeah, it was very good. It was very good. We had Procter & Gamble, Kimberly-Clark, and then, in 1993, we lost Procter & Gamble to a big thing, and that’s when we almost went under.

It was one of those where we found that my bookkeeper wasn’t doing her job. It was above her head, so she wasn’t paying some bills, and we owed a whole bunch of money. So that’s one of the

things I learned. From then on, I was gonna have a very good control of my accounting and have a good system, and we do. Right now, we have an excellent system at Lopez. We know where we're at, what we're doing, where the cash is, where it's going, all that kinda stuff.

AP: How were you able to get yourself out of –

JLL: Closing my eyes. And two partners that said, "Don't pay us. Let's just get out of this hole." I said, no, everybody was gonna get paid, and they just worked hard. They said, "Bring in the business and we'll take care of it," and they did. That's why they're partners now, because I'll never forget that. They never had to go without pay, but they were willing to go without pay. They were both single. They said, "We're single. We don't have to worry about it. We all have car payments, and that's all we have. We're living at home," et cetera, et cetera. I said no. So it worked out good.

AP: So then, tell me; you mentioned that you belonged to another advertisement agency?

JLL: We worked with another agency for a while. Had the idea of taking our Hispanic knowledge and teaming up with somebody else. We tried it for four years, and it just didn't work out. Two different philosophies, two different ways of looking at it, two different things that they should have paid attention to. We disagreed.

So, in '98, we opened up Lopez again. That time, it was one of those where I was told, again, "You're gone. We're closing. You're out. You can go set up your own agency again, your own PR firm." When I opened up my own agency, they said no.

There were so many details in it that, bottom line, we had to open up Lopez again, and I went and got my credit cards. Angela, her husband, my wife, and myself met in two cars, and we went to Best Buy and we went to Computer City at that time, and we took out six months, no interest, no payments loans and bought a whole bunch of stuff. What do you need? This, this, this and this and that. It was a situation where we went and bought laptops, Macs.

When we had Lopez before, the Macs weren't as hot as they were. When we opened up Lopez this time, you had to have printers and a whole bunch of other stuff, a whole bunch of equipment that we didn't have to have when we first opened up Lopez in '89. But in '98, it was very different.

We were able to keep a client that was major, McDonald's. McDonald's followed us. That was our base. McDonald's was our base for everything, thanks to Richard Castro and Robert Armendariz and the other people. But the ones who were really my champions were Richard and Robert, especially Richard. Richard Castro is a guy who really, really pushes for small business and Hispanic businesses, et cetera. So he's always been our champion.

But we opened up with credit cards. We went and bought a whole bunch of stuff. The next week, we said, "What else do we need? Well, maybe we can use some of this and some of that. Let's go get some credit." We couldn't open up any more credit cards, couldn't take out any credit.

What had happened is, at that time, we went and purchased on Saturday and Sunday. None of this got posted to my account until Monday. So we were able to take out a whole bunch of credit cards that, if it had been a Tuesday or Wednesday, it would have popped up in the credit bureau very quickly. "These guys, what are they doing? They're buying a whole bunch of stuff all of a sudden, and everything is on credit." So the red flag would have come out. It didn't come out until Monday, so we were able to buy about \$25- or \$30,000.00 worth of equipment on credit cards.

I always say thank God for six months, no interest, and no payments because if it wasn't for that, it would have been very hard.

And Tom Cardenas. Tom Cardenas, the engineer, did the same thing that George Thomas did when we opened up the first time and covered our office. We had an office probably smaller than this. There were six of us in there. It was a cubbyhole he lent us. He lent us his phone. We could use his phone. They answered like it was Lopez. We gave them their number, et cetera. So we were basically operating out of there, but he was already packed, so he only had a little, small space for us. But we didn't have to pay overhead for a few months, until we went and got overhead. Then we went and got office space.

But we saw it was coming. In '98, it came a lot quicker than it happened in '89. By that time, I had been chair of the Hispanic Chamber here. I had a lot of visibility, a lot of contacts, a lot of awareness, et cetera, et cetera.

AP: Do you still belong to –

JLL: Oh, yeah. I'm very involved in the chamber. As you probably know, I was the chairman of all the Hispanic chambers in Texas, TAMACC, for two years, and then I was on the national board. In fact, I was the first El Pasoan that was on the board of directors of the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on a national basis. Again, it's one of those where I said with pride but I also know the responsibility of making sure that, wherever I go, I need to leave a positive image for everybody.

The chamber has been fantastic because now we have contacts all over the United States. If I need anything, if my client needs anything, I can pick up the phone and call Illinois, call LA, call Miami, call New York, and find information, contacts, people that we may wanna hire to do promotions, et cetera. That was a lot of volunteer time, a lot of time, a lot of work, but in the long run, it's paid off.

AP: Would you consider the chambers of commerce to be a crucial component to –

JLL: Oh, yeah. They're very important. They're very important. They open doors. They train. A lot of companies don't have the contacts, so they go to somebody in the chamber. The chamber can say, "Oh, you know what, not a problem. You need what? Let me pick up the phone," and they'll put you in contact with somebody. "What else do you need?" "We need this." "So-and-so does that. Let me get you in contact with them."

