

NOTICE

Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.

This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.

Columbia Spanish Restaurant Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Interview with: Richard Gonzmart (RG) with input from Melanie Gonzmart (MG)
Interview by: Andrew (Andy) Huse (AH)
Interview date: January 11, 2007
Interview location: Home of Richard and Melanie Gonzmart (Tampa, FL)
Transcribed by: Cyrana Wyker
Transcription date: March 12, 2007 and March 21, 2007
Audit Edit by: Catherine Cottle
Audit Edit date: April 9, 2008
Final Edit by: Catherine Cottle
Final Edit date: July 14, 2008

Part 2 of 3 Interviews

Andrew Huse: All right, well, we're just going to review some of the stuff you guys looked over before. In the first chapter¹, you said something about Panthers. Partners.

Melanie Gonzmart: Partners. Yes, Bobultine.

AH: Okay.

MG: Was it Bobultine, Richard?

Richard Gonzmart: Partners (inaudible) my grandfather bought it in 1812. I don't—it wouldn't be accurate. My great grandfather was partners with him and actually left the stock to my great grandfather and (inaudible) got kind of messed up but to my understanding, he was a partner with my great grandfather eventually, and with his passing, my great grandfather received all [of] his stock.

AH: Okay. All right. Fair enough.

RG: We had some documents. Maybe you found some documents. We had some documents one time. And Constance Bubultine, his grandson was a bus boy, server, for many years at the Columbia [Restaurant].

AH: Okay.

RG: And it's very sad to see—

AH: Yes.

¹ [Transcriber's Note: Interviewer is referring to a document throughout the interview.]

RG: —that his situation, the family didn't used to eat and he is kind of slow and people said it's because they didn't eat. The father, grandfather, instead of buying food, would go out and drink booze and women and whatever, so—

AH: Okay.

RG: It distresses me to see what happened there.

AH: Okay.

MG: You could meet him today. I mean, he was always slow, but he was capable of working.

AH: Yes.

MG: But today, he is not.

AH: Oh.

MG: He's like in la la.

AH: Yes, Okay. Well, we just went by city directories, you know, in that and they're not always accurate and they don't show partners. They just show the main proprietor, so I can certainly change that.

RG: Okay.

AH: There is a question mark here by Calabra Casmara, "Open the Columbia Bakery across the street."

RG: I questioned marked that. I never knew that.

AH: Okay.

RG: I didn't know that.

AH: Okay.

RG: I knew a bakery, when I was a little boy, which was of course many years later, down the street. I just didn't know that.

AH: Now, would this be the one, the bakery that you're talking about, the one that you remember? Luis Diaz said that it was the best bakery in Tampa. He said it was just out-of-sight, the pastries—

RG: There was that bakery and my father had another bakery down on Neptune [Street], for some reason, I think.

AH: Okay.

RG: I remember they had great pastries and stuff. But I don't recall who or why we did that.

AH: Okay.

RG: Yes, I remember. I had forgotten that until you just mentioned it.

AH: Okay. Diaz mentioned that—

RG: It was on Neptune (inaudible).

AH: —certain detail. Yes, so, when I find that or whatever, I'll pull it out and e-mail it to you.

RG: He remembers it. The bakery that I remember, that I was talking about, was basically just Cuban bread. The one that he is talking about was like a retail bakery of sorts on Neptune.

AH: Yes.

RG: Bread, and had a machine that would slice the bread, like for sandwich bread.

AH: Okay.

RG: That was different than this bakery I'm talking of. The bakery that you write of, the Columbia Bakery, that's way, way long ago.

AH: Yes. Okay.

RG: And I understood my great uncle, probably my grandfather Gustavo Hernandez, had a restaurant across the street as well.

AH: Okay.

RG: I don't know what the restaurant was, but he would come bragging to my grandfather about how his food cost was so much lower. And my grandfather would tell him, "I'm surprised your food cost at all; you take all your food from me."

MG: He goes [in the] morning.

RG: He would go take whatever he needed to go prepare the food.

AH: Oh, oh.

RG: He was the competition since he wasn't working with my grandfather. But he went on, Gustavo Hernandez, went on to create the Tropical Ice Cream Factory, the Tropical Ice Cream Plant right behind the restaurant. So, I don't know if the Tropical Ice Cream came about because of the tropical brewery that my great grandfather was involved in, possibly.

