

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEX DE CASTROVERDE**

An Oral History Conducted by Monserrath Hernández

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Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada  
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada*.

Claytee D. White  
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## PREFACE



Alex De Castroverde grew up proud of his Cuban ancestry and embraced his parents' stories of coming to be Americans.

Both parents, Vivian and Waldo De Castroverde, were teenagers as Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba. Waldo actively fought against the Castro regime as a CIA trained paratrooper; during which he was arrested and was imprisoned for two years. Vivian was one of thousands of young Cubans who quietly entered the United States through Operation Peter Pan in the early 1960s.

Alex's paternal grandfather was a lawyer in Cuba. His father chose law after a brief stint as a dealer at the MGM Grand in Reno. In time he relocated to Las Vegas and built his law practice. Like a beacon in the desert, both Alex and his younger brother Orlando followed in their father's footsteps and became attorneys.

Alex was born in Miami, spent his childhood in Reno, and has become deeply rooted in southern Nevada. He serves on boards for Cristo Rey St. Viator High School, Guinn Center, and Las Vegas Business Academy.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Alex De Castroverde

April 17, 2019

in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Monserrath Hernández

Preface.....	iv
Cuban American identity; parents immigrated during Fidel Castro years; born in Miami; father’s Bay of Pigs involvement and autobiography <i>Que La patria Se Sienta Orgullosa; That the Homeland Would Feel Proud</i> ; family move to Reno in 1978; growing up in Reno with Spanish as first language.....	1 – 5
Father becomes a lawyer; Christmas holidays; 1992 family moves to Las Vegas; overview of his education and friends from Reno. His post-high school years and both he and his brother Orlando becoming attorneys (1999 and 2000 respectively).....	6 – 10
Alex, his father and his brother form the De Castroverde Law Group; about his father’s firm in Reno and Hispanic community, immigration law. More about his father’s autobiography and a Spanish novel, <i>Ciculo de la Muerte</i> .....	11 – 16
Feelings about Cuba; immigration of additional family members. Moving to new office space from the small house location; Spanish language commercial; Senator Richard Bryan’s childhood home and his internship with Bryan; now in multiple locations.....	16 – 20
Immigration law; Cuban culture and traditions. Serves on boards: Cristo Rey St. Viator High School, Guinn Center, and Las Vegas Business Academy. Vision for his law firm.....	21 – 26
Hiring lawyers; Boyd Law School. Thoughts about the identifier “Latinx”. More details about Cristo Rey St. Viator; the Cuban-American community; what make Las Vegas home.....	27 – 32
Reflects on being an attorney.....	33 – 34



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**My name is Monserrath Hernandez. It is April 17, 2019. We are in the office of De Castroverde Law Group here with...**

***Barbara Tabach.***

**And Alex De Castroverde.**

Correct.

**Can you spell out your name for us?’**

It’s D-E, space, capital C-A-S-T-R-O-V-E-R-D-E.

**What about Alex, can you spell that?**

A-L-E-X.

***What does De Castroverde mean?***

My dad used to say it means SOB and green.

**How do you identify?**

Cuban American. My mom was born in Cuba, my dad was born in Cuba, and I was born in Miami, Florida.

**What part of Cuba are they from?**

Havana.

**When did they leave Cuba?**

They both left shortly after Fidel Castro took power. My mom was known as a Peter Pan kid when she was fifteen years old. A lot of parents in Cuba realized that the Castro regime was taking over private property, was taking over the press, was indoctrinating the children in schools with a communism doctrine, and they didn’t want to have their children raised in that type of world. Fortunately, the Catholic Church here in the United States had a program that they took



these children from Cuba while their parents figured out a way how they could subsequently leave Cuba.

As a result, my mom was fortunate enough to become part of that program. When she was fifteen years old, she was put on a plane, never knowing whether she was going to see her mom and dad again. She flew to Miami. She was eventually housed in a boarding school in Virginia, a high school in Virginia. My mom went to a Catholic high school in Virginia. She saw her parents not until three years later when they were able to leave Cuba and join her and her brothers in the United States.

My father also left Cuba because of Fidel Castro. My father lived a fascinating life where he was involved in the Bay of Pigs. He was nineteen years old and became a paratrooper and was trained in Guatemala.

### **By the CIA, right?**

They were trained by the CIA. Obviously, as you know, the invasion was a failure. He ended up being captured and he was sentenced, along with other individuals who were captured, to over twenty years in prison, but he served close to two years before he was released. What's interesting about my father is after he was captured and was serving time in prison in Cuba, during the negotiations between Fidel Castro and the Kennedy administration to release these inmates who were trained by the CIA, my father was asked to serve in the negotiations committee. Two times he was released from prison and flew to the United States along with seven other prisoners and relayed the offers that Fidel Castro was requiring in exchange for their release. Each time he voluntarily flew back to Cuba to go back to prison. The second time that he went to the United States in Washington, D.C., it became evident that the negotiations weren't going to be successful. As a result, two of the inmates decided to stay in the United States and

say, *I'm not going to go back to be a political prisoner in Cuba*, but my dad flew back both times and went back to prison. As a result, he was admired by the Cuban American community, certainly by his inmates for not abandoning them.

Eventually they were released. Eventually the negotiations worked. James Donovan was the attorney who was involved with the negotiations. He was known in that movie "Bridge of Spies." He was an attorney who was involved in those negotiations as well. After the "Bridge of Spies" incident, he was involved with the negotiations of the release of the Bay of Pig prisoners and my dad was one of those prisoners.

### **Where in Miami did they settle?**

They settled near Coral Gables. My mom's parents lived in L.A. They moved from L.A. and Miami, back and forth. My older brother and sister were born in L.A. In the early seventies my mom and dad moved back to Miami and that's where my younger brother and I were born. I was born in 1972 and him in 1974. What's interesting, in the early seventies my father was still involved in a lot of anti-Castro activities. My dad was involved in activities that took him away from this country for weeks sometimes or several weeks even though he had a wife and four kids at home. My dad wrote an autobiography on his life, *Que La patria Se Sienta Orgullosa; That the Homeland Would Feel Proud* is the name of the book. He writes a lot about these anti-Castro, anti-communist activities that he was involved with trying to incite some sort of change in the Cuban government.