That's what the chambers are. They're a very good liaison for connecting you with what you need for your business, who you need, as well as helping you. They have how to develop a business plan, a whole bunch of seminars, training, and they open up doors for procurement, how to get ready for procurement. So the chambers do very well. Both chambers, the Greater Chamber as well as the Hispanic Chamber.

AP: As far as certification for your business, is it a minority-owned business?

JLL: Yes, minority-owned. We are registered with Texas. We're 8A. We just got our first 8A contract a month ago. It took us seven years to get one. We're using our certification with the National Minority Development Council.

We just came back from New York. We made some presentations. We're still waiting for results there, but because of the minority status, we're able to at least get on the court. That's all we want. Let me get on the court, and if I can't make the basket, then I need to go practice again. But they open doors that we may not have been able to open in the past.

AP: How difficult was the 8A certification process?

JLL: Very difficult, very difficult. We had to pay somebody to come in and help us get it together. It's very detailed paperwork that you don't know how to answer, forms that you don't know how to get done, formats that they give you that you have to basically fill in. They analyze your accounting very differently than the way you usually do your accounting. Your pricing is done based on cost plus profit versus what the market will bear or what the market is doing at that time. It's very, very different, but it's given us a different perspective. It's taught us a lot.

AP: If you could give somebody with an entrepreneurial spirit advice, what advice would that be?

JLL: Prepare well. I wanna say prepare well. Make sure you understand where you're going, if the market is there, how you're gonna make profit, how are you gonna get started. Don't just go start it. Cash flow. Make sure you're very conscious of the growth because, when we opened up Lopez, there was a lot of advertising that was being done in El Paso. A lot of the advertising is now being done out of Dallas or headquarters or a regional or a national office, and so we don't have as much business opportunity here as there used to be.

That's why I'm traveling so much. We have an office in New York, we have an office in Dallas, and we have a person in LA because of the necessity of having to be out there. I hate traveling. It's nice to go with your family on vacation, but to go to work, when you're catching a 6:00 flight to be in there to have meetings, meetings, and meetings, you don't even get a chance to enjoy anything. Then you come back, get unpacked, get ready because you may have to fly again. It's tough.

But it's a decision that I have made because the opportunities for an advertising agency to grow is to be in the cities like Dallas and New York and California, and I don't wanna leave El Paso. My wife is willing to do it, my kids are willing to do it, my partners are willing to do it, but I don't wanna leave El Paso.

The other thing is we've got some clients here that, if we went out of town, we'd lose. McDonald's would probably be one of them that at least would look at the fact that we're not a local agency anymore. They like to have local agencies in every market.

AP: How was that process expanding into New York and –

JLL: Close your eyes, and you don't know any better and you just go for it. It's been good. It's been good. We've picked up some business in Dallas. We've picked up some small business in New York, but now we're getting the calls from the big corporations. It takes a while. It's been a two-year process. You have to invest, invest, invest, and then you come back and say, okay, now we're getting the phone calls. So we're pitching enough new clients that I know we're gonna get some clients out of corporations out of New York. You've got the Colgates. You've got all of the pharmaceutical companies over there. Major corporations over there. So it's been real positive.

AP: What were the challenges? Did you face any challenges?

JLL: Um-hum. Homesick. Missing the family. Calling at 6:00 in the evening over there, being 4:00 over here, or being 8:00 over there and 6:00 over there. "What are you guys doing? Can we talk?" and the family is doing their own thing. It gets very lonely out there. It's tough.

You get up at 6:00 in the morning, you fly, and like I said, you get there, change, go to meetings. Sometimes I'll eat two dinners. I'll eat two salads so I can have two dinners because they wanna have a dinner meeting. So I say, "Let's have a 6:00 dinner meeting," and then I'll have one at 8:00 so I can have dinner with prospective clients.

But you know what; I can pull out the violin all I want. There are so many other people that do the same thing, and so I'm not the only one. It's part of the thing. As long as I'm, hopefully, home for the weekend with my kids and around them, I'm happy.

AP: Tell me about the services that you provide.

JLL: We do everything. We're a full-service agency. We do everything from graphic art, concept developing, branding, TV and radio production, newspaper, billboard. We're very lucky; some of our billboard designs have been requested by other McDonald co-ops,

if you will, in other markets because of the way they look and the fact that they've been very effective.

We do Hispanic, and we do a lot of Hispanic. When we're in El Paso, bilingual is very important, English, Spanish, et cetera. When we go out, there are so many English agencies that I say, you know what, if we can get English, that's great, but there are less Hispanic agencies or Spanish advertising agencies. That's gonna give us a better opportunity. We're competing against less agencies. That's why we've taken the Hispanic route. We've already done the Hispanic route. It's great.

AP: This continues the interview with Mr. Joe Lopez.

Looking back on your business, Mr. Lopez, what would you have done differently?

JLL: What would I have done differently. Probably nothing, except probably planned it just a little bit more. Figured out where the money was gonna come from, the cash flow, anything like that. But, no, I think I couldn't have planned it any differently because a lot of it was unplanned.