AH: Okay.

RG: And they made the ice cream for the Columbia. They made the coconut ice cream and the shell—

AH: That made it so famous, yes.

RG: Yes, so, that was what he did.

AH: Okay. Yes, there is some stuff about it in those columns so, I'll share that with you. Now, it talks about the Spanish bean soup was originally served in three courses.

RG: The Spanish Bean Soup was (inaudible) in Spain, [and] was known as Cocido Madrilen0, and when you served the—you'd make the stock—Please take a seat, honey. You make me nervous.

MG: And it still is.

RG: Cocido Madrilen0 is where they get everything and put it inside of a pot. Then you serve the broth with the vermicelli noodles—

AH: Okay.

RG: —and then they would serve the garbanzo beans and cabbage. And they would serve the meats, the chicken, ham, the chorizo, and beef.

AH: Okay.

RG: They would serve it in like three courses.

AH: Okay.

MG: And when we go now to Spain, we go to a place called La Bola [Madrid restaurant].

RG: Called La Bola. It's a hundred and sixty years old. They serve this Cocido Madrilen0 which means—Madrilen0 means Madrid-style and Cocido is stew—

AH: Okay.

RG: And so, but my grandfather from what I remember, said that that was too much food, took too long to eat, and so, he decided just to—he made a Vermicelli chicken soup. A soup kind of like it. And then he did the garbanzo bean soup where he put the meat and the garbanzos all in there together, so you ate it all at one time. It was a smaller portion.

AH: Yes.

RG: The way you typically would eat it, it's just too big of a meal.

AH: Oh, yes.

RG: And you'd have to take a nap or whatever. When I go to Spain and eat it, I can't eat the rest of the day or that night and I usually take a nap.

AH: Okay.

MG: And that's why you're grandfather named it Spanish Bean Soup, as opposed to Cocido—

RG: (inaudible)—garbanzo, garbanzo bean soup. It became known as Spanish Bean Soup.

AH: Okay.

MG: Yes, but it couldn't be Cocido Madrilenio, because it wasn't done in the progressive way.

AH: Yes, of course.

RG: The dish, I think was—I don't know who called it Spanish Bean Soup.

AH: So, as far as you know, was it Casimiro Sr. who innovated this?

RG: As far as I know, it was Casimiro Jr.

AH: Oh, who did the Spanish Bean Soup.

RG: I believe so.

AH: Okay.

RG: I don't know that for a fact.

AH: Okay.

MG: From what I remember your mom saying, of course your mom, knew your grandfather, but your grandfather, her father, was the one that was more instrumental in creating the new recipes and he was more food-oriented.

AH: You mean Junior?

RG: Junior was more creative in the food as well, as in the alcohol beverage drinks and stuff.

AH: Yes.

RG: He was, my great grandfather, more of business person starting—just entrepreneur—and my grandfather came in with more of a vision of creating new dishes.

AH: Yes.

RG: Some dishes we don't know who created what.

AH: Well, that is one thing that really comes across in these Paul Wilder pieces too, is that fact that he is such an innovator. He is always trying new things. He's always pushing the envelope with new dishes and you know, new drinks, everything. Always keeping it fresh.

RG: Yes, he was, from what I remember, he was somewhat quiet around me. I mean, maybe it wasn't quiet. He commanded a lot of respect, but if you saw him plucking his eyebrows, he was mad.

AH: Yes, Okay.

RG: So, that was it, you know. He would many times stay at the restaurant all night long, because it was open all the time. And I would go home, and they would say he would take a nap standing, standing at the cash register.

AH: Yes.

RG: So, it was kind of like a five-minute nap would charge him up. But—

MG: He sleeps in the drive through.

RG: —people remember him plucking his eyebrows. When he did that you knew, stay away.

AH: Yes.

MG: He sleeps in the drive-through window at the bank.

AH: Well, that's one of those things. Napoleon said he would go through three secretaries every night. Because they couldn't stay awake to keep up. And he could sleep in the saddle, you know—

MG: Wow.

AH: And then it asks here, "Were you allowed to make wine?" And yes, that's true, during Prohibition, you could make a certain amount.

RG: Consume for yourself.