My mom at some point confronted my dad with him leaving, with him being involved with these organizations and says, "I'm going to leave you and the four kids and I'm going back to Los Angeles and you can come with me, or you can decide to stay in Miami and stay with your Cuban cause." My mom gave my dad an ultimatum to stay with the Cuban movement, the

freedom movement that he was involved with in Miami for several years, or give all that up and move to Los Angeles. Ultimately, my dad decided to keep his family and that's why we ended up on the West Coast. Initially they moved to Los Angeles in 1977, and my dad gave up all those activities he was involved with for so many years.

Shortly thereafter, in 1978, a cellmate in the Bay of Pigs was a casino manager of a casino that opened up in Reno called the MGM Grand. At the time, if my memory is correct, it had the largest square footage for any casino in the world. My dad's friend was casino manager of the MGM Grand and, as I say, they were cellmates in the Bay of Pigs, and he offered my dad a job. He says, "Move to Reno, Nevada and I'll give you a job dealing cards and then I'll move you up in the casino business and you'll have a good future for your family." That's why we ended up in Northern Nevada in 1978.

**What was your childhood like growing up?**

It was great. There weren't that many Hispanic families at all and there certainly weren't that many Cuban families; there were some. We had a great childhood. My mom and dad gave us everything that they even couldn't afford to give us. We never wanted for anything. My mom ended up becoming a dealer as well. They worked overtime, so we were latchkey kids; we went to school and we went home while our parents were working. But we never wanted for anything. They sacrificed everything for us. They never made us feel like we needed anything. To the contrary. They always made us feel like we were fortunate, we were blessed to live in Nevada, to live in this country because of all the opportunity it provides. Not a day went by that they didn't remind us of all the opportunities that we had contrasted to the way life was in communist Cuba under the Castros.

**Did you speak Spanish at home?**

We did, yes. In fact, Spanish was my first language. I did kindergarten in Los Angeles. When I did kindergarten in Los Angeles, it was mostly in Spanish; it was more Spanish than English. Then when I went to first grade in Reno, I had a tremendously hard time in first grade in Reno to the point where I flunked first grade in Reno and I had to repeat first grade. In large part, it was because of my inability to speak English as consistent or as good as everyone else, I guess.

**How did that make you feel; that experience of having to...**

It didn't make me feel good having to repeat first grade; however, as I continued to get older and as I became a college graduate, after I had finished law school, after I became a lawyer, I am actually proud of the fact that I was able to reach the levels of success I've reached despite the fact that it took me two years to finish the first grade.

**That's awesome.**

***Do you still speak Spanish?***

I do, but I speak like a gringo. I speak like someone who lived in Reno, Nevada for the larger part of my life. I understand Spanish perfect. I just speak with an American accent.

**What were your parents like?**

They were great. Everything we have here in Las Vegas is due to our parents' sacrifices. My dad, shortly after he got a job dealing twenty-one—and my mom got a job next to him and they both were dealing twenty-one at the MGM Grand—shortly after he got his job and he thought he had a bright future in Reno, Nevada, despite the fact there were not many Hispanics, he thought his future was bright because a very good friend who he served in the Bay of Pigs with was casino manager, so he thought he had a very bright future. But his friend got fired within the first couple of years that my dad was working at the MGM. My dad, as a result, thought, *there goes my*

*future; there goes my future in Nevada; there goes my future in Reno; there goes my future in the gaming industry.*

He got very lucky that right around that time there was a small new law school that opened up in Reno, Nevada that was initially called the Old School of Law. My dad's dad was a lawyer in Cuba. My dad always wanted to be a lawyer, but never had the opportunity having four kids, having financial obligations, never had the opportunity to actually go to law school. However, when this law school opened up, he was able to go to law school at night and continue to work in the daytime. My dad went to law school at night, continued to work as a dealer in the daytime, continued to work overtime.

We saw him sacrifice for the benefit of his family, and there were sacrifices, tremendous amount of sacrifices: paying bills, providing for his family. But he did it with his head held high and he did it with letting his kids know that we were fortunate to be in a situation that he was able to do it, again, contrasting that with the situation of his home country. It was always top of mind, what was going on in Cuba. We were always waiting for a free Cuba. We were always waiting for change with the Castro regime. That was always top of mind. We were always contrasting the opportunity we had to growing up in Reno, Nevada to that of what was going on in the country in which they were born. My parents always instilled that in us, how lucky we were to live in this country; how fortunate we were for the opportunities it provided. They were always there for us, giving us what we needed to accomplish that. We never felt like second class even though there were not many Hispanics growing up in Reno at the time, even though we didn't have much money relatively speaking. They were living paycheck to paycheck working hard to make ends meet. We never felt like we weren't worthy of obtaining success in the future

or we wanted for anything. It's very much to the contrary. We always felt tremendously blessed for what we had and, more importantly, what we could obtain in the future.

**Any favorite family traditions that you celebrated growing up?**

Christmas Eve is always a big night in our household. It's really cool thinking back to the days in Reno, and it's mostly filled with Americans, non-Hispanics from Reno coming to our house and being proud to take part in the Hispanic tradition of Christmas Eve and very festive household.

**What kind of foods do you eat?**

Christmas Eve: the pork, the chicken, the black beans and rice, the plantains, the flan for dessert. In our household it was always more than enough food, always an abundance. Even though, like I said, they were struggling to make ends meet, there was always an abundance of food.

**When did your family move to Las Vegas?**

My youngest brother graduated high school in 1992. My parents were always waiting for all of us to graduate high school before they moved down to Las Vegas. My dad passed away in 2014. When he was alive they were very outgoing; they were very festive; they had a tremendous amount of friends from all over the world. Despite the fact that they had a lot of friends in Reno and they had a lot of fun in Reno, they always wanted for more, more in regards to just their social life, and I think that's why they wanted to move to Las Vegas; they thought there was a lot more of that in Las Vegas, more Hispanic culture, closer Hispanic friends in Las Vegas and also in Southern California where they would be closer. They waited for my little brother to graduate from high school, and, once he did, my dad first opened up a law office in Vegas in, I believe, 1993. Shortly thereafter, in 1993, my mom and dad moved to Las Vegas, at which time my younger brother and I were still in school; I was attending University of Nevada and my brother was wrestling in college in California.