I guess the biggest thing would have been to stay more visible outside El Paso with advertising because I liked the fact that I didn't have to travel. I could be with my family. We had clients here, and then those clients' decisions started going out of town. Then I had to go chase them. If I had done what we had done at the beginning, which was deal with the Procter & Gambles and the Kimberly-Clarks and the Quaker Oats to get our visibility restarted. It was harder because, at the time we went in, there was not as much competition. Now there is a lot more competition in the Hispanic realm. So it would have been a lot better for us to have stayed there.

AP: Do you see any advantages of being a Hispanic-owned business?

JLL: Oh, yeah. When you see Texas that will be 50 percent Hispanic by the year 2050, which I think is gonna be more like 2030, you'd better understand the market. Even though we may speak English, there are still cultural hot buttons that a marketing firm, an advertising firm, has to understand and recommend to their client. Any company that ignores the Hispanic market now is gonna have to pay a lot more for it later because, now, they're gonna have to be competing against everybody else. They're gonna have to try to

take brand loyalty away from one brand and give it to them. So it's gonna take a lot more money to throw at it.

So, yeah, Hispanic is a big advantage. When I see California, that will also be 50 percent Hispanic in the near future. If you look at New York, you look at Miami and Florida that already a big portion of it is Hispanic, if you want to be in business, you need to know how to go after the Hispanic market, especially in the consumer products and the retail aspect of it.

AP: Is there anything that I didn't ask you that you feel –

JLL: I think one of the things – what did I learn at Coca-Cola? That we weren't prepared here and that you need a mentor. You need to find a mentor.

When I said “not prepared,” even the way I dressed, I was not dressing for the industry. I was wearing polyester suits, dark blues, dark greens, dark browns. Everybody else was wearing pinstripe, wool blends, wools, light wool, with button-down collars. No beige suits like I wore one day. I wore a beige suit with a brown shirt and a beige tie. That's what you wear when you go to a *quinceañera* or a wedding. That doesn't work over there like that. You don't wear, at that time, a green suit. You wear basically pinstripes, very conservative colors.

I didn't know how to dress. Thank God, I had a friend of mine that kinda gave me a hint without hurting my feelings, and I went and started being very conscious and I changed.

We need to have people who have been out there to teach our kids at the university. I see a lot of the kids that come in here and interview. They're not ready. They're not ready for the interview. They're not ready for the way they look. They don't understand what they're supposed to be ready for.

I don't know whether it's the university or the kids haven't followed through with what the university may have already, but there should be somewhere where we bring all the seniors and you say, whatever industry they're gonna go in, “This is the way you need to dress. This is the way you need to talk. This is how you get ready for the job. Go find out about the company. Find out about the industry, et cetera.”

These kids come in. They don't know. “I just wanna do advertising.” “So what have you read?” “Well, I read this, and

I'm very good because I know that in the competition we did for advertising, we came in No. 2 in the nation, and so we know everything." "Have you done this? Have you done this? Do you understand?" "Well, no, no, no."

They have this false sense of reality. Somebody has to teach reality and let them know that they have to start at the bottom and work their way up, but, at the same time, how to get ready, how to sit at the edge, not to sit like this with their legs crossed as they're interviewing for a job. They don't know. Nobody has told them. They think that "I know it. I've got my degree, so you should be hiring me."

So there has to be a transition area from university to interviewing for jobs. Some of these kids come in and they're very sharp, but they're naturally sharp. Nobody has ever really taught them how to do it. We need to teach them how, especially in our culture. We did not grow up that way.

A lot of them, their parents don't ever wear suits. A lot of them don't ever wear ties. Even though there's a lot more casual dress, you need to be ready to interview with a tie and a business suit, whether it be a female or a male, and the shoes you're wearing and color coordination, all that kind of stuff. Hair, makeup, all that kind of stuff is very important because that's gonna set the tone for your interview.

Then what you're gonna say, how you're gonna respond, what you're gonna talk to, et cetera.

AP: Are you a mentor?

JLL: No, but I will be. I mentor people, but I do it especially when they're coming in for interviews and I don't hire them. I still come in and I tell them, "You know what? I'm gonna take off my interviewer hat. Let me share with you where you were strong, where you were weak. Let me show you why you weren't hired." Most of the time, they weren't hired because they didn't fill the position. "So it wasn't you." I don't wanna hurt them. I don't want them to ever come back and say, "Man, the guy that really affected my confidence was Lopez." I want to kick their confidence.

Then, with Hispanics, I start saying in Spanish, [Spanish]. They don't expect it because they see me like this. "What I'm telling you is you're damn good. Go for it. But you've gotta act like you

know, and don't come in like this because nobody's gonna hire you if you're like this." So when I interview, and I interview a lot of people, I do give them that recommendation. Then, "Tell me where you're at. Tell me what you're looking at, what you're looking for," et cetera. So, yes, I guess I mentor without being an official mentor.

Is that it?

AP: Well, thank you so much.

JLL: No, thank you.

AP: This concludes the interview with Mr. Joe Lopez.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 85 minutes

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