AH: Yes.

RG: (inaudible) told me that. They told me that but they also, told me though their inroad on making wine was, they made it for religious purposes.

AH: Yes.

RG: And you are allowed to make wine if assumed for religious purposes. And everybody was very religious back then. (laughter) And they—body of wine.

MG: (inaudible)

AH: Yes.

RG: But that was kind of neat.

AH: Yes.

RG: That's how, I guess, some of the winers got around it. You were able to make your own consumption, like I told Melanie, but you couldn't sell it.

AH: Yes.

RG: So, she had questioned that. I said you could make it, you couldn't sell it. It was okay to drink it, you couldn't buy it.

AH: Yes, that's right. Okay.

RG: That's my understanding.

AH: All right. And then, we're talking about the Florida land boom and the Depression. It says Havatampa [Cigar Factory], thirties [1930s] to through early sixties [1960s] still there.

RG: Yes, Havatampa was there in the early sixties from what I remember. (inaudible) I used to come there every day [as a] little boy, coming there to the restaurant. He would sit at table ten in the Don Quixote [dining room]. Marie Lopez would be his server. But he had a certain table. I remember Havatampa being there. The building was in really ragged shape. It's basically where the [Hillsborough County] Sheriff's office is and the Sheriff's garage and new tech building, that's where they were located there in Tampa.

AH: Okay.

RG: I think they left Ybor City in early sixties [1960s]—

AH: Okay.

RG: —late fifties [1950s], early sixties.

AH: Yes. Well, certainly and really I just need to change [the document] to word that it didn't end in the thirties, but it began a steep decline.

RG: A decline, yes.

AH: Yes.

RG: I didn't know, under my grandfather, Perfecto Garcia [Cigar Manufacturers] until the sixties [1960s], they had a factory there. But the decline was imminent. They were doing a lot of machine made I guess—

AH: Okay.

AH: Yes, exactly and when they started replacing the Latino workers with Anglos, especially women who would work for less money and they didn't unionize either. Okay. Okay. It mentions Germans with mustard and pickles.

RG: I say, from what I had heard, the Cuban sandwich was a Tampa sandwich.

AH: Yes.

RG: A variation of the Cuban sandwich. And I say it was the salami [that] was a reflection of the Italians, and the mustard and the pickles from the Germans.

AH: Okay.

RG: Ybor City was—

MG: And the Germans—

RG: What?

MG: The Germans, you could go down Seventh Avenue and see the building names.

AH: They had a German club.

MG: But there is German—

RG: Names. Ybor City was the Spanish, the Cubans, the Italians, and the Germans, the Jews, German Jews, and—

AH: Yes.

RG: —and so, that influence, I think they had was how the Cuban sandwich was created. The mayonnaise didn't exist.

AH: No.

RG: Ah, I went the other day to get something for my grandson said, "Do you want mayonnaise, lettuce, and tomato?" I said, "Take it, not real Cuban. This is a Columbian restaurant." But people that do that, it's a good sandwich but it's not a real Cuban sandwich.

AH: Yes.

MG: But I always put mayonnaise on mine.

AH: Okay.

RG: Good for you. (laughter) I won't. The Cuban sandwich has to be made in a certain order because it hits your palate. The way I have been trained. *The Tampa Tribune* was doing a story once, we actually did color copies of the story to show the sandwich layered out and it has to be done in a certain order where you have the ham, the pork, the salami—

AH: Yes.

RG: —swiss cheese, pickle, mustard on top. I went to a restaurant in Sarasota one time. I ordered it, and ate it. And I said, "This sandwich is made backwards. In reverse." They made it backwards. I said, "How can you make a sandwich backwards?" I said "You've got the ingredients in the wrong order. You went—the mustard was on the bottom—

MG: But it was in the right order, it was just backwards?

RG: Yes, kind of.

AH: Okay. But yes, I mean, hamburger people who make hamburgers say the same thing, I mean—

RG: It hits the palate a certain way. If you get used to that taste—

AH: Yes.

RG: —pickles on the top, you know—

AH: Yes.

RG: —and the dressing's on the top. And I don't know, I can't explain exactly but that flavor, that mustard, hits the top of your palate and—

AH: Okay.

RG: And it's more intense.