**Your education: what schools did you go to?**

I went to Roger Corbett Elementary School in Reno. Like I said, what's cool is when we went there—certainly in my classes or my grade—we were the only Hispanics. Then we went to Vaughn Middle School; the same, very few Hispanics. I became a good friend with him in middle school; he came in the Mariel Boatlift in 1980; his name is Marv Martinez and he was one of the few Hispanics at Vaughn Middle School at the time. Marv Martinez was a Mariel Boatlift and his parents were porters at the MGM. Because they were from Cuba and they were porters at the MGM, his parents became friends with my parents and that's how I became friends with him. What's a cool side note is Marv Martinez is now vice president nationwide of Dick's Sporting Goods and before that he was vice president nationwide of Sears/Kmart, which is a really cool success story that I'm proud of. We grew up together and I've seen his success. His parents were the same as mine; they sacrificed everything for the success of their children. But now those two schools, Roger Corbett and Vaughn are almost entirely Hispanic. If you look at the statistics now, I think it's probably over 90 Hispanic, which is remarkable.

Then I went to Reed High School. After I graduated from high school, I went to Truckee Meadows. I was never a good student, starting in first grade. I started in first grade and I wasn't a good student. Throughout middle school and high school I wasn't a good student. I had to go to community college. I went to Truckee Meadows Community College for a year. I graduated high school with probably like a one-point-six GPA.

This is something I think is very significant in my life and I remember it clearly. After I graduated from high school—Marv Martinez is one of them—I had a lot of good friends who were really good athletes and they were going on to universities in other states and I was so sad that they were going to universities in other states and they were going to have fun in a fun

college. I remember talking to my dad in regards to what do you want to do. *What do you want to do with your life?* I was like, “Well, I’m not particularly good at anything. I’m not particularly good at sciences, particularly good at math or history, so I don’t really know. But one thing I’d like to do is I’d like to be a lawyer.” I saw my dad work really hard to become a lawyer and I worked at his law office while I was in high school and I enjoyed seeing him in court. I go, “One thing I’d like to do is become a lawyer. But, Dad, I can’t become a lawyer. You know my grades. I’ve never done good in school.” My dad was like, “Of course you can become a lawyer, of course.” I just remember that certainty he had. He was like, “Of course.” He goes, “You don’t do good in school because you don’t try. You’ve just got to try.” I was like, “Well, these kids get such good grades and I don’t.” He was like, “Well, you need to try harder than them. Just try harder than them.”

That conversation was after I graduated from high school, before I started any college. It just sticks. It’s engrained in my memory.

I signed up at Truckee Meadows Community College. The friends I was closest with were all going to universities in other states, so I didn’t have any close friends still in Reno at the time. I just grinded. I just studied. I took, I believe, seventeen units my first semester and just studied, studied, studied. I couldn’t believe when I got the report card back that I got a 4.0. I was like, “Oh, Dad, look, I got a 4.0.” And he was like, “Yes, of course. You studied. They’re not necessarily smarter than you; you just worked hard and you studied.” Then the second semester I got all A’s again with the exception of one B-plus, which I think to this day I should have gotten an A. It was subjective; it was an English paper. I think I should have gotten an A. But with that said, I did really well my first year of college and I was able to transfer to UNR.



Then I transferred to UNR and had a great time at University of Nevada. I loved it. After my first year at University of Nevada, I stopped grinding as much academically. I stopped studying as hard. I still graduated from college, but that's one of the reasons I didn't go to an elite law school.

Nevertheless, I loved the law school I went to. I went to law school in Southern Florida, Nova Southeastern University. I would have liked to have gone to University of Miami, but I took the LSATs really late in the year and I missed the deadlines for most schools. I had Miami very close by and Fort Lauderdale very close by. It's a small city called Davie, Florida, in between Miami and Fort Lauderdale. I had a great time in law school.

**After law school what did you do?**

I graduated law school in 1999. I passed the bar exam on the first time, which I'm very proud of because I flunked the first grade. What's cool is that my brother did exceptionally well on the bar exam as well. It's my understanding he had the best multi-state score in the entire state the year that he took it. My dad only was able to study for the bar exam for two weeks while he was working as a dealer. He was able to take two weeks off. He had four kids. During those two weeks that he took off, he studied for the bar exam and he passed the bar exam the first time. He had a very heavy accent, Spanish being his first language. I always was tremendously proud of my dad for passing the bar exam the first time.

**You and your brother were in law school at the same time?**

He was a year behind me. He went to law school at University of Mississippi. He was always a better student than me. Orlando has a very good memory and his grades contrasted mine; he always did exceptionally well. He didn't have to study very hard. He just had a very good

photographic memory that he did well. He was also a wrestler. He wrestled at Cal State Fullerton and then he went to law school at University of Mississippi.

I graduated law school in 1999 and became a lawyer in 1999. He graduated law school in 2000 and he became a lawyer in 2000. After I graduated from law school, I worked for my dad for one year and it was just him in a small little house down the street from Gorman on Maryland Parkway. Then my brother was clerking for a chief judge here in Southern Nevada, Judge Lee Gates, who was great to my dad and told my dad, "I'll give your son an opportunity to clerk with me." I worked with my dad for a year. He had a small, little office with my sister being his secretary.

After a year of working with him, I wanted to get some other experience. He was a little fed up with me telling him how to change his ways or change his office, and he was like, "Feel free to go get some experience." I worked for an insurance defense firm that had their main offices in Pasadena, California.

My brother, after he got done clerking for Judge Gates, started working with my dad in 2001. When my brother started working with my dad in 2001, he moved from the little house on Maryland Parkway that was down the street from [Bishop] Gorman—and they rented that house—and moved two houses down so that house could have an office space for my brother. I remember being so proud that they were able to move into a little bit bigger office on Maryland Parkway. My brother worked there with my dad until about 2005.

It was interesting. One of the things with my dad was when I worked with my dad starting in 1999, I wanted him to change the way he did things. He was not going to change; he was going to keep doing it his own way. That's one of the reasons we both decided it would be best for me to go and get experience at a bigger law firm.

When my brother started working with my dad, he did it a little bit different. He goes, “Well, you’re not going to change. I’ll just open up a different law office within your law office. Dad, you don’t need to change. You keep doing what you’re doing and I’ll just do what I’m doing.”

Over the next two to three years, I saw my brother doing really well, and I was like, *this is what I always wanted, to be part of the family law firm.* That was always my dream.

