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Interview no. 1477

Adam Nieto

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Name of Interviewee: Adam Nieto
Date of Interview: 5 March 2010
Name of Interview: Kristine Navarro-McElhane

KM: Today is March the 5th, 2010. I'm interviewing Mr. Adam Nieto. We are at the headquarters of Mr. Nieto's Native Contractors business. It's 12820 Hill Crest, Suite 207 in Dallas, Texas.

KM: Good morning.

AN: Good morning

KM: How are you?

AN: Fine.

KM: Good. Mr. Nieto, if you can tell me when and where you were born.

AN: I was born in El Paso, Texas in 1944.

KM: Okay. Can you tell me did you grow up in El Paso?

AN: Yes, I grew up in El Paso. Went to high school there. Went to college there, the service. I have thirteen brothers and sisters.

KM: Wow.

AN: I grew up with thirteen brothers and sisters.

KM: Can you tell me your parents, and their names, and a little bit about them?

AN: My father is also Adam, and my mother is Carmen. They're both deceased now.

KM: Okay, and tell me, your thirteen brothers and sisters, are they living in El Paso?

AN: Most of them are. Two have passed away, so there's eleven, and I was the first one to go to college. The first in the family, and the first one to graduate. And after I did it, a few followed and got their degrees.

KM: That's fabulous. Can you tell me what it's like to grow up with thirteen brothers and sisters? What was it like?

AN: I'd say it was fun because back then, like a guy told me, we lived on a dirt road, and when you saw dirt—smoke or dust, it meant that somebody was coming to see you, and you got all excited. That's an exciting feeling that I know, nowadays, kids don't get. They don't even get excited over the remote control.

KM: It's a different world.

AN: It's a different world, yes.

KM: Can you tell me where you went to grade school and a little bit in high school?

AN: As a matter of fact, I started kinder[garten] at Jefferson High School because there were no other elementarys around. And then they built Burlenson School, so I moved to Burlenson. And then after Burlenson, in the fifth grade or forth—forth or fifth, they built Clardy School, so I went to Clardy. And then seventh and eighth—seventh through twelfth, I went to Jefferson.

KM: Okay. I'm going to back up a little bit. Can you tell me what your parents—their occupations, what they did? What your parents did for a living?

AN: My father was 100 percent disabled from the Army. He lost a leg in World War II, but he still works for civil service after the service, and my mother was always a housewife.

KM: Well, thirteen kids, yeah.

AN: Yeah.

KM: Anything that you remember, that your parents shared with you, while you were growing up and what made you decide to go to college? What was the determining factor?

AN: The determining factor that really made me go to school was that I went into the Army, and I was an infantryman. I spent twelve months in the jungles of Vietnam carrying a rifle twenty-four hours a day, and our job was twenty-four hours a day. We did not stop at night. We went on—always on duty or alert twenty-four hours because we had to protect everybody else. And after a year of doing that, I said, you know, there's got to be something better in life, and I knew in the back of my mind it was education, so as soon as I was out of the service, I ran straight to UTEP, in 1967, and I said, I'm not leaving here until I walk out of here with this little piece of paper. And sure enough, four years later, thank God, got the help and I made it. But that was the main thing, you know? I feel that you have to go through tough times to realize the importance of an education.

KM: Can you tell me after Jefferson—can you do a timeline for me? Did you go into the military right after Jefferson?

AN: No. I spent two years in L.A. because back then everybody from El Paso would migrate to Los Angeles to find work, and I worked there for two years, and that's when the Army caught up with me and drafted me in '65. So I went into the Army for two years.

KM: And what was that process like, going into the military at such a young age and being drafted?

AN: Well, being from El Paso, being around—I thought the whole world was Mexican. So when I went to basic training, I look around and said, Where's the Mexican guys?

KM: Where did you have basic training?

AN: At Fort Polk, Louisiana, and until I got to the front lines of Vietnam, that's where I found all the Mexican guys.

KM: Wow. In basic training, what was it like? I mean what was—

AN: Basic training was tough. Fort Polk, Louisiana was known throughout the United States as being the roughest Army base for training. It was really rough. For eight weeks you never saw a civilian. I mean it was seven days a week, in our unit, anyway, but it was rough, rough training, let me tell you. It was really rough.

KM: Can you tell me—I'm going to go back a little bit more. Tell me a little bit about growing up at home and thirteen brothers and sisters. What language did you all mainly speak?

AN: Spanish, of course.

KM: Okay, and now are you in the middle of this thirteen?

AN: I'm four from the top.

KM: And what year were you born?

AN: [Nineteen] forty-four..

KM: Were you ever exposed when you were little to any type of business or entrepreneurship when you were growing up?

AN: We worked as kids. I remember myself and my two older brothers, we knew that my parents didn't have money, so we started working real young.

KM: What did you do?

AN: I remember I had a newspaper route. When I was twelve years old till I was fifteen, for about three to four years, and I delivered newspapers in the morning and afternoon every day, seven days a week. Because we knew we liked to have spending money, and our parents couldn't afford it—to do it to us. And it was really hard work, because sometimes it was cold, rainy, or whatever. Morning and afternoon, every day, three hundred and sixty-five days out of the year.

KM: And I'm assuming you delivered them via—what type of transportation?

AN: Bicycle.

KM: Bicycle, and was it a large paper route?

AN: Yeah, I had a hundred and fifty subscribers.

KM: So what time did you have to wake up in the morning?

AN: Probably, about five..

KM: And get them all delivered?

AN: Yes.

KM: Okay. So your parents allowed you to keep that money that you—

AN: No. No, we would help.

KM: You would give some and keep some?

AN: Yes.

KM: For spending money?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Did they try to teach you how to manage money or how to, kind of, save your money?

AN: No, I think my parents were too busy having babies that they just—(laughing).

KM: So you were number four and how—what made you decide to go to work, at such a young age?

AN: Just the need. I knew I couldn't depend on my parents to give us spending money. Thank God they always had plenty of food on the table. Maybe we didn't have money or other luxuries, but in my house, there was always food, and that means a lot.

KM: What's the fondest memory you have of your mother?

AN: Well, it's mostly my father because I remember my father would sometimes—I mean, he would want to call our names. He would forget our names, and he would go, “Hey, you!” (laughing) He couldn't think of our names. We were so many, you know, and that was funny.

KM: Are there any stories that he shared with you about your family or anything?

AN: No, not too many.

KM: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about growing up at—attending Jefferson High School and what that was like, what the atmosphere was like?

AN: It was very relaxed, calm atmosphere.

KM: Okay, so after—so you went to L.A. for two years, and what did you do in L.A.?

AN: I worked there for two years. I lived with my sister, my older sister that moved out there.

KM: And what type of jobs did you do?

AN: I did assembly line work.

KM: And then you got drafted and you went to Louisiana?

AN: For basic.

KM: For basic, and then where'd you go?

AN: I went to AIT, Advanced Infantry at Fort Ord, California. And then from there, direct to Vietnam.

KM: You mentioned that Hispanics were not very evident at Fort Polk. Were they evident at the advanced training facility?

AN: Yeah, a little bit more.

KM: Did you ever encounter discrimination while you were attending basic?

AN: I guess—you mean, basic?

KM: Uh-huh, basic or at the advanced training.

AN: Let's see. Discrimination. I guess, it does exist everywhere, every day, in any place, but if you just ignore it, I guess, or—because the more attention you paid for it, the deeper you go into the hole.

KM: That's true. Absolutely. So after you went to Oregon—no, California.

AN: Fort Ord.

KM: Fort Ord in California.

AN: No, no—yeah, in California.

KM: Okay, then where did you go?

AN: Direct to Vietnam.

KM: Okay. What was that like? What was that transition?

AN: In Vietnam?

KM: Um-hm.

AN: Well, it was—you're young.

KM: How old were you?

AN: I was twenty-one.

KM: Okay.

AN: And, of course, you're with all your peers, your friends, and your loaded with ammo, so you're not afraid of anything. You know? It kind of helps.

KM: What were the conditions like over there?

AN: Wet. Very wet, every day. Kind of jungle-like, you know?

KM: And you went to the front lines, and then what was—you said you saw more Hispanics on the front lines.

AN: Oh, yes. Yes. Hispanics and blacks.

KM: Did you find that odd when you were—

AN: Yes. I said, "Oh, so this is the way the system works. All right, I get the picture now. I understand."

KM: So you realized it, when you were there. Did you say anything to the commanders or anything, or bring it up?

AN: I said, “Thank you for my rifle. Now the playing field is even. Thank you.”

KM: And how long were you stationed in Vietnam?

AN: One year.

KM: Just one year?

AN: Yeah.

KM: And then you returned?

AN: Returned to Fort Carson, Colorado for six months, and I finished my two year hitch.

KM: Is there anything about the experience of Vietnam that you want to share with us?

AN: I think the experience helped me a lot.

KM: Tell me why.

AN: Because I still appreciate when the sun comes up and the sun goes down, you know. When you sit down to dinner and there’s—plates are on the table, and the glass of water. Everything, you know, because for a whole year we did without all that stuff, and we—all we ate for a whole year was C rations, cans, you know? So all those things, I do appreciate.

KM: What was it like, I mean, without—with just C rations? What was that experience like?

AN: What?

KM: Just being in Vietnam and not having—

AN: Well, back then, you didn't think about it. You didn't have the communication with home on a daily basis. The only communication we had was by mail.

KM: Did you write letters?

AN: No.

KM: No?

AN: No.

KM: Did you get mail up there?

AN: Yeah. I would write, but one time I—you know how you are when you're young. It's like my son, he went to college for four or five years, he never wrote once to me.

KM: Unless he needed money, then he called.