AH: Now something else I want to ask you about as long as we're on the sandwich. I got a lot of grief over that article because it was never pressed in the old days. And doing in the course of looking through your scrap books, I saw a reference to the sandwich station and that they had a small warming oven to warm the sandwiches in, rather than a press. So, what do you know about that?

RG: What I heard was that years ago, was they used this iron, irons. They would heat them and they would press it on there. You know, flat top and they would grill it that way. The presses that you have today, we've been using those fifty years. Turn of the century, those things didn't exist.

AH: No, of course not.

RG: They might have to heat them up, they probably put the iron on top of the grill, put the sandwich on top of the grill and pressed it.

AH: Yes.

RG: So, that's where it started.

AH: Okay.

RG: The sandwich has evolved into what it is today.

AH: Sure.

RG: I'd call it a smashed Cuban. And I like mine almost paper thin and I tell them to put plates on it so, it's really crunchy. And I can't get them to make it the way I like. And that's the way my dad used to do it.

AH: Yes.

MG: Mine are the best.

AH: I agree.

RG: But they use, and I had heard, I'd seen some and I had them, those flat irons, those heavy like ten pound irons.

AH: Yes.

RG: Throw them on the griddle, and it retains the hit. You put it on top and (makes sound).

AH: Yes.

RG: So—

AH: Okay.

RG: I think they had to do that to crisp the bread because the bread was probably somewhat stale. Because Cuban bread didn't hold well.

AH: No.

RG: So, I think they were required to do that and just like certain foods had a lot of spice. It was to mask the fact that a lot the product was rotten.

AH: Yes, yes.

MG: (laughter)

RG: The Creole style, whatever. Yes, the food was not really edible. So, they put all that hot spice in there so, you couldn't tell. Kill your taste buds, you know.

AH: Yes. All right. Okay, now Gregorio Martinez Elray was one of his closest friends.

RG: Closest friend and employee, who when hearing my grandfather say another day, like I told (inaudible). He went and got his life savings and offered it to my grandfather.

AH: Okay.

RG: He was one of his closest friends and loyal employees—

AH: Okay.

RG: What's that (noise in background)?

AH: And then it says *had faith*, that he had faith in the business.

RG: He had faith in my grandfather and his dreams.

AH: Okay.

RG: Yes, he had faith in my grandfather.

AH: I see.

RG: So, he believed. And to come with your life savings and offer it to somebody it's because he believed and what my grandfather was doing was valid (inaudible). That was enough. Sometimes we all have our doubts.

AH: Yes.

RG: And when you have somebody who assures, that they believe in you, that gives you the strength to go forward.

AH: Okay. And then, all right, there was King Alfonso XIII [King of Spain].

RG: Thirteenth.

AH: Okay. I got that wrong. And then the Spanish monarchy fell during the Spanish Civil War.

RG: Yes. That was I guess, the thirties [1930s]. When it fell with the war, with the reds against the whatever, I get that confused.

AH: Yes, the reds and the whites.

RG: Whites, yes. I think the reds were—was that Franco?

AH: No, they were the socialists.

RG: Socialists. I get confused.

AH: Yes, they were—let me think. Yes, it is kind of confusing.

RG: It is very confusing. I think Franco was backed by Hitler.

AH: Yes. And Mussolini.

RG: And Mussolini. That was prior to World War II, but yet when the war started he stayed clear and opposed the king. It was sad though, when we put the king back in, he bypassed the king and went to the son.

AH: Yes.

RG: And he chose who he wanted to be king.

AH: Okay.

RG: But during that period, that's when Francisco Piwan left because of the war. And I can't explain why he left exactly.

AH: Yes.

RG: What was his reason?

AH: I can think of lots of reasons, too, but yes.

RG: I can think of lots of reasons, too. Not wanting to get hung.

AH: Yes. Well, is it fair to say that like, between Casimiro's real just relentless striving and ambition and Piwan's great skills, I mean, did that really put the Columbia on the map?

RG: Yes, I think it was Casimiro Sr.'s vision of opening a café. Did he ever vision what would happen? No. He thought it was an opportunity. So many people today have a dream, they come in here with a little bit of money, and start a café. But as I saw in the paper today—

AH: Thanks, Mel.