Back in 2005, there was a building; it was the old Front Boy Building in front of Huntridge Circle Park on Maryland Parkway, for sale. My brother and I bought that old Front Boy Building with the intentions of renovating it and making it a little bit more attractive and make it suitable for an office. We bought it in 2005, but at that time it wasn’t ready, so I moved into the little house that my dad and my brother were renting and my dad and I actually had to share a desk and we shared a computer for close to a year and a half. In 2005 is when we created the name De Castroverde Law Group and we started working under the name of De Castroverde Law Group. Eventually my dad’s law office and my brother’s law office became De Castroverde Law Group and my dad became of counsel. We didn’t really have to change the way he does things. He had his ways of doing things and he was happy just seeing my brother and I do things the way we wanted to do things and build the business and we built it under De Castroverde Law Group starting in 2005.

***Talk about, if you can, what kind of attorney was he? What kind of law did he get into?***

Great question. My dad, when he first opened up his law office in Reno, it was as a result of the Reagan amnesty. There was at the time, 1989 I believe, the Hispanic community was growing in Northern Nevada and there were immigrants who needed assistance with amnesty paperwork. When he first started he started doing a lot of immigration paperwork. But then, just to pay the

bills and to keep the lights on, when you're a solo practitioner, you do everything, so my dad would do everything. You figure out a way to do it whether it's wills or a trust or family law or criminal defense or personal injury. He would do a little bit of everything. My dad would have been the first one to tell you he's a great lawyer, but a horrible businessman. "I'm a great lawyer, but a horrible businessman." He was loved by his clients and it was to his detriment; he would do things for free. Cases would cost him money. We would laugh. We were like, "You take on this case. Not only do you not make money, you've lost money." But to this day my brother and I are still reaping the rewards from my dad's actions; until this day we still get clients who come to us because of what our dad did for them and for their families. He may not have money from it then, but now we're getting the benefit of continuing to get the additional clientele twenty, thirty years later.

My dad was always there for his clients. My mom used to always say, "You don't charge enough. You need to grow your business and you need to be able to keep the lights on." That was the struggle and he would have been the first to say it was hard. I tell my team at my office, my dad had obstacle after obstacle after obstacle trying to grow a law practice. He didn't really have a lot of mentors. He certainly didn't have someone looking over his back telling him, this is the best way to do things; this is how you should do things. He made a lot of mistakes and that's why he ran into all these obstacles. Whereas my dad had obstacle after obstacle, my brother and I have the wind at our back due to all his sacrifices. The best way of learning is mistakes. You learn from your mistakes. I view mistakes as a blessing because that's the way you get better. The mindset we have at our office is, hey, I want to be better today than I was yesterday; I want to be better tomorrow than I am today. The way you're able to do it is identify mistakes and correct them and take steps to make sure we don't do them again. We learned through a lot of my

dad's mistakes. The way he ran the office, he tried to do a little of everything, and so now we try to specialize in certain areas we can be the best at and we can do it really well.

***How big was his office? You said he was a sole practitioner first.***

As a sole practitioner he had one or two people working for him.

***Is there an example that you can think of, of one of these stories that epitomizes his kindness?***

Oh, there's just countless. There are countless families that my dad would take on cases for nothing and would take them on for years without getting paid just because he felt it was the right thing to do. My mom used to get so upset that it used to cause so much turmoil in our home. She would look down the street and say, "Look at all these other attorneys and they're growing. They're charging. Look what the other attorneys charging. You should charge." I don't know if it was due to the fact that he got his law degree at an older age that he appreciated the responsibility that he had that much more, but he would give the shirt off his back for his clients and at his expense and at his family's expense.

***What was the name of his office?***

Law Offices of Waldo De Castroverde. On his business card it was Law Offices of Waldo De Castroverde and it would say Abogados [law] underneath. I think he had a business card that says Abogados, back slash, Bufete [firm]. Yes, I think he had one of the first Spanish-speaking commercials for an attorney in Nevada and certainly in Northern Nevada. His commercial was just him behind his desk saying, "I'll speak to you in your *propio idioma*." *I'll speak to you in your language.*

I always saw the opportunity as a young student in law school, even as a college student, because I worked in his office when I was in high school, when I was in college, and when I was in law school. His reception area was always full. Even though he wasn't making much money,

the reception area was always full. I always knew there was an opportunity for success in his office.

I am glad that before he passed away he got to see us grow. His very first secretary is still with us today. Because she's been here the longest, she is currently our office manager. She remembers when it was just her and my dad. She will tell you the weeks that went by that she didn't get paid, but she loved my dad and she continued to work for my dad. But it's pretty cool for her to see that we now have over sixty-five, close to seventy employees, close to fourteen lawyers. We have an office on Maryland Parkway, Tivoli Village, in Reno, Nevada, and it's all because of his sacrifices.

***He must have been very proud. You said he wrote an autobiography.***

Yes, he did.

***Is it in English or in Spanish or both?***

I just handed you a copy. I'll give you one. It's in Spanish. It got published and it got sold and distributed all over the world. One of my goals has been to translate it into English and to get it published in English. It's been a much more difficult task than I thought. I did hire somebody to translate it into English last year. Now I'm in the process of trying to get it edited. It needs to be condensed. It's a monumental book he wrote with a lot of names, a lot of history. It's a very difficult read. But my dad lived an absolutely fascinating life. I have spoken just a thin slice, just a pebble of the life that he lived. He lived an absolutely fascinating life.

***Did you know his parents, your grandparents?***

I did not because his father died of a heart attack when my dad's father was forty-two years old. My dad was only seven years old. My dad's brother died of a heart attack when my dad was in prison in the Bay of Pigs and my dad's brother was living in Miami at the time. My dad's brother

was thirty-seven years old. My dad's mom died of a heart attack when I was less than two years old, so I do not remember meeting his mom and I never met his father.

**What year did he write this autobiography?**

He wrote it—let me see when it says it got published.

*It says 1999 copyright.*

Yes, it got published in 1999. It took him, I think, at least three years to write it. He was working on it for a long time. He also published another book he wrote in Spanish while he was in law school. I think his first two years in law school, he published a novel, fiction; it's called *El Circulo de la Muerte; the Circle of Death*. The circle includes geography and has a map of Miami, Cuba, Nicaragua. He wrote that book as well while he was in law school. Like I said, he worked hard and he sacrificed a tremendous amount. In his autobiography it talks a lot of the sacrifices, and I didn't get into a lot of detail, but a lot of the sacrifices he made in his pursuit of a free Cuba. That's the reason we ended up on the West Coast. He sacrificed a lot. My mom certainly sacrificed a lot allowing her husband, willingly and unwillingly, just to be involved in all this anti-Castro activities throughout the early seventies and late sixties.