AN: Yeah, but I remember the Red Cross found me one time, and they asked me, How come you don't write home, you know? And I said, "Well, I really don't have anything to say. What do you mean? What do you want me to do? Lie? Get a piece of paper and make a hole through it and say, hey, the bullet just went through this piece of paper?" So they forced me to write.

KM: Did they?

AN: Yeah, but you know—

KM: Do you still have the letters?

AN: Oh, yeah.

KM: You do?

AN: Oh, no. No. No.

KM: Do your family members still have the letters that you wrote?

AN: No, I don't think so. But every month, when we'd get paid—because we would get paid every month, half of my pay would go home automatically through an allotment, so I figured, Well, as long as they get the money, they know I'm okay. That's the way you think when you're young. Because you don't have a wife, you don't have kids, nothing. You just—it's like I said, my son knows what I'm talking about.

KM: Let's talk about—when you were fifteen, you had a paper route, up to fifteen [years of age], and then what was your next job after? Did you have another job after that?

AN: No. After that, I just kind of went to high school and hung around till I graduated.

KM: Okay. Did you play sports? Did you join clubs?

AN: No, I never played sports. I was always kind of small in the athletic ability.

KM: And what about any clubs or, I mean—

AN: No, no.

KM: Anything you did after schools at Jefferson? Anything? Any hangouts or any parties?

AN: Just pick up basketball games and things like that, you know.

KM: Okay, so outside with your family? With family members?

AN: No, no. With friends.

KM: With just friends?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Are there any particular friends that you grew up with? You said you—do you remember?

AN: Yeah, but you know, most of my closest friends from high school have passed away—heart problems, or drinking, or things like that. My closest friends.

KM: Okay. Let's go ahead, and so you returned back from Vietnam, and you're in Colorado, and then what happens after Colorado?

AN: I ran straight to UTEP. I ran—it's first time I ever run in my life besides Vietnam. I ran straight to UTEP.

KM: And your deciding factor to attend the university?

AN: I guess my experience for a whole year, being on duty twenty-four hours a day. That kind of makes you wonder, There's got to be a better way.

KM: Right, absolutely.

AN: And not only the war, but people always telling you what to do, what to do.

KM: In the military?

AN: Yeah. It gets old, you know.

KM: Did you like that?

AN: Well, thank God—that's why I say, Thank God I went to Vietnam, because in Vietnam they didn't bug you too much. They just kept you out there in the boonies, and give you your sea rations and your ammo and they didn't bug you too much. It's like if you're stationed in the U.S., you know, where every day you have to be—your boots have to be polished and uniform starched and all that stuff. Thank God, you know?

KM: Did you enjoy being in the military?

AN: I don't think so, no.

KM: Okay, and why not? Because you were drafted, correct?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Okay.

AN: It's like everything else. Something the leadership—it's not very, it's not the best.

KM: Did you encounter that while you were there?

AN: Yeah. Encountered a lot of good leaders, a lot of bad ones.

KM: What would make the defining—what would make a leader good?

AN: A guy that you knew that you could trust. If he told you to do something, that means he would do it. But there's so many leaders that are in the safe zone—just barking orders.

KM: And that would indicate that they were not—

AN: Well, up to a point, you know. It all depended on how they talk to the troops.

KM: What did you see is an effective way to talk to the troops?

AN: Just be fair with them. Be straight with them. And firm, you know.

KM: Did this experience help you, when you started your own business?

AN: Oh, yeah.

KM: How?

AN: By being firm with my employees.

KM: As in setting rules or boundaries or establishing policies?

AN: Rules, boundaries, working conditions, everything. And then, of course, trying to pay them good wages also helps.

KM: You find that an important factor?

AN: Yes. Yes.

KM: And why is that?

AN: Because they're happy. Money makes everybody happy, and they strive to do better. One of the best experiences I ever had in Vietnam was that—let's see. We didn't have the war stripes on our uniforms, so I don't know what I had done, so they took my stripes away. Something foolish, and the first sergeant, the number one sergeant kept telling me every day, "Hey, Nieto, where's your stripe?" You know, and I would say, "Don't worry, sarge, I'll put it on." So one day we had a company formation—battalion. About eight hundred guys. We're all wondering, What's the formation for, you know? So I was in the back just daydreaming, looking at the sun, and then my neighbor—a guy next to me says, "Hey, they're calling you", and I thought he was pulling my leg, you know? And sure enough, I look, and the first sergeant is looking at me. So I go up there, and he presented me with my stripe. The whole battalion went crazy because they'd never done that before.

KM: Why do you think they did?

AN: I guess the—because the first sergeant knew that I worked my butt off. I always considered myself—I always thought to myself, These guys can't win the war without me. [laughing] It's a crazy way of thinking, and I always considered myself a good soldier. And sure enough they would always send me to the worst missions because you're not going to send somebody you don't trust to the worst missions. But sometimes they would do it to me with, what do you call it? With intent to hurt me.

KM: Without intent or with intent?

AN: With intent. Like I said, some of the leaders were jealous, or whatever, because I would always work hard. So that was a great honor to get your stripe. I mean, just one measly little stripe in front of the battalion because everybody else got their stripes, or medals, or stars, whatever, (under the table??), you know, and it's obtained quietly. When (One??) old sergeant turned—said to me, he said, “If you ever make two stripes, he said, I’ll give you a twenty-one gun salute. But, to me, that—I felt good, you know?”

KM: What did he tell you when he gave you the stripe?

AN: He just laughed at me and gave it to me.

KM: What did you do?

AN: He knew I could care less about the stripe. And that’s the way I felt about it.

KM: What was more important to you?

AN: Just having my sea rations and my ammo, and to finish what I went to do.

KM: Where do you think this type of mentality came? Where do you think your drive came?

AN: I don’t know—from up there. Yeah. Because I’ve thought about it, you know.

KM: And what have you decided?

AN: It came from up there.

KM: Up there. Just the way you are?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Are your other brothers and sisters like that?

AN: No. I've always been the trailblazer in the family. First one to buy a house, first one to go to college, and first one to be successful, I guess. Right?

KM: Absolutely. What separates you from the rest, your other brothers and sisters? They grew up in the same household. They grew up same conditions, but you—

AN: I don't look back. I just look forward. Focus on what you want and just focus and go after it. On whatever you want, not on dollar signs. Because 90 percent of the people always focus on dollar signs. Just focus on what you want to accomplish. Writing books or whatever, selling a product, and don't move.

KM: What did you want to accomplish since you always look forward—when you—in Vietnam, what was your thought when you went back there?

AN: In Vietnam? Like I said, we were young. We just wanted to finish our tour.

KM: And be done?

AN: Yeah, and be done.

KM: Why would they send you always first to go in places that they weren't willing to go?

AN: (laughing) That's what I mean, you know, because they—I feel the higher ups always looked after me because they knew I worked hard. The officers and the first sergeants, they knew that I work hard, and they always knew that the lower sergeants, they hated me because they would back me up. But they knew, and it

was—sometimes I remember one of the top sergeants, he was sitting down with all of the sergeants around him, lower sergeants, and I was walking by, and he says, “Hey Nieto, come here.” he says, “have a drink.” (laughing) I mean, he wouldn’t give the other sergeants a drink, but he’d give a private a drink. Oh, man, those guys hated me.

KM: Who was this sergeant? Do you remember his name?

AN: John (Yeah, ??) Campbell.

KM: Campbell was his last name?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Did you stay in touch with him after?

AN: No.

KM: But he respected you and he liked you?

AN: Yeah. I don’t know if he liked me or hated me because I remember he was kind of a baldheaded guy, you know redheaded, he was baldheaded, and he would put his face right in front of yours, and to me he had the most comical face in the world, so I mean, I had to laugh or giggle or smile, and he’d get so mad at me. He’d say, “Goddamn Nieto, what the hell are you grinning about?” Well, I couldn’t tell him, “Your funny face.” (laughing) That’d be the worst. But after a while, I guess, he started to like me because I’d see the guy in the morning (and the more he’d tell me??), the more I would laugh, you know? I would try not to, but I couldn’t help it. Because he would squeak. He would get right in front of your face, and to me that was—oh, man.

KM: When you came back from an assignment or you returned back to base, what was that like for you?

AN: What?

KM: When you finished an assignment, when you were sent out and you returned back to base.

AN: Oh, on the missions?

KM: Um-hm.

AN: It was a standard every night—ambush patrol, you know. We'd go somewhere and set up for an ambush. I mean, by the river or someplace, and just spend the night there so that nobody would infiltrate—to protect the people at base camp. You know, artillery people. We would always protect the artillery because they were busy firing the—they didn't have time to have people protect them, like police people.

KM: Okay. Let's go ahead and jump a little bit to going to the university. What did you get your degree in?

AN: Education.

KM: And what made you go that route?

AN: Because I was not a very good student in high school. I was a lousy student in high school, and then being two years out of high school, when I was going to school, I mean, I was bad. So I figure, Well, what am I going to do? I figured education was probably the easiest route, to be honest, and I also didn't have an

engineer's mind. So I said, Well, I guess I'll go—what I think might be the easiest way to get there.

KM: Did you use the GI bill to go to school?

AN: Yes.

KM: You did?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Okay. Could you have gone to school without the GI bill?

AN: It would have been hard.

KM: Did you have to work, as well, when you went to school?

AN: Yes, I always worked full time.

KM: You were working full time and going to school full time?

AN: Yes.

KM: And you did this for four years?

AN: Yes.

KM: How was that for you?

AN: It was really fun because I worked at Fort Bliss with the computers.

KM: What did you do at Fort Bliss?

AN: With the big computers, we fed the little IBM cards into them. Remember those?

KM: I remember those.

AN: Yeah. So it was kind of—it was fun because all—there were twelve guys of us that worked there. We all went to school.