RG: There was a gentleman at Casa Sierra who does the court, he says, "In this country, be willing to sacrifice, anything is possible." And that's what it was with them. They believed, they sacrificed and worked, and committed. Too often people just give up.

MG: Because what was great. It was something like, if you really want to sacrifice and work, you will make it.

AH: Yes.

RG: If you're willing to sacrifice you can be successful.

AH: Okay. (sound of eating, utensils)

RG: I'm so friggin full already.

AH: Oh, yes.

RG: What happens, I start cooking Sunday morning, I woke up and at 9 o'clock I started cooking oxtail. And we'll continue through the food.

AH: All right.

RG: That's when the best conversation takes place, when you're eating and you recall these wonderful memories.

AH: Now, it mentions justice of the peace.

RG: He was a justice of the peace.

MG: Yes, was.

AH: Yes.

RG: I think, what I understood was when he saw, during World War II, that the business was starting to prosper, the patio was built, they got through the patio and then he came in. He was just always taking advantage of an opportunity.

AH: Yes.

RG: So, he got involved and Lawrence Senior got involved with them in the restaurant. My grandfather was more of the operator. And my grandfather's brother Lawrence, the second oldest son, more the show boat.

AH: Yes, kind of cheerleader.

RG: Yes, just out there selling. Like my main people and always connected with the politicals and the mob. He came in, and he was always giving away alcohol and drinks. We have a bottle that Lawrence gave to my father's grandfather.

AH: Okay.

RG: My great grandfather. Who, of course, my father wasn't married to him at the time. He gave him a bottle of Lewis XIII, in a baccarat crystal bottle on December. I've got the date here. He gave it to my great grandfather, who gave it to my great aunt, who gave it to me. All within the same week of—in the period. This was in 1930 something.

AH: Okay.

RG: And that bottle today, the current Lewis XIII, costs \$1100 a bottle. So, if it costs \$1100 a bottle today, then it was baccarat today as it was baccarat then. It had to be extremely expensive.

AH: Oh, yes.

RG: So, why did he do this to this gentlemen that wasn't related to us in anyway, that was in West Tampa, that was a business leader. (sounds of an object being set down)

AH: Okay, so this is it.

RG: The legendary bottle.

MG: This is it.

AH: Oh, wow. Yes.

RG: It's got the—the current—

MG: Where's the card?

AH: July 21, 1938.

MG: Where's the card?

RG: I don't know I haven't touched it. (sound on tape). We lost the card.

MG: Wait a minute.

RG: There it is.

AH: Oh. Okay.

MG: I would never lose something like that. You know better than that.

AH: Okay, so, it was December 24, 1946. Now, am I right in thinking?

RG: That's when my dad did get married. That's why he did it, 1946. My dad got married. My mom and dad were getting married.

AH: And then Lawrence died.

RG: Lawrence died the day before they were getting married.

AH: Okay.

RG: So, Lawrence gave that to them and he died.

MG: And then they got married on the thirtieth.

RG: They got married on the thirtieth. They pushed it back.

AH: Okay. And then it says December 24, 1947.

MG: The past—

AH: But that's E. Francisco Martinez.

RG: Yes, that's my great grandfather and great grandmother.

AH: Okay.

RG: My dad's grandparents.

AH: Okay.

MG: That's Cesar's grandparents.

AH: Okay.

RG: Gave it to my great-aunt and their daughter.

AH: And then Concha gave it to you guys in 1991. Is that right, 1991?

MG: Yes and Concha just died.

AH: Oh. Okay.

RG: She died thirty days short of her hundred-and-third birthday.

AH: Wow.

RG: Now, put the card away.

AH: Wow, that's neat. Definitely a family heirloom. You've got to think, what could possibly be an occasion good enough to drink it?

MG: No one will ever drink it.

AH: Yes.

RG: Ebay [Online auction site].

MG: Ebay. Yes, knowing Lauren, she'll put it on Ebay.

AH: Why, is she an Ebay junkie?

MG: No, she is the kind, like I told her today, "You know, Lauren"—she came to me, she said, "Mommy, they are going to do this benefit or this party they do every year for St. Joseph's Hospital—

AH: Yes, the "Sit for Life."

RG: No.

AH: No.