*We should put this in the library.*

**Yes, we should.**

*Did you ever go to Cuba to visit?*

No. I have mixed feelings with that knowing that my dad fought in the Bay of Pigs, knowing that my dad devoted a big part of his life, in part his entire life towards getting rid of Fidel and Raúl Castro and having a free Cuba. I have mixed feelings in regards to, do I want to go now? Raúl Castro is still in charge. It's still a totalitarian country. They still absolutely oppress political dissidents. There's no freedom there. On that one hand, I'd just rather wait for a free Cuba. On

the other hand, I'm forty-six years old and I've waited all these years and at some point I would like to go. I'd like to see the country that my parents were born. I'm torn. I go back and forth. If I go—I've tried to persuade my mom since my dad passed away—I'd like to go with mom so she could be the historian. I know she's not going to be around forever, so I've tried to persuade her that perhaps it's best that we go and you could share your memories with me, but she feels strongly that she will not return until there is a free Cuba. She has zero interest or desire to go. She knows how much my dad sacrificed and she just couldn't live with herself to go and be any part of rewarding through her dollars the Cuban government that's in place right now.

**How do your parents imagine a free Cuba? What would that entail for them?**

Good question. Democracy, not oppression, no Castros, no communism, no socialism.

**Did your family keep in touch with the family that stayed behind?**

Little by little almost all our family came, so there was no family behind. I think my entire adult life there's been no family left behind. Shortly after my dad was released from prison, his family came to the United States, and my mother's as well, shortly after she got done with high school. My mom's mom's siblings, I think there were some siblings that stayed, but we had zero communication as kids growing up. I think they were communists and my mom's mom had no interest in even continuing the relationship, if my memory is correct.

**When you and your brother opened the office in 2005, what was that experience like, the renovation? How did you attract clientele?**

I was really excited. Like I said, I was really excited because we always saw the opportunity. My dad's lobby was always full, so I always saw the opportunity. My dad always provided great customer service. We bought that old Front Boy Building and our goal was to renovate it to make it look really nice. On the stretch of Maryland Parkway from St. Louis to Charleston,



there's a lot of older houses that are converted into offices, but they still look like an older house. When we bought this Front Boy Building in front of Circle Park, we were really excited that we could be the first office building on that stretch that actually looks like an office; that looks like a professional building. When we bought it we were really excited we were going to renovate it and make it look like a real nice, sharp, professional building and put our name outside of it.

Once we finished the construction, I remember doing a commercial in Spanish, which we aired on Telemundo and Univision, and that commercial included my brother, me and my father. The thing of the commercial is: we'll treat you like family. That was really a core value of our whole office; we're going to treat each other like family because we were family. It was literally me and my dad sharing offices before we moved into that building, working along with my brother. But, more importantly, we're going to treat our clients like family. We always thought if we continued doing what my dad did, and he treated his clients like family, but we're smarter in regards to how to run a business, we were always confident we could be successful. That was our first step in 2005 when we bought that building. When we finished renovations we moved in there about 2007.

Even before we moved in there, we started in that little house where me and my dad shared literally an office and a desk and a computer and we started to hire more people because we kept attracting more clients. I remember telling those individuals we hired, "This is our plan. This is the schematic design of the building we're renovating down the street and we're going to move into a nice building. We're going to have a nice building. We're going to grow." We started growing even before we moved into that building.

It was a single-story building in 2007. Eventually we bought the little lot property next door to it, which also fronted Huntridge Circle Park. It was an old residence converted into an

office. I think before we bought it they tried to have like a Mail Boxes Etc., but it wasn't Mail Boxes Etc.; it was just their own brand for having individual mailboxes in this building. We bought that building because we ran out of space in our current building and we needed to expand. Initially we were going to do two separate buildings side by side, but we decided just to expand our existing single-story building into a two-story building, but we had to tear down that existing office next door. What's interesting about that existing office next door, I think before we bought it or around the time that we bought it, we learned that it was Senator [Richard] Bryan's childhood home. We absolutely adore Senator Bryan.

When I was in college and my dad had a small office in Reno—I can't remember if he had it in Reno and Vegas at the time, but it was my sophomore year of college, my first year at University of Nevada. My dad went to a small, little event with Hispanic business individuals in Reno and he met Senator Bryan. My dad, obviously as a proud father of sons, was talking about that one of his sons was at University of Nevada. Senator Richard Bryan at the time says, "I'll get your son an internship in Washington, D.C."

I remember my dad being so proud when he came home that night and was eager to tell me that Senator Bryan would get me an internship in Washington, D.C. I was thinking, *yeah, that's not really going to happen*. But he says you have to submit your application by a certain date, and I did. I submitted my application and Senator Bryan was a man of his word and I got an internship in Washington, D.C. and it was one of the best experiences of my life. I lived in the G.W. dorms for a summer. I had an opportunity to have lunch with Senator Bryan along with a couple of other interns two times in the Senate Dining Hall, I guess it's called. You have to be a senator to actually dine there and I got to go twice because my internship overlapped with a

couple of other internships. Most interns only got to go once, but I got to go twice. I'll never forget. It was just an amazing experience.

Going full circle, this residence that we bought next to our office building on Maryland Parkway in front of Circle Park, it turns out to be Senator Bryan's childhood home. But we needed to tear it down to do the expansion of our office. We met with Senator Bryan and he was just so gracious and kind and nice and just forthcoming in regards to the history of his house. He shared two hours of history of the neighborhood, of the Huntridge area. Before we tore it down we ended up removing the wood floor and framing it and giving it to Senator Bryan at lunch. To this day he still reminds me when I see him about what we gave him. It's just a great memory that I'll never forget how kind the governor and the senator was to us and how remarkable it is that we were able to buy that land and expand our building on Maryland Parkway and make it a two-story building, which gave us the opportunity to hire more people, to serve more of the community, to continue to grow, and that's what we did.