KM: Oh, to UTEP?

AN: Yeah, so we all helped each other. We'd share—then we work the swing shift from four [o'clock] to midnight.

KM: And then when did you go to school?

AN: In the daytime.

KM: And when'd you sleep?

AN: Somewhere, in sometime.

KM: Did you take twelve hours?

AN: Yes.

KM: A full load, every time?

AN: And summer.

KM: And the summer, too?

AN: Yeah.

KM: And you were able to finish in four years?

AN: In four years.

KM: Was it hard to come back and go to the university after—

AN: It was hard because I didn't have the tools, but I stuck with it. I'd get on probation one semester and get off, and on and off, for the first two years till the junior year, I made the honor roll.

KM: Really?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Congratulations. Did you finally kind of—able to adjust?

AN: Oh, yeah because the first year or two are the hardest. Once you get over that—

KM: Now, did you get married at this time or were you still single?

AN: No, I didn't get married until I got my degree. I had a program in my mind, I'm not going to get married until I get my degree.

KM: So you had decided this?

AN: Yeah.

KM: And tell me why?

AN: Huh?

KM: Why had you decided not to get married?

AN: Because I knew that if I got married, I would mess up my education.

KM: So that was the goal, to get the education.

AN: Yeah.

KM: To get the degree.

AN: Yes. Oh yeah, you know, back then in our culture, the girlfriend was always waiting for you to come back to get married, so no, but I said, I can't do that. I'm going to get in the hole and I'm going to stay there forever.

KM: Did you decide this goal before Vietnam or after Vietnam?

AN: After Vietnam.

KM: Once you came back that was the goal—was to get the degree?

AN: Right.

KM: Okay. So you're very goal-minded. I mean, that's—

AN: Yeah. Very—

KM: Once you set your mind on something, that's it, huh?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Did this help you when you started your business?

AN: Oh, yes. Sure.

KM: What was the goal at that—when did you discover that you wanted this goal—to start your own business?

AN: It just happened, you know? Well, I've been self-employed all my life, for thirty years—thirty plus years. But we used to farm also for about fifteen years, and then when this business—when I got into this kind of business about three (ten??) years ago, I just happened to fall into it, you know? Went (It was ??) through the small business administration, minority [inaudible].

KM: Okay, well we'll get there. I'll follow back up on that. So you went to school, you got your degree. Any experience at the university that you'd want to share with us? They'd just won the national championship, right?

AN: Yeah. They won in '66, and I started school in '67. That's when they changed the name to—from Texas Western.

KM: What do you think of that name change?

AN: Well, of course, when it happened, I wasn't too happy, but now it makes sense.

KM: It was a big change.

AN: Of course, Texas Western sounds also nice, but it's like when they added blue to the color orange white. I said, "How can they add blue to it?" But now it looks beautiful.

KM: So little changes.

AN: Yeah. See that? It looks nice.

KM: The blue and the—

AN: And I think, when I heard about it, I said oh, man.

KM: Because it was originally only orange and white.

AN: Yes.

KM: Okay.

AN: Yeah.

KM: And then they changed it. Tell me a little bit about the campus. What was it? Was it small, big, medium?

AN: Back then, it was like twelve-thousand students. Now I think it's like twenty.

KM: Did you know everyone? Did you go to school with them?

AN: I knew quite a bit of people because most of them were, of course, from my high school. But the ones that I went to high school with were already out because I graduated from high school in '63, and I started college four years later in '67. So the ones that went straight to, which weren't too many, but they were out, but there were still some guys that struggled, that were still there, from my high school. Like, I said— like Tita [Yañar].

KM: So you went to high school with her and she was in college?

AN: No, no. I went to college with her.

KM: Oh, went to college with her, okay. And she was in school at the time?

AN: Yeah.

KM: What was campus life like?

AN: It was real nice. I always enjoyed it. I thought we had a beautiful campus. You could walk around from one building to another, from one class to another. El Paso doesn't know it, but they have a beautiful campus. I don't know, something about the campus is very, very beautiful.

KM: What was student life like?

AN: It was real nice. You know, real calm.

KM: Were the riots happening, at that time, on the university campus?

AN: No.

KM: Maybe it was a little later.

AN: Yeah.

KM: With the Chicano Movement?

AN: It was the Chicano Movement, but not very strong.

KM: Not very strong? Okay. Anything else about the university—I mean, so you decided on education and then you did well in your junior year and your senior year. Had you decided what you wanted to do next, what your next steps were?

AN: Yeah, it was education. I said, Well, I guess I have to go teach.

KM: Did you not want to teach?

AN: Yes, yes.

KM: And so you got out of UTEP and then what happened?

AN: And I went to teach school for one year, but I was very—I loved it.

KM: Teaching?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Where did you teach at?

AN: At San Jancinto.

KM: Okay.

AN: But the pay, boy, that was discouraging. I remember when I got my first paycheck. I said, “What? You mean, four years of work for this?” I said, I thought to myself, I could sell coke bottles on the corner and make more money than this. I think my take home pay was \$450.

KM: A month? Wow.

AN: Yeah, so I said, No, I'm going to get out and see what I can do out in the world, and if I don't make it, I'll run back to the safety of the school district. That (was not??) for about twenty-five years.

KM: You were out of—

AN: Of the school system.

KM: Okay, so what did you do after that first year? What did you—

AN: Oh, I went into real estate for about five years—five, six years.

KM: Did you own your own business, then, or did you work for someone else?

AN: I worked for somebody else.

KM: Okay, and the name of the business?

AN: Investors—Albert Haddad and Norman Haddad. Norman is still in El Paso.

KM: And you worked for them as a real estate agent?

AN: Yes, real estate agent for five or six years. Then my wife's parents had a farm, up in Panhandle by Amarillo, so they wanted us to go up there and help them. So we moved up there and help them, so we moved up there for fifteen years.

KM: Okay, so you got married in between here. Did you get married—

AN: In '71.

KM: In '71?

AN: Yeah, right after I graduated from UTEP.

KM: Okay. Was she the high school sweetheart that was waiting?

AN: No, she was from Dallas. She's from Dallas. But she had moved to El Paso and was going to nursing school there.

KM: So you met her at UTEP?

AN: Yes.

KM: So that's something that happened at UTEP.

AN: Right.

KM: And your wife's name, please?

AN: Judy.

KM: Judy, okay, so you met her—so she was going to school as well, and did she finish right after you or the same time?

AN: No, she finished later because she was working also full time at Providence.

KM: So was that a common thing? Most students worked full time and then would go to school part time?

AN: Most of the local kids, yeah.

KM: So was it still a commuter school back then as well?

AN: Yes.

KM: Not a lot of kids living on campus?

AN: No.

KM: No? Where did you live while you went to school?

AN: Well, since I was working and had the GI bill, me and some friends had an apartment. Because my house—there were still too many kids there.

KM: Absolutely. How many still were left?

AN: Twelve, I think.

KM: Twelve left by then?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Were you still helping your parents when you got back as well?

AN: Yeah.

KM: So you continued to help your parents?

AN: Yeah.

KM: While you were in college?

AN: Yeah. Like I said, I was working full time, and I had the GI bill. I had enough money. Because my parents never gave me a dime for school. They couldn't afford it.

KM: Sure, but you continued to help them afterwards. Was that common throughout your other friends as well, helping?

AN: You realize, after many years, that the more you give, the more you get.

KM: Right. True.

AN: If you can live without it, help the ones that have helped you, you know.

KM: So you probably helped them from twelve [years of age], all the way until they passed away, I'm assuming.

AN: Well, after I got married, I guess, the way that I helped them was I never imposed on them. My mother never had to baby sit for my kids. I would always—even though it was harder—have a maid at home to take care of my son because he wasn't born yet, but I remember my brothers and sisters, they would all drop their kids off at my mother's house, and I'd say, "You know, that's not right. Just creating more work for her." In other words, I never like to take the easy route, you know. With school, I did because I didn't have a choice, but in school, I would have probably ended up doing the education anyway because like I said, I knew I wasn't—I couldn't be an engineer. I wanted to be an architect, but UTEP didn't have an architect school back then.

KM: Still doesn't.

AN: No. New Mexico State [University] had it, but to me, New Mexico State was another world. (laughing)

KM: No, it's true. And it's out of state tuition as well, at that time.

AN: Right.

KM: So why architect? What interests you about that?

AN: I guess, because my father would make plans—house plans for neighbors. Because in my neighborhood, a lot of people would build their own houses, and my father would draw the plans.

KM: Really?

AN: Yeah.

KM: And they would follow the plan?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Did you build your own house as well?

AN: No, I bought a new one, but that stuck to me.

KM: I'm sorry, did your parents build their own house?

AN: Oh, yeah. But it was the old fashioned way, you know?

KM: Tell me what the old fashioned way is. I don't know. Tell me like I don't know.

AN: The old fashioned way was they would build one room every five years.

KM: Oh. You would add it on?

AN: Yeah, add on a room every five years. So by the time you finish building the house, all the kids are gone. (laughing). Well, that was the way my father did it. Some guys would go ahead and do it all at one time, but my father, I guess, he wasn't a good manager with his money. He'd go one room at a time, you know. That's why, nowadays, I don't do that. I look all the way but none of this one room every five years.

KM: So you took a different path.

AN: Oh, yeah.

KM: Why do you think you took that type of path to go all the way?

AN: Because you don't need (gain nothing??) by going the other direction. Life's too short. You're here, you're going, and the only thing that you have, that you can enjoy twenty-four hours a day, is your roof, your home. So you might as well get something that you're comfortable and enjoy and live there.

KM: You said you were the first to buy your own house.

AN: Yes.

KM: Did you use the FHA?