MG: No, this is another thing, this is in March. And (inaudible) Richard. And Richard said, "Look, I think Mommy's got the receipt from when I was born," which it was worth \$143.29 or something.

AH: Okay.

MG: And that's all they paid (inaudible). I had the check that had been

RG: You found it?

MG: I gave it all to Lauren today. But I told Lauren today, I said,—she goes, "you know, Mommy, I can't believe you saved this, all these women are so excited." I said, "Well, Lauren, you know, these are the things that really mean something eventually, and knowing you, you're going to just dump [it] all."

AH: Yes.

RG: You'll find the bill from your birth and the check, so, I mean they got to love that though, because that's the real deal.

AH: Yes.

MG: I've the got the bill. I've got the instructions on how to take care you.

AH: Really. Okay.

MG: Okay. And the check (inaudible).

AH: All right.

MG: From the Columbia Bank.

AH: That's great. Okay, so, next, it says—I talked about a \$75,000 loan. You said it's fifty thousand and a hand shake.

RG: I don't know.

AH: Okay.

RG: No, I don't know, I thought it was fifty thousand, thirty five thousand, \$50,000 on a hand shake—

AH: Okay.

RG: —with the bank.

AH: Okay.

RG: That's what I heard. You've researched it. You may have more accurate information.

AH: Well, no, it doesn't mean anything, I mean, it was in the first book, but I don't know that that's necessarily—

RG: I always remembered just \$50,000.

AH: Okay.

RG: If they said seventy five thousand, then that's what could have been.

AH: Well, we know Ferdie [Pacheco] sometimes stretches things a bit.

RG: If Ferdie said it, then I don't believe it.

AH: Yes.

RG: If my mom said it, I'll believe it.

AH: Yes, okay.

MG: She really—

AH: Now—

RG: Ferdie wouldn't have known.

AH: Sure. Okay, so, it says, all right, there's a few different things here. Stars Los Privados.

MG: Oh, the stars on the ceiling.

RG: The Tampa Theatre, my grandfather marveled at it, because people were talking about it. And people would go to the Tampa Theatre because it was air-conditioned. And everybody would say, "Oh, air conditioned."

AH: Yes.

RG: Everyone—the wording they put on there, inside they had stars in the ceiling (inaudible). Everybody was blown away by that.

AH: Okay.

RG: So, my grandfather, that's why he wanted to make the Siboney dining room air-conditioned. And he built this private room called Los Privados, [spells out] P-R-I-V-A-D-O, private.

AH: Yes.

RG: And then eventually, my dad's office was in there. But when we ripped up all the ceiling he had put the stars in the ceiling like the Tampa Theatre [speaking in an aside, noise on tape]. So, in these rooms, these were small dining rooms for men—

AH: Yes.

RG: —very small, where they would come with their girlfriends or whatever.

AH: Yes.

RG: So, they had the stars in there. And see, that was innovative. He got that idea from the Tampa Theatre. And I guess—I always say it's a compliment to Tampa Theatre.

AH: Oh yes.

RG: He'd get ideas from other people. Somebody had to come up with an idea and you can then make it your own. And I've said that in your travels, you learn. And when we built the new dining room, we got ideas from the Alfonso XIII Hotel in Seville, my dad got ideas, my mom and dad, and my grandfather's architects did. So, you get those ideas and you make them your own. And that's what he did.

AH: Yes.

RG: He got air condition and put in these dining rooms with the sparkling stars. And I guess it must have been dark. I've heard stories and so you go in there and go, "Romance." So—

AH: Now, you mentioned the Siboney but it didn't exist yet. Did you mean the Don Quixote?

RG: The Don Quixote. Yes, I'm sorry. I said Siboney.

AH: Okay.

RG: [The] Don Quixote dining room was the first air-conditioned dining room.

AH: Okay.

RG: The patio opened up two years later—

MG: (murmurs)

RG: What is that? Picadillo?

MG: Yes, I warmed the—(utensil noise).

AH: Wow, it smells wonderful.

RG: I hope it tastes good, let's see. Yes, the patio opened two years later and with the sky light that slid open—

AH: Yes.

RG: —and I don't believe they had air-condition in there originally—

AH: No.

RG: —because they put fans and they had open air. It was a different feeling. And it was more of a courtyard effect. It was difficult for us to put air-conditioning in that room, because it wasn't designed for it.