**How many people work in that location?**

It's interesting. In that location on Maryland Parkway, we own that building and we ended up buying another law office now across the street from it, which also fronts Circle Park, which is the old Neiman and Mills Building, and we're renovating that building right now. Then next to the Neiman and Mills Building, we rent a location because we've been unable to agree upon a price to buy it. We house other employees in that rental building also. We ran out of space in that building to the point where we have to house people in a rental property next to another building that we bought. We have over sixty-five employees right now, probably close to seventy. I don't know exactly how many work in that Maryland Parkway location, but a guess is around fifty.

**And then this office?**

Probably around fifteen. We're in the Tivoli Village office. I have around fifteen people in Tivoli Village. We only currently have one person working in our Reno office. But it's really exciting that we did a two-story addition at 1149 South Maryland Parkway and we've outgrown it. We need more space.

**That's amazing. When your family moved from Reno to Vegas, what neighborhood did your family settle in?**

South Shores. It's near Lake Mead and Rampart. I currently live right now right down the street in Desert Shores.

**What was that neighborhood like?**

It was great. I couldn't believe it. I remember being so excited when I first saw that house. I was in college and me and two of my friends drove from Reno to Vegas; this is the first time we visited Vegas after my dad and mom bought their house. When I first saw this house, I just couldn't believe it. It was 8205 Emerald Isle. I just thought it was such a big house and I just couldn't believe my parents were actually living there.

**What was that neighborhood like? Has it changed since they moved here?**

It looks about the same. If you see those houses in South Shores and Desert Shores, they haven't changed much at all. There is just a lot of growth around that neighborhood. I think it was just the beginning of the development of Summerlin. That neighborhood itself hasn't changed much, but the growth around has changed tremendously.

*I'd like to learn more about how you perceive the immigration story, how it's changed in Nevada, from your experience of not having much Hispanic, as you describe it, population in the northern part of the state to what we are today, growing up around that and now working with it. Can you talk about that?*

Absolutely. I'm tremendously lucky to be part of it. I think it's fascinating what's happened, seeing us grow up in Northern Nevada when there were few Hispanics. I want to add, though, I don't think we were ever mistreated or felt like we had a more difficult path ahead of us because of that, but we were one of the few Hispanics. There weren't many Hispanics. It's just the way it was.

***You didn't experience racism or prejudice?***

No, not at all.

***Do you think that's because it was a small population?***

I don't know. I don't know. Maybe it's just the way my mom and dad were. If they experienced it at work while they were dealing... They dealt with people drinking alcohol all the time and they both had very heavy accents. The way my mom and dad were, they wouldn't come home and share that with us. They wouldn't come home and act like victims. They never comported themselves that way. In regards to school, if it was it was the language things; our family speaking Spanish at home, just nominal things. It was nothing that made an impact on my life.

What's cool is, contrasting just the few Hispanics in Northern Nevada while we were growing up in the late seventies and eighties, contrasting that to where we are today, it's just remarkable because where we are today is in a place where our law firm is provided so much opportunity because of the Hispanic community. Everything my family has is, in large part, not entirely, because of the Hispanic community. We've been afforded an opportunity to serve the Hispanic community and it's been a community that if you treat them with respect, if you treat them like family, they're going to be there for you and they're going to be there for you in terms of being future clients and they're going to be there for you in terms of being friends and being support. I like to say—and that's been our message a lot when we advertise our law firm on

Univision and Telemundo and Spanish TV, when we advertise our law firm, a lot of our commercials have been showing our growth. Like I said, we started off in a little house on Maryland Parkway and we moved to a little bit bigger house on Maryland Parkway and we moved to a building and then we added to that building and we've been growing. We've been growing side by side along with the Hispanic community. We've been growing because of the growth of the Hispanic community.

It's not only that it's afforded us an opportunity to represent the Hispanic community; equally as important, if not more important, it's afforded us an opportunity to surround ourselves with great people. We've surrounded ourselves with kids who have realized how lucky they are to live in this country and be educated in this country and be willing to work hard. Our team members here mostly are Hispanic, mostly entirely speak Spanish. I've been blessed to surround myself with educated, smart, hungry, ambitious individuals who treat each other like family, very warm and caring, treat our clients like family.

We've grown with the Hispanic community here in Nevada. We've had just a unique perspective and I'm blessed to have been and continue to be a part of it.

**How have you passed your culture and your traditions to your own children?**

We need to do a much better job. We need to do a much better job in speaking Spanish at home. My brother did better than I did and my brother has six kids and early on all his six kids spoke Spanish. However, as they got older their Spanish continued to deteriorate, speaking less and less Spanish at home. My wife was born here in Las Vegas. She does not speak Spanish, and, as a result, I have not done a good job of speaking to them in Spanish at home. I try to share as much as I can my mom and dad's story with my children. That's the sad part of having a parent who passes away at a young age; I wish my dad was still alive to have that influence that he did with

me, have the same influence with my three daughters. No, I do need to do a much better job in doing just what you asked.

**Do you tell them, our family is from Cuba; this is what we went through; and this is why you're here?**

Of course, yes. I share my dad's story and as I share my dad's story, I share how blessed we were to be able to move to Nevada and to grow up in Reno and how blessed I was to have parents who sacrificed really everything for the children's benefit. The challenge is being able to share that story and letting them really appreciate that story. Because of my dad's sacrifices and my mom's sacrifices, we're in a position to completely spoil our children, so that's the challenge. I want them to see how lucky they are without being spoiled, so I'm working on that.

***You talked to us before we started the recording about the different ways that you're involved in the community and your enthusiasm is contagious.***

Thank you. I'm really excited about three boards I'm on right now. First and foremost, I'm the vice chair and I'm on the board of Cristo Rey St. Viator High School. It's a high school that's going to open up in fall 2019. It's being built right now at Las Vegas Boulevard in North Las Vegas across the street from Broadacres Swap Meet. It's just a remarkable, remarkable school that I think is going to make a tremendous impact to lower income minority families here in Southern Nevada who otherwise could not afford a private college preparatory college education, families who couldn't afford to send their kids to Gorman.

This high school is very unique. It's a network of Catholic high schools that started in Chicago that provides college preparatory education to the students, but also provides one day out of the week an opportunity for the students to work in a corporate environment, and that's what the students are going to do starting their freshman year; they're going to work at MGM

corporate offices or at a law office or at a bank. I'm really excited to be part of this school before it was even designed, before it was built, before they hired a principal and hire teachers. Hopefully fifteen years from now I can look back and say, hey, this is one of the coolest things I've done.