AN: Yeah, GI bill.

KM: GI bill again, okay. And that enabled you to purchase a house? Where did you purchase your first house?

AN: In the Eastwood area, off of McRae.

KM: Okay.

AN: In '71.

KM: What was that like?

AN: I felt like a criminal. I couldn't tell anybody that I was buying a new house.

KM: Tell me why.

AN: Because back then, the culture—I wasn't even married. You see? Back then, the culture was, if you weren't married, why do you want a house for? Well, even if you going to get married. Why do you want a new house? Well just, here, we'll make a little—this is going to be your little corner, you know? Okay. Throw a mattress on the floor. You can stay there. That was the culture, the way of thinking.

KM: Why do you think that was?

AN: I don't know. But I remember as a kid saying, "You know, when I work,"—we all thirteen lived in the house, I said, "I'm not going to live this way. I don't care if I live at the hotel with five other bedrooms, I'm not living this way."

KM: And what was 'this way'? What was that— what do you mean 'this way'?

AN: Crowded like sardines. Thirteen people—we had a three-room house. Three rooms—not bedrooms. Three-roomhouse. See? So I said, "No. I don't want to live this way." And since day one when I first bought my house, I wasn't even married yet. I bought—like I told my son, "Always go for the gold, go as far as

you can for your roof.” I bought a three level house, and I said, Now what am I going to do? I didn’t have furniture. I didn’t have a wife. (laughing)

KM: That’s later.

AN: Yeah, but—

KM: Were you nervous buying your first house?

AN: Oh, yeah.

KM: Because you were how old? How old were you?

AN: Well, I was like, twenty—it was after the service—after school, after college. I was like twenty-seven, but like I said, you couldn’t tell anybody because I didn’t have any relatives—no uncles, or aunts that ever bought a house.

KM: None?

AN: Nobody. They would help me with good advice.

KM: What made you decide to buy the house? Who told you that was a good investment?

AN: Since I was a kid, I remember saying, I’m not going to live this way.

KM: That’s why?

AN: So who did you go to? How did you start thinking about buying the house? Did you go to the bank? Did you go—you were in real estate at that time?

AN: No, no. This was in '71 when I was teaching school because I got my contract through my school salary.

KM: Where did you go? You couldn't go to your family for advice. Where did you go for advice?

AN: Well, I remember, what really turned me on, we went to buy a little kitten, me and my wife Judy, at a friend's house, and she had a tri-level house, and I was amazed. I'd never seen such a beautiful home, and then when I found out that I could afford it, to get it, I said, "To hell with it, I'm buying one." But like I said, I couldn't discuss it with friends or relatives or anybody.

KM: Did you discuss it with your, I guess, then, girlfriend Judy?

AN: Yeah.

KM: You talked to her about it?

AN: Because people—what do you want a house for? Discourage you.

KM: Never saw it as an investment?

AN: No.

KM: Do you think that was the culture? Why?

AN: That was the culture back then, yeah. It's like I've also noticed that, back then, when my friends were getting married and then they find a duplex, live on one side, and then the girl would bring her mother and she would live on the other side. I don't know if you recall that, right? Well, they don't do that anymore do they? See? It was just the culture.

KM: What do you think changed that was—

AN: I guess people realize that it doesn't work that way. It's not the best thing to do.

KM: Did you ever have trouble acquiring the loan or getting a house?

AN: Oh yeah, of course. They always give you a hard time. We still have a hard time dealing with the banks. We're better off financially, but they always give you a hard time.

KM: Tell me why, and what they do.

AN: They always to back to your credit—something that happened ten, twenty years ago. Things like that.

KM: Current day banks?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Okay, let's talk about—let's go to the house. When you purchased the house, did you have any trouble, back then, purchasing the house?

AN: No. I remember—my first house?

KM: Um-hm.

AN: I had to prove to them—besides my salary at the school was, I think, \$6,000 a year, but I needed to be making \$7,000 so I had to go work in the summer at the recreation center, swimming pool, so that my salary would show \$7,000. My payment was \$180. Everything, taxes, insurance for a three level house.

KM: That's nice.

AN: Yeah.

KM: So you—did you have to come up with the down?

AN: Yeah.

KM: You did. Any trouble with the paperwork, or submitting it, or anything with the banks, then? No? Everything was fine?

AN: I guess, the main thing was that I already had the degree.

KM: What did your family say when you got your degree?

AN: I guess, they were proud, you know. One thing I remember that I never did and I've never done, and I don't know if it's right or wrong, but I never told my brothers and sisters, "See? If I can do it, you can do it." I always believe that you've got to—people follow footsteps. They don't follow advice. They follow footsteps. That's the way it's always been.

KM: Did any of your brothers and sisters get a degree?

AN: Four of my sisters did.

KM: Four of your sisters did?

AN: But none of my brothers did. I have four other brothers and none of them did.

KM: Why do you think it was only the girls that followed?

AN: I guess, they realize the importance. Women are more mature in that stage.

KM: Why did you get it? I mean, you said when you came back you realize, but that's four years of not making a lot of money, and what was the determining factor for you to get the degree?

AN: It's a key that a lot of people that don't have the degree, they're hindered, and they feel it. They're afraid to talk to people that have degrees.

KM: Really?

AN: They're intimidated. With a degree, you'll talk to anybody. You feel like—because there's people that, to them, that means a lot. Like Mr. Viramontes, I don't think he even has a high school degree, but he's one of the nicest guys I've ever met. Yeah, I went to school with his brothers, and I bet you he doesn't have a high school degree.

KM: I don't remember, so I have to check. So you worked one year at the school in the—for the school district.

AN: Yeah.

KM: And then you got married?

AN: Yes.

KM: And then what happened at that point?

AN: In '71—from '71 to '76, I was in '78 in real estate, and then from—

KM: What was real estate like? Did you market to Hispanics? Were they buying houses at that time?

AN: Yeah. I was kind of lucky because I would sell the new houses. I would just go sit up there where the new houses were and people would come, and I would sell a lot of houses. I did good.

KM: Any observations about the development of El Paso and how they were putting the houses—I mean the different kind of—how they were getting the houses, where they were building them and things like that? Any observations about that? Planning, or lack of planning, that you saw or?

AN: No, I think back then I used to sell houses for a guy that just died, George Thomas, and he was building like five-hundred homes a year plus apartments. He built, maybe, two, three hundred on the east side, a hundred on the west side, a hundred in the northeast, and I remember—I would even come to Dallas, to visit, and I find plans, of the homes here and I'd take it, and I'd give them to—

KM: As a model?

AN: Yeah.

KM: To use over there?

AN: Yeah. And also the first house that I bought, I bought it from George Thomas, the builder, and I added on to the house, a den, 20 by 20 with a humongous fireplace. I took a picture of the fireplace, and I gave it to him and I said, "Look, this is the way to build the fireplace. I'm getting sick of—I'm looking at your ugly hole in the wall fireplaces that you guys built." I said, "I walk into a \$20,000 home or a \$1,000,000 and the same ugly hole in the wall fireplace. God damn it. Put some imagination into it." So I built this beautiful (fireplace??). I mean, it's still there

off McRae, you know. It's beautiful. I found our black rock out in the desert. It was like granite. It wasn't porous, you know. And I said, Oh. I thought it'd look ugly, but I said, I'm going to try because it's different. Oh, it looked beautiful, shiny. The hearth was real big. It just turned out real beautiful.

KM: You just saw that it would look well?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Now did they give you any credit for it, or any—just gave him the—so you worked seven years and then what happened?

AN: In '78, we went out to the farm.

KM: And this is in the Panhandle?

AN: Yes.

KM: What was that like? That's a different—

AN: You know, when I was selling real estate, I started to sell ranches to the cattle people, and I started to like those kind of people, the way they live.

KM: What'd you like about it?

AN: The way the people were. They're really down to earth. And I always liked being out in the country, you know, I like that. So when the opportunity came up, we went out there. And it was rough because it was cold country. Completely different. Flat. No trees, but it was something that I wanted to do.

KM: Different lifestyle, too.

AN: Oh, yeah.

KM: Tell me what your day was—a typical day, for fifteen years, right?

AN: Yeah.

KM: What was a typical day for you?

AN: Well, of course, the bus would come pick up the kids and take them to school.

KM: So you had kids by then?

AN: Yeah.

KM: How many?

AN: Mac and—I had two. Bring them in the afternoon, and I'd go out there and plow the fields, you know, the daytime—

KM: What kind of crops did you grow?

AN: Cattle feed, which is feed for the cattle, and then the last ten years I started—I developed another business. And I just couldn't stand one minute of this because I can go on forever. There was a plant that grew wild. It was like alfalfa, and the cattle will eat it, and I started to market the seed. And then I ended up marketing it all over the U.S. and in foreign countries.

KM: Well, now, let's talk a little bit about this. Sorry. I know you just want to talk about it one minute, but tell me what the seed is and why—

AN: It's a plant called kochia, K-O-C-H-I-A, and it grows wild all the way from El Paso all the way to Canada, mostly through the central states. It doesn't grow in the east coast or west coast. When we first got there, I didn't know the difference between a horse or a cow, but I did notice that the cattle would always concentrate on it and eat this plant, and they were always fat, and I would lease out the pasture to my neighbor. This guy would run cattle everywhere. And one year we had a bad drought and the cattle were in our place all summer, and they got real fat, and I still didn't understand the correlation between grass, and cows, and meat. But this guy came and said, "You know what? The only place I made money this year was here. He said, I lost money everywhere else. And I said, "You know that doesn't make sense." It was just a plant that people would call a weed. And our county—

KM: And it grew wild?

AN: Yeah, it grew wild, even in El Paso, in the desert, it grows wild. And our county agent was—he was promoting it to the farmers and rancher, so I picked it up and I started to—

KM: Promoting it how, the plant?