AH: Okay. Yes, in the scrapbooks, I got to the point where they finally closed the roof for good. And they put air-conditioning in, so. It said that nobody wanted to sit up in the balcony—

RG: Too hot.

AH: —because it was too hot, yes.

RG: And from what I understand, that it took so, long to close the roof, fifteen to twenty minutes, and the thunderstorms came out of no where. And every picture I've seen that early mid-thirties when it opened—

AH: Okay.

RG: —there's no tables in the middle, because nobody would sit there.

AH: Yes.

RG: Everybody was off to the side. So, eventually, I figured, we are losing 50 percent of our occupancy—

AH: Okay, yes.

RG: So, they closed in—

MG: (laughter)

AH: Thank you.

MG: You're welcome.

AH: Looks wonderful.

MG: Okay, now it's your turn.

AH: I'm going to hit pause for a minute. (pause in tape)

RG: We—

AH: Okay.

RG: —went to Napa Valley, Melanie and I, fifteen years ago or so.

MG: Was that our thirtieth, or our twenty?

RG: Twenty-fifth anniversary, which was nine years ago.

AH: Okay.

RG: Just coming back from cruising Tahiti where we were trying to take our first two-week vacation ever without calling work. So, to be successful I figured we had to go to Tahiti, half way around the world.

AH: (sounds of agreement)

RG: I could make it two days without calling. And I planned this; I'd get on a ship. So, I knew I would be too cheap to call the United States from a ship, because it would be very expensive.

AH: Yes.

RG: It was a ten-day cruise. And I said, "Well, this is pretty good, relax and taking it easy." And get off the cruise the plan was to finish the last couple of days of the two-week goal. It took me three years to plan this two-week vacation without calling. It made me understand I had to have the right people in place that couldn't do it before.

AH: Yes.

RG: So, then we flew to California the last few days of that goal, where we were being entertained by some of our suppliers. We went to the Sebastiani Winery, one of the oldest family-owned wineries in California, in Sonoma.

AH: Okay.

RG: And we're taking a tour of the facility and they're one year older than our family business, and we see this woman sitting, holding court in the middle of the gift shop of the wine store just autographing books.

MG: A little lady, tiny.

RG: She reminded me so much of my mother. She was five feet tall and she's autographing books and we start talking to her. And I felt like I was talking to my mother. And we go on and on, and she introduces, tells us who she is, and says, "You want to come to my home?" I said, "Sure." I mean, here she doesn't know us from a hole in the wall.

AH: Yes.

RG: And taking us in. And we go up to—she tells us how her husband, Sam, works so hard and they have this beautiful piece of property where their home is at. You can oversee all these vineyards.

MG: Sits up at the highest point.

RG: In Sonoma.

MG: So, I mean, they could all—it was just gorgeous.

AH: Wow.

RG: I felt like all of a sudden I was with a family member. And I had met this woman just fifteen minutes before.

AH: Yes.

RG: She takes us into her cellar where she has her wines.

MG: (laughs)

RG: And I go in and she shows me where they keep the wines—

(phone rings)

RG: —and I see a jug of Carlo Rossi burgundy wine in a jug. I said, “I didn’t know you made Carlo Rossi.” And she said, “We don’t make Carlo Rossi.” Because that was an inferior product.

AH: Yes.

RG: And she realized she was getting defensive, and she tells me, “But they are real good friends of ours.”

AH: Okay.

MG: And that’s the only reason it’s here in the cellar.

RG: Carlo Rossi had sent them this jug wine.

AH: Oh (laughs), yes.

RG: (inaudible) didn’t really know anybody, didn’t sell a lot. But they developed a relationship and friendship with this family. And now her daughter runs the company along with her husband who’s the C.E.O. And when they celebrate their 100th anniversary in 2004, in October, they came and had dinner with us. We prepared to celebrate our 100th Anniversary and gave us a three-liter bottle with their logo etched in the bottle, and our 100th Anniversary logo etched on the bottle. And we called it Passing of the Cork. Passing from one centurion company to the next. And we just strengthened our relationship. Now we sell about a thousand cases of Sebastiani wines a year. We feature chardonnay, merlot, pinot noir, cabernet, along with everything else.

AH: Okay.