I'm also on the board of the Guinn Center; it's a public policy institute, which I'm real proud of. If you look at the other board members on it, I look at the list and I think to myself, *I have no business being on this board.*

Lastly, I'm on the board of Las Vegas Business Academy, which provides scholarships to students trying to obtain their MBA or their law degree. I'm on that part, too. It's a remarkable board consisting of vice presidents and presidents of some of the major casinos and hotels and restaurants and the food and beverage industry here in Las Vegas.

**Can you tell us a little bit more about where you see your law firm going in the future?**

I love that question. Yes, I am really passionate about that question. I hope this doesn't sound corny, but it goes back to my father and it goes back to his sacrifices. We saw all his struggles and obstacles and difficulties just making ends meet and sacrifices. I really do feel some sort of obligation to make the most out of all the opportunities that we have. I'm not going to feel content; just, *hey, I have a law office and I'm going to come work today and I'm going to go home and I'm going to come to work tomorrow and I'm going to go home.* I really feel like I have an obligation to make the most out of it because we have it easy compared to what my dad had. We have it easy.

I want to continue to grow it. The Hispanic community is continuing to grow not only in Southern Nevada and Nevada, but in the Western United States and the United States. It's continuing to grow and with that comes opportunity, the opportunity to surround myself not only



with good case managers, assistants, but law clerks and lawyers. If I continue to surround myself with the best of the best in the Hispanic community and serve the Hispanic community—we've built something special in Vegas—there's no reason we can't do the same thing in Reno. And if we can do the same thing in Reno, why not do it in Salt Lake? Why not do it in Phoenix? Why not go up and do it in Oregon and Washington? That's my long-term goal. Let's prove that we can create something special that can be replicated and we can scale this.

It's not easy. There's obstacles every day. If it was easy then everybody would be successful; all these law firms would be growing. I think we're at the right place at the right time. If it's not us, someone else is going to do it. What's remarkable is you do not see a multi-jurisdictional law firm serving the Hispanic community that's over fifteen or twenty lawyers in the United States; you don't see it. You're going to see it.

***Why is that?***

It just hasn't happened. It's going to happen. I tell these lawyers here in my office, if we look back ten years from now, there's going to be several law firms who do just that, and if we're not one of them, we're going to kick ourselves and we're going to say, why wasn't it us? I want us to be that law firm or I want us to be one of those law firms.

There's a variety of reasons why that isn't. We represent people. Most of the multi-jurisdictional law firms are law firms that have offices in several cities, several states. Most of them are law firms that represent corporations, represent insurance industry, so it's easier for them to have one point of contact who is assigning the cases in various cities and various clients. It's easier for those law firms to grow across state lines. I know it can be done for a law firm like us, a law firm like us that represents people and who provides good professional service to their clients. We can expand as well just like they do. There is more challenges because we've got to

get name recognition in the new market areas. They don't know who we are in Phoenix; they don't know who we are in Southern California. There are challenges, but I think it can be done, I think it will be done, and I would love for it to be us.

We have a pretty good-size law firm right now. But if we're sitting here five years from now, I hope our law firm is ten times the size and we'll look back and say, wow, these were the small days when we only had three offices: Maryland Parkway, Tivoli and Reno. That's the goal.

**That sounds amazing...When you hire a lawyer, what are you looking for? What kind of mentality are you expecting from someone to work in your law office?**

I want to see enthusiasm. I want to see someone who expects more out of themselves than I expect out of them. I think that's the most important quality: someone who expects more out of themselves than I expect out of them. We've been really fortunate to hire lawyers from within. We've relied a lot on law clerks. While they are going to law school—I have over five Boyd Law students working for me right now—it gives you an opportunity before I hire that lawyer to have worked with that lawyer and it gives me an opportunity to see which one is the best, which one would fit in best with our culture and which one do I see growing with us.

***Talk about Boyd Law School.***

It's been great. We've been really lucky, yes. That's been a big part in helping us grow because we've utilized law clerks as far back as I can remember. Early on we started hiring law clerks. They work with us their second year of law school, their third year of law school, their summers in between, and it gives us an opportunity...I like the energy that they bring to the office. When you're a law student, you're very excited about becoming a lawyer; you're very excited about the law, so they bring a very positive energy to the work environment. I think they add overall to the work culture. They're smart, so they help us with the work product once we figure out systems

and processes and a way to best utilize their skills in the short amount of time that they're here. The last thing that I previously referenced was it gives us an opportunity to gage how well they will fit in at our law office as a lawyer. There are several benefits of having Boyd in our city. We've hired a ton of Boyd Law students over the years and I'm real proud of that.

*That's good.*

**That's awesome.**

What's cool is we're seeing more and more Hispanic students at Boyd. I'm having lunch tomorrow with Ryan. I'll butcher his last name, so I'm not going to say it. He started working with us in high school. I remember Ryan would come to work with a white button-up shirt and a tie every day, and this kid is a high school student. I knew he was special because he was just professional, worked hard, and just pleasant, positive person to be around. He worked with us in high school and he worked with us while he was in college for four years. He got a full ride scholarship to Boyd. Now I'm having lunch with him tomorrow to see if he wants to clerk with us after his first year of law school.

I couldn't draw it up any better as far as if you draw up a business plan; that's the type of person I want to hire. He is Hispanic from a Hispanic family here in Las Vegas. Someone like Ryan is what's going to allow us to continue to grow because the growth goals that I previously stated out my brother and I will not be able to accomplish that goal by ourselves. There is zero chance we could accomplish the goal I have of becoming one of the largest multi-jurisdictional law firms representing people across state lines and primarily serving the Hispanic community with having offices in several cities and several states. Orlando, my brother, and I, we can not accomplish that goal by ourselves. We're going to need smart, hungry individuals to help us get

there and it's going to be people who went to Boyd and people who grew up here in Hispanic families. We're blessed to have more and more each year that we could choose from.

**Changing the topic a little bit, how do you feel about the term *Latinx*, this new term to identify the Latino community?**

I don't know. I haven't heard it much. Latinx? No, I haven't heard it much. I don't know if that means I'm old, but I haven't heard it much.

**Basically it's this new academic term created by American universities to identify the Latino community in a more accepting way where it is more inclusive; rather than identifying people as Latino/Latina, let's say *Latinx* and you can have anybody from sexual orientation to race, etc.**

This is the first of hear of it and my initial response is I don't feel it's needed. I wouldn't be a fan of it or I wouldn't be a proponent of that new term.