AN: To plant, yeah. To use it. It was a natural resource like the sun, but people would plow it up because they'd say, Oh, it's a weed. So they would plow it up, and consider myself a dummy. I went to the dictionary. And the dictionary says a weed, it's a plant that's out of place, or of no economic use. I said, Well, if the cattle eat it, and it's helpful, it's not bad for them.

KM: And it was good for them. They fattened up, obviously.

AN: Yeah—much. That plant would be there all summer, drought or no drought. It's an amazing plant to me. It's an amazing plant.

KM: So you saw opportunity?

AN: Well it was just opportunity to survive. I wasn't looking, like I said, dollar signs. I just wanted to see green grass and we grew green plants. But this plant is like an alfalfa.

KM: And it just grows? It doesn't need maintenance or anything? Okay, so you found this—so you notice they were eating it, then what?

AN: One year, I harvested a seed. I said I'm going to advertise this and see what happens.

KM: Now tell me about harvesting the seed and what that process was.

AN: Well, the process I used a combine, what they call a combine, like, to harvest grain, you know, wheat, milo, and I harvest some. And I started to market it. I said, I'm going to see what happens, and I was stunned because my neighbors bought me out.

KM: How did you start to market it? What did you do?

AN: Local, newspaper.

KM: Newspaper.

AN: Yeah.

KN: Advertising?

AN: Yeah.

KM: And what was your pitch?

AN: Just [inaudible] seed good for cattle. (Loves??) grazing.

KM: Did you put it in packets? What did you do?

AN: Oh, yeah. I would put it in forty pound bags, fifty pound bags.

KM: Okay, so large.

AN: Yeah, I would clean the seed and have it inspected by the state, make sure there was no noxious weeds, you know, seed.

KM: So you had to get it going—you had to get all these permits before you can market it?

AN: Yes.

KM: How did you learn about going through all these permits and all this process?

AN: As I was doing it.

KM: As you were doing it?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Did you talk to anybody?

AN: Oh, yeah. I would ask questions.

KM: Who would you ask questions to?

AN: County agent.

KM: How to do it?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Were they helpful?

AN: Yeah, yes.

KM: Okay. Go ahead.

AN: You know, we had a real good county agent. Mac got to meet him and he was real helpful.

KM: What was his name?

AN: Jimmy Walker. He got the whole town started with solar energy. The school, the businesses, houses. He was a real good agent. So like I said, I just started advertising the seed, and the first year I sold mostly to my neighbors. I said, Wow.

KM: How much did you sell?

AN: I forgot how much.

KM: Not dollar wise but bag wise, I mean—

AN: Yeah, I sold maybe a ton or two.

KM: So you were totally sold out?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Just to your neighbor?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Okay.

AN: And this, advertising only locally. So then I started advertising kind of regionally. Five state area, Oklahoma, Texas.

KM: What made you decide to go start advertising regionally?

AN: Just to see what would happen? More interest, more calls, more visitors, more letters.

KM: So that's how they would communicate with you, through letters or phone calls?

AN: Yes, and then when I went regional, then I started advertising nationwide.

KM: How did you keep track of—what type of accounting system, what type of marketing? I mean is it just—

AN: I had the old fashioned—

KM: Ledger? I like ledgers.

AN: I had my laptop with me.

KM: Okay, and he's showing me a small three and a half by five notebook?

AN: No. Back then, and don't ask me why, I had a regular notebook to keep track of every year, year-by-year for twenty years.

KM: Do you still have this? Do you really?

AN: Yeah. Everybody that I sold to, how much I sold to. Because every day, people would call me, and I had the notebook there, the date, who called, and what they call, and their comments, you know, and people would come in from all the states. Farmers and ranchers, they don't worry about the farm. They're not like El Paso people, oh, I'm calling long-distance, I've got to do this in three seconds. They'll talk forever. So they would call me and tell me their stories about the kochia because, like I said, this plant grows all the way to Canada. These people would call me and tell me their experiences with the plant.

KM: What would they tell you?

AN: Whatever experience they had with it. I was always looking for negatives. I knew what it could do for the positive side, but I was always looking for negatives. Since I was selling the seed, I wanted to make sure I had all my bases covered. And the only negative that people—and it's not a negative, I think it's ignorance. They would tell me, It's a weed. I would say, "Well, yeah, what's your definition of a weed?" That was the only negative, you know?

KM: But they kept buying it.

AN: Yeah, they kept buying it, and I started selling it internationally.

KM: And how did you do this? Did you—

AN: Advertising in international publications, Farm and Ranch.

KM: How'd you find them? How did you—

AN: Oh, they're all over. You go in any office, you always find a magazine or—

KM: And just put your ad in and they called you?

AN: Yeah. They would call me, they would visit me. I had people visit me from (Bistro??), from Africa. Remember those people from Africa?

KM: Really?

AN: Oh, yeah.

KM: To come see how you did it?

AN: Yes.

KM: Were you surprised?

AN: Oh, yes.

KM: And how long did you do this for?

AN: Twenty years. I'm still doing it [inaudible].

KM: Go ahead.

AN: I'm still doing it. Not as much as I used to though (you know??), but the same time (town??) about twenty years ago, I was wondering, I wonder what—I said, You know, nobody has ever messed with this seed, with this plant. I said, I wonder if there's anything good in the seed. So I looked around. I wanted to extract to see if it was any oil or whatever in the seed or vitamins, whatever. So I called corn oil, peanut oil people, and all the people that extract oil from seeds, but they wanted semi loads. Finally, I found a little cosmetic lab here in Dallas twenty years ago. So I sent them the seed, and they extracted the oil. No, I had extracted in A & M—Texas A & M, a quart of oil, and then I found the cosmetic firm here in Dallas, and then they shut that out—they're consultants to them, the cosmetic industry. They asked me where I got it, and they say, You know what? We've never seen an oil that can do what this oil can do for cosmetics. They told me to build a twenty story house because of all the money I was going to make, all this stuff. So I said, well, I don't. Anyway, it was a doctor, PhD, MD, that would do all the research, and he was—he's still excited. I'm still working with him, but they found out that the oil from this plant is also very good for cosmetics and anti-aging, get rid of wrinkles. Because about a year ago I was working with UTEP with the oil for anti-aging. They were real excited because there's a lot of money grants for that purpose.

KM: Absolutely. So let's go back to selling the seed. So that's phase two almost, so this is back in phase one. You continued to sell the seed in notebook only, huh? That's how you kept track?

AN: Daily.

KM: Did you get so big that your wife would help you, or kids?

AN: Oh, yeah.

KM: So it was you and your wife?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Did you make more money on the seed than on the farming?

AN: Oh, sure, a hundred times more.

KM: Did you stop farming altogether?

AN: Yeah. Towards the end, I would just sit there at the house and answer the phone because the phone would ring off the hook all day. Especially when I was advertising nationwide and I would get visitors from foreign countries. And even from Mexico, from the U.S.

KM: And is the seed still selling?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Still selling today.

AN: I haven't advertised. I haven't done it lately because, like I said, for the last five years, our business just took off like a rocket.

KM: This business?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Okay. So you worked on the farm, you developed the seed, and then what happened? So you saw that as a successful entrepreneurship?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Do you need some water?

AN: No.

KM: So what did you do after you—what was that experience like of developing this seed and taking it off and stuff like that?

AN: It was fun.

KM: Tell me why it was fun.

AN: Because I was doing it for fun. I wasn't doing it for dollar signs. I was doing it for fun. I was trying to accomplish something. Just see how far I could go with it.

KM: Do you feel you succeeded?

AN: Yeah. Yes. When I first started, they used to call me the father of kochia, and now they call me the grandfather of kochia. (laughing)

KM: It's changed titles.

AN: Yeah, it changed titles. But it was funny because I put a lot into it. I would talk to people, I would call them, I would go visit them, they'd come visit me. I was always concerned about the plant. I wanted to make sure I won't hurt livestock, you know? And it was funny because people would call us from universities and they would pick our brain, and there was a question that—we would always ring a bell if they ask us that question, when they didn't know what else to ask us, the universities, and we call it the PhD question.

KM: And what was the PhD question?

AN: They would ask us, okay, they would ask us, What's the TDN value of the plant? TDN means total digestive nutrients. Okay? So our answer to that would be, Okay, wet or dry? Wet, is when a plant is green, and dry, when it's dry. And we would hear the silence. They don't didn't know what to (ask??) so we would ring a bell and say, Okay, I got a PhD question—

KM: They're stumped.

AN: They're stumped. They thought they were going to get us with that question but we were ready for it.

KM: So you were stumping them instead?

AN: Yeah.

KM: What made you decide to market this? What was—

AN: What made me? Because I would go out there, plow, and the stuff wouldn't grow. And I would ask, Why isn't the stuff growing? Well, it didn't rain. It has to rain.

KM: But it would still grow?

AN: No, what I was planting.

KM: Oh, okay.

AN: The pasture that I would plant or it hasn't rained? It's always excuses. But this plant was there, early spring, every year. All through the summer. We could

have had the biggest drought in a hundred years, but it was there. It was feed for the livestock. I said, Well, it doesn't made sense to me.

KM: Did you develop a company around this?

AN: Yeah.

KM: You did? Okay, what was the name of the company?

AN: Windy Acres Farm.

KM: Okay, and did you do other products besides selling of the seed or was it just solely the seed?

AN: The seed, but of course I would also—I would make bales, like alfalfa bales, the little ones, and the big ones, and the round ones, just for educational purposes, to educate people, and I have a brochure. I would send out a real nice brochure with pictures and all that stuff, and in Spanish too. And I also had set up in Arabic if I needed it, you know.