**Oh, really, why is that?**

Latino is fine. You're saying there is a negative connotation to Latino; therefore, we need to change the term so there is no longer a negative connotation. My response is I haven't seen or experienced a negative connotation to the word *Latino*, and I don't think just changing the word will change people's...If people are going to be racist, they're going to be racist regardless of the name. *Oh, we're going to change the name and now we're not going to have any racists out there.* That's what I think.

**That makes perfect sense, yes. We've been having a conversation with our interviewees, how do you feel about the term, because that was the term that UNLV came up with.**

*Again, I think it's rooted in the academic world. When I came onto the project it was already existing and I was like, what does that mean? I wasn't familiar with that. I come from a*

*marketing background and I got used to Hispanic and that was used. It's kind of a new way and a generational shift, which younger generation is taking ownership, which I think is okay.*

*I didn't mean...*

**Oh, yes. It was created by American academics, so it's kind of the Anglo version of Latino, per se. They're taking away the masculine and feminine of Latino/Latina and making it more inclusive.**

*It's kind of fun to ask people. We're seeing different reactions to it.*

**There is no right or wrong answer. It's just a word.**

*What about the future of Las Vegas in general?*

Really exciting. I think we are really at an exciting crossroads where we could continue just to grow and outdo ourselves. Really excited.

*I'm excited about Cristo Rey St. Viator high school that you're involved in.*

Yes, that's going to be cool.

*Yes. Addressing needs of the community.*

Yes. I think it's going to make an impact once it's open and once the students start sharing their stories in regards to not only the education they're obtaining, but their experience while they're participating in their work-study program. I think it's going to be very exciting to see their experiences and I'm looking forward to it.

**How did you choose the incoming class for that school?**

It's just freshmen. They are currently in the interview process still. We're looking at a hundred and twenty-five students. The first year it's just going to be freshmen; second year, freshmen, sophomore; third year, freshman, sophomore, junior; so forth. It will be four years until the school is fully operational, I guess...

*...I worked on the Jewish project for four years prior to this and listening to your father's story, has anyone everyone told you the similarities between Hank Greenspun and your father?*

Oh, wow. No. oh, wow.

*Oh, yes, the same sort of passionate allegiance and honor code. Hank did things that broke the law, but he did it because he cared.*

Yes, yes, he wanted to make a difference, yes.

**You mentioned earlier you have a complex relationship with Cuba and ever going back.**

Yes.

**Do you feel like your children will have that or that the Cuban American community still has that?**

I think it's unique. My dad was uniquely involved in the anti-Castro activities. My dad was a paratrooper, a political prisoner, involved in a lot of anti-Castro activities, more so than most. I think my personal experience with what my dad went through is unique. I do feel stronger more than other Cuban Americans, I think, for sure. I don't think it's as strong. In regards to my reluctance in going back to Cuba for vacation purposes, yes, I think I feel stronger, even within my own family. My older brother has been to Cuba twice on vacation, and he went while my dad was alive and my dad didn't criticize him at all. My dad was fine with it. He would have never went back; he wouldn't have been able to go back.

**What makes Las Vegas home to you?**

Oh, Nevada has provided us with everything, everything we have. It's really ironic. My dad gets captured in the Bay of Pigs. He fails in his attempts to overthrow Fidel Castro. He fails in his attempts to obtain a free Cuba. Yet, everything we have is because of that; we live in Las Vegas

because of their failures. It's not forgotten on my part that we're blessed. I am better off because of it. I'm living in the best country in the world and, I feel, the best city in the world and we have all the opportunities that we could ever ask for. I love Las Vegas. I love Nevada. It's provided us with everything.

I would love to hopefully one day give back more than I'm doing now. Right now I'm trying to build a business. I'm participating in organizations and good causes, but we're trying to build and grow a business and provide the clients the best service and treat them like family and do something special for them. I would love to be at a point someday in the future that we could say, hey, thank you, Nevada, and give back in a more substantial way because that's how strongly I feel for Las Vegas and Nevada. It's been a great place to grow up. It's a great place to raise a family. It's a great place to call colleagues and friends friends.

This is equally important, is I have a lot of fun in Las Vegas. It's a great place to live. I saw Pink on Friday night. I went to the playoff game yesterday. I saw the Golden Knights take a three-one lead against the San Jose Sharks. We're going to have the Raiders in a year. It's a great place. We're at a great place.

**Going back into your work as a lawyer, has there been a case or cases that have really impacted you and how you practice or how you see the profession itself?**

It's always a learning experience; that's the thing. There are countless cases and what we learn from them. There are too many to name as far as have they impacted you. Cases dig deep in your heart. It digs deep and close. Some cases hurt, give you a lot of pain; you lose. Some cases give you a lot of satisfaction and joy. But you do move on. Once the case is over, you move on. What I've tried to build is a mindset of improving. How do we get better? How do we learn from each

case? How do I get better from each case and how does our team get better from each case? I guess that's the best way I could answer that question.

**With everything going on in Vegas and the Latino community expanding and growing, what is something that you would want the Latino community to know from you in your position in the community?**

I think I was blessed to grow up in a home where it was just ever present, the fact of how lucky we were to live in this country and how blessed we were for all the opportunities the country provided. It's not what we can get as a result of living here; it's what we can give and obtain, the opportunities that we can maximize. We never felt like we were owed anything. Sometimes I feel with the Latino community here in Vegas that they're not benefitting themselves by saying, we're owed this, or, this is what I'm entitled. We're lucky to live here and we're blessed to live here. We're a big part of it, but let's take advantage of the opportunities and make the most out of it. We're not the victims. We're blessed. We're lucky. I don't know. I hope that doesn't sound negative because I don't mean it to sound negative. I mean it to sound positive. It's like, I'm more blessed than the kids I grew up with because I had that unique perspective from my mom and dad, the unique perspective being, take advantage of these opportunities. You don't have these opportunities in every country around the world. We have these opportunities here; take advantage of them.

They worked really hard in never making us feel like victims or second class because my mom and dad had a funny accent or my mom and dad were born in a different country. They never made us feel like we were second-class citizens, my mom and dad. To the contrary, they made us feel like we were blessed to live here.

**That's awesome. Thank you so much.**



*Yes. This was great.*

Thank you. That was fun.

*Anything else you want to share with us?*

No. That was fun.

**[End of recorded interview]**