KM: Who'd you get to translate it?

AN: Some people there, in Amarillo, Arab people.

KM: Wow. So did you ever get any lawsuits or any problems or anything?

AN: No.

KM: It was always a positive?

AN: Yeah, because every day that's what I would look for, negatives, you know, is there anything that I should be aware of?

KM: Were you surprised it took off like this?

AN: Yeah, of course. But what surprised me, I think, why hadn't people done it before, you know?

KM: What'd you decide the answer was?

AN: I don't know. I guess what do you call it? I said, you know, because people would call it a weed. That's like calling a woman a prostitute. Once you call it a weed, I mean nobody wants to hear anything else. It's a weed. You tell them that woman's a prostitute, you're not going to change their minds, from that for life. I said—I just didn't understand it.

KM: Did you have any naysayers when you first started to market it, telling you it's a weed and telling you the negatives and stuff like that?

AN: Um-hm.

KM: You did? What would they tell you?

AN: That it was poisonous and all kinds of stuff. I would have a collection of all the articles. I have like fifty or a hundred that I would find in magazines, you know, Farm & Ranch. But the people that we used to—on the practical side, like myself, they were always positive. But then one PhD guy, from New Mexico State, would always write negative.

KM: About the weed? I mean, about—

AN: Yeah, about the plant. So I called him once and I said, “Look, we’ve been using it. We’ve survived. Keep telling us what we’re doing right or wrong,” I said, “because we’re happy with it.” And you know what he told me? He says, “Well, I’m against it because everybody’s in favor of it. That’s why I’ve got to be against it.” So I said, well, we wrote a letter to the dean of New Mexico telling him what he had told us. All the obvious story stuff (ugly stories stuck??), because the guy would write stories that he fed the cattle for seven days, and they were dying, all kinds of problems. I said, “Well, come—”. He was only like two hours away because he was in Clovis, New Mexico. I said, “Come tell us what we’re doing right or wrong,” I said, “because we depend on this plant.” That’s what he told me. And then another university in Utah, I think, they wrote, supposedly, a research on the seed. They wrote that the seed was half inch big, and it’s real tiny. They wrote all kinds of weird stuff. (laughing) So I wrote to them and I said, “Look, you guys, the seed is not big, half inch. If you look at this book, page so and so,” I gave them all the info, and I corrected it. And I still have all that info.

KM: You still have all these?

AN: Yes. And they answered me, Thank you, they said, for checking us out.

KM: What do you think prepared you to market something like this? This is something that people didn’t—

AN: Well, what prepared me to market it?

KM: Right, or to just realize it was an opportunity.

AN: Because, see, drought is a world problem. It’s not an individual problem. And I kept saying to myself, Why are people—I mean, this is a natural resource. It’s nothing new. I haven’t invented the eighth wonder of the world. I’m using

what's there and nothing else, and I couldn't understand the mentality of (how a??) guy really couldn't.

KM: Did you have to, when you expanded, did you expand your business there?

AN: Yes.

KM: Tell me how you expanded it and what you did.

AN: I just advertised it.

KM: So just advertising. You didn't have to buy more land?

AN: No. Because if I needed more seed, I could contact my neighbors and get it from my neighbors.

KM: Oh, so they had seed? They were growing it now as well?

AN: Well, it grew native. But like I tell you, in the spring, March, April, people would plow it up instead of—

KM: I bet they're not plowing it up anymore, or are they still—

AN: You'd be surprised how many stubborn people that are left in this world.
(laughing)

KM: They're still doing it? But they don't—that's mainly because they're planting more so then they're growing cattle, right?

AN: Yeah.

KM: So what made you decide to start the business in—

AN: What, the seed?

KM: Right.

AN: Just to help other people have pasture for their cattle.

KM: Did you incorporate it? Did you—

AN: No.

KM: Just a company itself?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Okay, it's a continuation with Mr. Nieto. I'm just asking him a little bit about Windy Acres Farms, and if he can just continue his story about that. Go ahead.

AN: All right. Well, with the grass seed, it just grew. The business grew, and grew, and grew.

KM: Were you surprised?

AN: Yes and no because I knew that since I was the only person in the United States working with that seed, harvesting the seed, and marketing the seed, I wasn't really that surprised that it was growing. My intention was just to help people have feed for their cattle. I hated to hear the word 'drought' because this plant doesn't know what drought is.

KM: So it'll grow no matter the environment or anything?

AN: It would grow, yeah, in the desert where nothing else will grow.

KM: So on the east coast it wouldn't grow, but they don't have cattle in the east.

AN: No. It doesn't do well in wet areas because there's something already established on top of the ground. Whatever's established on top of the ground is going to dominate. It's like trying to build a house on top of a house. But in the desert country, there's nothing on top of the ground. It's dirt. This stuff will take off. Rocky, I mean, caliche, any—the worst soils in the world, this stuff will germinate and grow. It's an amazing plant. And why the academic world has never accepted it, because they want to just call it a weed from the very beginning, you know.

KM: Do you think they're stuck on that?

AN: Oh, yes. They're very stuck, and I felt like I always took her out of the closet and put her in a different light because I got to the point that I would tell my people, "Come visit me. You don't have to buy a thing. I'll pay your flight. Get here in the morning by the—I'll pick you up in the airport, give you a tour." I would have visitors from Canada. They did a lot of studies on the kochia, like this. Research scientists from Canada, and they would come see me. They'd visit me, and talk to me, and they would tell me, Oh, don't say anything, just let us look. Of course, they knew what to look for, and I'd take them on a tour, and in one hour we would see all kinds of stuff—grazing cattle and bales of hay. The way people used to in different ways. I would even take them to the feed lots where we would take the (insulish??) and they would—they did a lot of studies for me. Many, many studies.

KM: The findings on what the plant was?

AN: Yeah, because kochia grows native, also, in Canada, and that's why they were real concerned what we were doing with the kochia. Because Canada had the same problem that we did it in the U.S. people ignore it. People just called it a weed. And I hear that in Washington state, there's an area they call the Washington National Forest. It's all kochia. (laughing) And I always tried to tell them, "Take advantage. It's a national resource." It's like the sun. I mean, are we taking advantage of the sun? No. The wind, are we taking advantage of the wind? No. And people ask, Why? Why? Somebody has to do it.

KM: Why did you see this and no one else saw it?

AN: I didn't see it, I just—

KM: Well, you did because no one else has developed this, I mean no one. How did you see this?

AN: I just figure if it's doing good, you know, just keep focusing.

KM: What made you decide to bring in people? You said you'd buy their tickets and have them come and tour the plant. Why did you do that? What was that strategy?

AN: Because I wanted them to be satisfied by what they saw.

KM: And were they when they left?

AN: Yes.

KM: Do you remember some of the people that came and what they said, their comments?

AN: Sure. Well, they were believers because—especially the cattle people. Cattle people, they know when they go out to the field at nine o'clock in the morning and the cattle are laying down, that means they're content, they're happy, they're full. Okay? And when they go out there and see that, they know. Something else. Some people feed cattle. They put a bale or two in the back of a pickup and go out and throw it to the cattle. Well when the cattle get accustomed to that, they see the truck coming, and there they go. We'd drive up to the cattle, the cattle would just look at us. They knew we weren't going—. We didn't have anything to give them, you know. All those little things, that people know.

KM: So you're very observant then?

AN: Yeah.

KM: How long were you at the farm that you started noticing about this plant?

AN: About the third year.

KM: The third year?

AN: Yeah.

KM: And so you started marketing it the fourth year?

AN: Yes.

KM: Just regionally and then next year you went?

AN: Yeah. The first few years were locally, kinda, around Amarillo. Wherever the magazine subscriptions go, you know.

KM: Once the people purchase the seed, do they have to purchase it from you every year or is it just a one time?

AN: No. They can purchase as many times as they want, but normally it's just a one time.

KM: Because it grows back?

AN: Yes. The plant reseeds itself.

KM: Okay, so the plant reseed itself then.

AN: Yes.

KM: So they plant it, it grows, and then it—do you have to do anything? Did you have to give them instructions?

AN: No.

KM: It just grew. And then it reseeds itself and—

AN: It grows like a weed.

KM: And then it would grow back?

AN: Yes.

KM: Did you have trouble with, since it's only a one time kind of purchase, in having the purchase—you had to get a lot of sales in order to continue the business, right? Because if it's a one time purchase usually, or did they come back and purchase more?

AN: Oh, yeah. I would sell out every year.

KM: Every year, you would sell out?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Wow. How did you keep up with demand?

AN: Sometimes I didn't.

KM: And what would you have to do in that case?

AN: Bite the bullet. Sometimes mother nature would help me. When the seed is ready for harvest, it shatters and the wind blows, especially up in the Panhandle, and branches rub each other, so it knocks the seed off. But whatever I harvest, I always knew how much I had and how much I needed to advertise to get rid of it. Even overseas, I'd send—Spain would buy them by the ton. Africa would buy by the ton, and a ton costs like \$10,000.

KM: How did you ship it out of—how did you handle the logistics?

AN: Just going by the book. Going through the USDA. Get all the phytosanitary certificate. That's the main key, when you send seed to a different country. It's called a phytosanitary certificate.

KM: And what is that?

AN: They analyze the seed, make sure it doesn't have any obnoxious seeds. Seeds that can be—cause problems.

KM: Did they have to do that for every ton that you send out?

AN: Yeah. For every kind of seed.

KM: Okay, that you send out?

AN: Yeah.

KM: And then once they get that, they just—

AN: The seed can go. Oh, and then the country has to make sure that they accept it.

KM: How did you learn all this?

AN: It's what I did every day.

KM: Just self-taught?

AN: Yeah, answer the correspondence, the phone, check the fields, the cattle. Talk to the people that—whenever I would read anything about it, I would pick up the phone and talk to the people.

KM: Do you think that's normal? Most people don't talk to the people. Do you think that makes you just more observant?

AN: I feel I'm very observant, and that's what—like I tell the teachers when I started. I taught for one year in '71 and then I was out for twenty-five years, and then when I went back to El Paso, I went back to teaching. Twenty-five years later, the teachers would tell me, Mr. Nieto, you see things that nobody else can see. I would say, "What?" But I guess I am a very, very observant person, and I can attribute that, maybe, to my—Vietnam had something to do with it. I always had

to be alert twenty-four hours a day, and then twenty years on the farm also. If it rained, you had to be careful. What's going to happen if it rains? What's going to happen if the wind blows? Because we kept the cattle in with the hot wire. They call it a hot wire. And the hotwire got a—if a tumbleweed or something got stuck in there, it would short it out, and the cattle would get out. You always had to be alert. Always had to be alert. We lived on a dirt road. You know, all those little things, and so, I guess, that made me more observant. I remember when I was teaching school at Bel Air, and there were two-thousand students at Bel Air, and they would all go to lunch at noon, at twelve. But the cafeteria could only seat, like, three hundred, and I would notice pockets of kids around the schools, ten, twenty, thirty pockets of kids. I notice that they wouldn't eat. There was one kid that would always ask me every day for a quarter to buy a (Coke??). And I started to notice. I said, "You know, the other kids don't eat." So I ask one of the other teachers. I said, "Hey, have you noticed that seventeen hundred, maybe less, of the kids don't eat? He says, "No." And I say, "What do you mean, no?" He says, "No." So I kept an eye on this guy, on this cool teacher, and I noticed why. He would walk from the classroom to the cafeteria like this, you know? I don't know what the heck he was looking for with his head down. I said, "No wonder the guy can't see what the heck—" See? That's the way he would walk.

KM: Head down?

AN: Head down, like this. I said, "God almighty." But right away I said—you know, I noticed that and I enjoyed—I taught there for one year. I enjoyed it. I loved it. I went in there gung ho. I was the second teacher in the school. There was a little lady before me that had been there for thirty years. She was over there at six [o'clock]. I was there about quarter after six. But the system was so bad that I said, "Oh, good lord, get me out of here."

KM: Really?

AN: Yeah. Pathetic.

KM: Tell me why.

AN: No accountability. None, whatsoever.

KM: Do you think that's critical?

AN: Very critical.

KM: Tell me why.

AN: Because it's in the mess that we're in now. I remember my second year I had to—they had to reevaluate me. In that first year at Bel Air, I was teaching physical science in high school, and the failure rate at school was 50 percent. I dropped it to ten, but I was on the phone every day calling their parents every day. And their parents would help me 100 percent. And so the second year they had to reevaluate me, so I went before the principal, counselor, and one parent that I didn't know. And they asked me, Why should we hire you back? And I said, "Well, because I dropped the failure rate from fifty to ten." Even though it cost me most of my lunch hour (laughing) but I really wanted to help. And you know what they did to me? They looked at me like this and said, So? And I looked at them and I said, "God bless you guys." I said, Lord, get me out of there. I'm going to kill somebody.

KM: Wow.

AN: That's what [inaudible] so.

KM: Was this in '72?

AN: No, this was just in '94 when I moved back from the farm to El Paso.

KM: Wow.

AN: Yeah, so another time, this was the summer before the second year, I went by the school, and the principal went to college with me, Vern Bob Butler. He had become a principal, so I stopped by the school. There was no school. It was summer. He was rearranging some new furniture that he got into his office, and I said, "Hey, Vern, can I talk to you?" And he says, "No." He was so excited, rearranging his furniture. And I said, "Well, okay." And then he said, "No." I said, "Okay." No, I said, "Do you have a minute?" He says, "No." I said, "Well, how about thirty seconds?" He said, "No." I said, "Okay, goodbye." No accountability. No accountability. It's bad. I got out full time just doing the ESL in different schools. You know what's pathetic? Every school that I went to, I knew teachers, and they would talk to—I don't know why. I have this knack. People tell me—

KM: Because you listen and you ask.

AN: Yeah, and they would tell me all of the ugly things, and I would say to them, I'd say, "You know, all these problems can be corrected if somebody would—if there'd be accountability and people would act on it." But everybody would just hush.

KM: Nobody wanted to know.

AN: Yeah.

KM: Wow. I'm going to go back to—so Windy Farms, you decided to close the business, or leave, or the Panhandle area, or tell me—and did you have it—wait,

let's go back, sorry. Did you encounter any challenges in owning the Windy Acres Farm Inc.?

AN: I guess just normal challenges. People throw rocks or stones at you, you know, and say, It's a weed, you can't do that. But—

KM: Any problems with banks? Any issues with banks, at that time, with this business?

AN: No.

KM: No? Didn't need the banks at that time? What encouraged you to continue and expand your business for Windy Acres Farms?

AN: To see people that were happy that they had pasture for their cattle.

KM: Did you need any funding to get this business off the ground?

AN: No. Everything, like this business, everything was—we never had to—. Well, one time like within our business, I had to mortgage my house to keep going because with the government, they don't pay you up front. You have to perform the work, and maybe thirty, sixty, ninety days later you start getting the money. But at the beginning, they don't.

KM: After the Panhandle, you moved back to El Paso?

AN: Yes.

KM: Why did you move back and what happened to your business at that point?

AN: After that, we got divorced, so my wife came here to Dallas with the kids, and I went back to El Paso.

KM: And what happened to the business itself?

AN: I still kept it going from El Paso. I would get seed from people around the Panhandle. They would truck it to me and I had it in my garage and I would market it and send it out.

KM: And it still worked?

AN: Yeah.

KM: And then so you went—moved back to El Paso and then what happened from that point?

AN: I moved back to El Paso about '94, and then, like I said, I did things like teach school for a couple of years, three years, then this came around, this kind of—this business.

KM: What is this business? Tell me—

AN: In '99.

KM: And the name of the business?

AN: Native Contractors.

KM: And tell me a little bit about what the business does.

AN: Okay. We started off ten years ago as Native Landscaping doing maintenance work for the government at Fort Bliss. And that's the way we started, and then we started to expand into Houston doing the hospital in Houston and the cemetery, and then when my son came in, in '04, in one year, I think we picked up like eight contracts, long term, three to five years, in Florida and Georgia where we're doing, even, burials. We take all the grass out and install (de??) turf. We realign the headstones on a daily basis. We bury people, too. So it just expanded from Texas to Florida, Tennessee, Georgia, Virginia, Louisiana. We have long-term contracts between three—between a year to five years.

KM: How did you decide to start the business?

AN: I just kind of stumbled into it. I heard about the 8a program in El Paso.

KM: The what program?

AN: 8(a). It's for minorities.

KM: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about how that helped you?

AN: Oh, yes. It helps you break into doing work for the government. They put you into their database and you have to get everything lined up. CCR and what do you call that? All your certifications.

KM: And did anyone help you learn about this, or was it the SBA in El Paso that helped you?

AN: Yeah, the SBA.

KM: Do you remember who helped you at the SBA?

AN: Jose Campos.

KM: And he helped you start the business or the paperwork?

AN: Well, first, yeah, he helped me get started and I submitted my paperwork to SBA. Of course, they disqualified me twice, two or three times, but I'm very persistent, and eventually the third time—

KM: Why did they disqualify you the first two times? Do you know?

AN: Because there was a gap when I moved to El Paso and I really couldn't justify being employed, you know? And they kept—they would knock me out, you know? But then I ran into this other guy, you might know, Roque Segura, from the community college, and he said, "No", he told me how to do it, so I did because the application had to be approved here in Texas and in Washington. So finally it was approved in Washington, but if Roque Segura hadn't given me that hint, you know—

KM: Did you just talk to him?

AN: Yeah.

KM: What made you—so talking to him opened up other—

AN: Yes.

KM: And how did you decide to get into the type of business you're in?

AN: Like I said, it was just—the very first contract we got Fort Bliss, which is maintenance, keeping the grounds mowed and watered. It was the very first. I would have taken anything, janitorial, whatever they threw at me.

KM: Did you know people Fort Bliss?

AN: No, because these contracts come direct from Washington at the SBA office.

KM: Did you have any dealings with the chamber of commerce that helped you?

AN: I've always joined. I was always around the Hispanic Chamber.

KM: So you were a member of the Hispanic Chamber?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Did you attend any of the seminars?

AN: Yes.

KM: Did they help you?

AN: Oh, sure.

KM: What was the deciding factor that made you go this route to open your own business?

AN: Well, I'd always been self employed, like I said, for almost thirty years in real estate and had the farm almost fifteen years, and real estate, five that's twenty years. I've always been self-employed, and when I wanted to go work, like, for the school district, I was really disappointed. I mean I said—it was bad. I said, I couldn't work under those conditions, you know? When I went to work at Bel Air, in what, (two or four??) I think, that's when they fired a bunch of the teachers. You had to move the teachers out of the way to get to your classroom

because it was that bad. They would block you. They would put little—sabotage you, and it's still ugly. I was reading last week here in Dallas where some of the schools have like six hundred problems a year with students that they have to expel. Six hundred a year. Some had four hundred, some had five hundred, some have six hundred, where they have to expel or apply discipline. It's getting to the point that it's bad. And I wish we could find a way to—and I think we, the Latinos, are at fault a lot.

KM: Tell me why.

AN: We don't—the parents don't supervise their kids. I think that—it's bad. It's really bad.

KM: Do you think it can be corrected?

AN: Yes.

KM: How?

AN: By everybody getting involved. A lot of people don't get involved.

KM: Why do you think that is?

AN: I don't know. I cannot think that way.

KM: You're very observant, so that's why I'm asking.

AN: I cannot think why people don't want to—I'm not sorry (I, myself??). Whenever I see anything, anywhere, that's wrong, I'll bring it up. At least I got it off my chest. It's up to the people to do whatever they want, you know?

KM: Okay, so let's focus a little bit more on your Native—so you started with Native Landscapers and then you changed the name?

AN: We changed the name. We started landscaping in '99, 1999. In '04, when my son came in, to work for me, we changed the name to contractors because we were getting different kinds of work, like cemetery work, and burying people, and that's why landscaping wouldn't fit.

KM: How did you start the business in '99? How many employees? Did you—

AN: When I started the business, I had four employees.

KM: And you had an office in El Paso?

AN: At my home.

KM: Okay, out of your home? Okay. And how is it, the beginning years of starting your own business?

AN: It was tight.

KM: What were the challenges?

AN: Because I had never before had employees. I mean, I had employees at the farm, but they were seasonal. See? But full time employees I've never had them. Working for the government, or—I'd never done that.

KM: What were the benefits of having government contracts, or the negatives?

AN: Well, the benefits, there's always work, and like I would tell me workers, "When you're a good worker, you never have to look for work. Work looks for you."

And we did real good. I had a good crew, and people would tell us at Fort Bliss. They would tell us, You know what? I've been working here twenty, twenty-five years, and this place has never looked this beautiful." And I would tell them, "That's what we're here for, and we're not going to do it ugly."

KM: What kind of manager are you? Because obviously your workers took pride in the work they did.

AN: Yeah. Yeah. I like to treat people the way I wanted to be treated. I'm firm, but I also try to be good to my employees.

KM: What would you say is your motto of your business?

AN: My motto?

KM: What would you stand by?

AN: Just every day, take care of the little problems every day, every day. Because if you don't, by the end of the month, there's little problems, gonna get as big as this room, but you just stay on top of it on a daily basis. Answering the phone and things like that daily, daily. Everything runs smoothly.

KM: At the beginning, when you started your business, Fort Bliss, was that your only—was that your only contract?

AN: Yes. Yeah, for about four years, that was my only contract.

KM: Was it hard being the only contract?

AN: Pardon me?

KM: Was it hard for you having it as your only contract?

AN: No, it wasn't. I was surviving. And then when my son came to help me, and thank God he volunteered. He would try to help me part time, and then he finally saw the daylight. He saw the light at the end of the tunnel. That's when he said, "Dad, I'd rather go work for you." I said, "Okay."

KM: And what is your son's name?

AN: Macadam.

KM: And why was he instrumental in helping grow the business?

AN: Because he had just graduated from Texas Tech, and then he worked for two years selling cell phone service. And, of course, that was a lot of travel. And, of course, he was making good money, but he was also being disappointed because they would promise him bonuses and they wouldn't give it to them, so that was very disappointing. That's when he decided to work with me.

KM: Is it hard working with family?

AN: I try to make it easy.

KM: How do you make it easy?

AN: Huh?

KM: How do you do that?

AN: To be patient with everybody. I don't like to yell at anybody. I just like to let everybody work at their pace and have the respect for them.

KM: So you don't try to micromanage them?

AN: Sometimes I have to get involved with whatever I have to do.

KM: At what point do you decide to get involved?

AN: Whenever I see something that I think is—you know, every day things change because we're at fourteen different locations.

KM: How do you handle fourteen different locations?

AN: Every place, we have a crew that's there permanent. And now here with the office, you know. I feel now that I do less work than I did when I had one location. When I had one location, I mean I was wearing too many hats, you know? Now that I have fourteen locations, I'm in my office saying, "And what am I going to do now?" Because, thank God, we're organized now.

KM: Do you travel to the different locations?

AN: Sometimes.

KM: Do you hire the people or is that your son that hires them?

AN: My son hires everybody here in the office and in all the other locations. He has really taken the reins of the business.

KM: So when did you expand and what was your deciding factor to expand?

AN: It just happened so fast. Like I said, in one year, you know, in '04 when my son joined, before I knew it, he had picked up eight contracts.

KM: And how do you think he did this? Is this—

AN: He just focused on the Internet, all the government jobs are posted on the Internet. He just focused going after the work. That's all he did.

KM: So many of the contracts and everything?

AN: Yeah, and all the people (paper??) work.

KM: Do you have any troubles with—any issues with banks when you first started?

AN: Oh, yeah. Banks.

KM: Tell me a little bit about that if you want to.

AN: Yeah, well they're very tough. They're going to protect themselves 100 percent. Like, I've been with Chase for over ten years, and they've got all my history, all my accounts, and they still give us a hard time.

KM: Do you think they are more hesitant to loan money at this point.

AN: Yeah, probably.

KM: Did you ever borrow money from family, friends, or anything?

AN: No. I had to refinance my home in El Paso. It was paid for.

KM: Is that how you handled the financing?

AN: Yes.

KM: How did you grow the business?

AN: How did we grow? Like I said, in '04 when we just went from here, two contracts to about ten. But it happens fast. My son was just focusing on the contracts. That's all he did. Before we knew it, we were up there.

KM: Did you have a business—a formalized business plan when you first started?

AN: No.

KM: Okay. What were any major obstacles that you encountered during the startup when you first started your business in '99?

AN: When I first started? Of course, trying to familiarize yourself with employees, with government people, and contracts, and rules, and especially with the government, you know? They've got all kinds of rules. How tall to cut the grass, and—

KM: Really?

AN: All that business, yeah.

KM: Only a certain height?

AN: Yeah.

KM: And how did you learn these rules? Where did you go?

AN: As we went along, you know.

KM: Would they tell you that this is—

AN: It was in the contract.

KM: It was in the contract?

AN: It would be—what do you call it? The work—the scope of work.

KM: The scope—okay, and how did you—I mean, did you pass these rules down? Do they all vary at different locations?

AN: Basically, they're about the same. They're all different in all the places that you go to. Every director or whatever, the different cemetery, or hospital, they'll have their rules, too.

KM: Do you find that being Hispanic helped, or hindered, you in your development of your business?

AN: Helped.

KM: Tell me how, please?

AN: How? Because, let's see. Because I'm going to do the work as good as I can, or better than anybody else, regardless of what color they are. The work speaks for yourself.

KM: What would you describe as your major success as a business owner either in your Windy Farms or in your—

AN: Persistence.

KM: Persistence? Do you think that's an internal, from yourself?

AN: Yeah.

KM: How do you think that was established in you? Is it your upbringing?

AN: Yeah, your upbringing, where you live without.

KM: Do you think that made the difference?

AN: Yeah. Because you want something, you know what it is not to have.

KM: Do you think that's the difference between the generation now and your generation?

AN: Right. Yes.

KM: What role has your family played in the growth of your business?

AN: Oh, 100 percent. Right now, my two sons are working with me, and my ex-wife too.

KM: Okay, can you tell me your son's names please?

AN: Eddie. He's thirty-nine years old. He takes care of Florida for us, and Macadam who is thirty years old. He takes care of everything else in our headquarters here in Dallas.

KM: Okay, and your ex-wife? Sorry, got to put her name in too since you mentioned her.

AN: She's the human director—human resources.

KM: And her name?

AN: Judy.

KM: Judy, okay. What percentage of your customer base is Hispanic?

AN: Customer base?

KM: Um-hm. It's probably kind of not—and you can say none and it's not relevant.

AN: None.

KM: Okay, and as a business owner, have you ever experienced any discrimination?

AN: No, because like I said, I don't think so because I always—when I go after something, I know I have a good track record, and I'm conscious of the work that we do, and we do it right. So I have nothing to fear.

KM: Okay. Looking back on your different businesses, would you have done anything differently?

AN: No, probably not.

KM: Okay. What dreams do you have for the future? What are your goals for the future?

AN: My goals for the future? Let's see. I guess, for my sons to continue. My son's—Eddie's also a veteran, so maybe—because that's what has helped me a lot because in April, when I started, I had to be an 8(a) minority, and that phased out.

It was for nine years, so I graduated from that program about a year ago. But now, being a disabled vet, they also helped me with the contracts.

KM: Do you think these type of programs are helpful?

AN: Yes.

KM: Do you think more people need to become aware of them or—

AN: Sure.

KM: And how do you think that should happen?

AN: Just get involved with the SBA.

KM: Do you think most small business owners know to do these steps, or how do you think—

AN: No. They don't know.

KM: And why do you think that is?

AN: Because they don't ask questions. They don't talk to people.

KM: You think that's what makes you different from the rest? Talking to them?

AN: Yeah.

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

AN: Just focus on what you want to do, on the work, not the money. Focus on the work.

KM: And how do you treat your employees and what makes you different from other business leaders?

AN: How do I treat them?

KM: Um-hm.

AN: With respect, you know, and awarding them with bonuses and good wages.

KM: Do you feel the business climate today is better or worse for Hispanic business owners than when you started your company?

AN: I think it's better now.

KM: Tell me why.

AN: Because—especially for the Hispanics?

KM: Um-hm.

AN: Because we're used to having our culture, working. Most of us come from backgrounds that the mother was always at home, she didn't work, and we had—they were large families. There was enough, just to eat, but not enough money for luxuries. So we all have that in the back of our minds that we have to work a little bit harder.

KM: Okay. I know you wanted your son to talk a little bit about the business and the business aspect from 2004 and present?

AN: Yeah.

KM: Yeah, sorry. Surprise. Welcome back.

2nd: Hi.

KM: Okay. I'm just going to move this a little. I'm just going to switch. I'm going to pause it.

2nd: Pause if you want.

[End of Interview]