RG: By the bottle, the glass. To me it’s just great to be able to maintain that relationship.

RG: Melanie would like to speak.

MG: Am I allowed?

RG: You may speak now.

MG: Thank you.

RG: Be short and precise.

MG: Yes.

AH: (laughs)

MG: Yes, master. So, anyway, one thing I do want to say is that when we left there, the gentlemen that we were with is [the] representative of the Sebastiani wines. He looked at me and Richard and said, "I can not believe it." He said, "I've never seen her take anyone back to her home." So, this is truly—I mean we just assumed this was like an every day thing.

AH: Sure.

MG: You know, we would—my mother would have done it too.

AH: Yes.

MG: But she obviously felt comfortable. It was just—what a very big honor it was.

AH: Yes.

RG: To be welcomed into somebody's home is really truly a sign of friendship.

AH: And so, you were touring the Napa.

MG: We were visiting vineyards.

RG: We were visiting Napa, visiting Sonoma, visiting some different wineries—

AH: So, you already knew these guys or—

MG: We had an appointment.

RG: We had an appointment with them. One of our distributors set it up; they wanted me to visit this family business that I didn't have a lot of knowledge about. Had we sold their wines over a hundred years, I don't know, but that—my goal is to continue, I've featured wines from California and Spain and some from South America. But I try to do business with family businesses. So, my mission was to go over there and meet some of these family businesses.

AH: Okay.

RG: Like the Robert Mondavi family which unfortunately has been broken up but—

AH: Oh.

RG: You know, to meet them, that was cool. We missed Mr. Mondavi by just a little bit. We met Michael Mondavi at a wine tasting in Madrid (inaudible) once. But it's to build those relationships and know those people and let them know your passion is equal to their passion.

AH: Yes.

RG: Because like I try to say in our *Ten Secrets to Our Success*, it takes passion to be successful. It takes common sense to be a success—not a genius.

AH: Yes.

RG: So, and I tell my kids, you don't need book smarts, just use common sense, what's right.

AH: (sounds of agreement)

MG: Pay attention.

AH: Yes.

RG: Boy, I'm full! (laughter)

MG: (inaudible) Keep shoveling.

RG: I can't eat anymore.

MG: You've got a full plate.

RG: Just give me a couple more bites.

AH: (laughter) I love this story, especially trying to go two weeks without calling. You know, and—

MG: I was very nervous.

AH: It's a marathon—

MG: He wasn't nervous, I was nervous.

RG: I was in a seminar with this gentlemen and fourteen C.E.O.'s of companies and the speaker asked, "When was the last time any of you took a two-week vacation, without calling the office? We all looked at each other and say, "Are you crazy? What do you mean, a two-week vacation?" He says, "Well, apparently you don't have the right people in place." I start thinking about it, I didn't have the confidence and that's when I realize I had to build the team that I could leave. I knew I couldn't leave forever. But if I couldn't leave for two weeks, then I didn't have the right team in place and I was being too controlling.

MG: And the team is actually here, baby. The team has actually gotten even better now.

AH: I know, it sounds like it.

RG: Not only did I realize I'm a control freak, I realized I had to do this. So, it took me three years to hire the right people for the right positions.

AH: (sounds of agreement)

RG: And for that 25th Anniversary, you know, you have to plan for success and I was concerned that if I was too close by, I might not make it, but I figured Tahiti, I looked at a map and the time zones, and thought, Everybody will be gone by the time I am up.

AH: Yes.

RG: It was the best thing I think I've ever done. And I since then—

MG: But I was going, "Aren't you going to call home? "Aren't you worried?" [Richard responded] "No I'm not going to," that was part of—

RG: This group I spoke to, retail leaders and I told them that. Again, *The Ten Secrets to Our Success*, you have to plan. You're not indispensable and if you are then you're family business is destined to, for ruin.

MG: My daddy always told me anybody could be replaced even you.

RG: That's what my dad told me.

MG: Notice he doesn't deny it.

RG: No, I agree, my dad told me that. But you have to prepare, you can be replaced, but can the business survive during that—

AH: Yes.

RG:—during that period. You know, you have to prepare someone. You can't sit there and just want to have control.

AH: That is a great lesson. And that's true in government and so, many other things. That's why dictatorships don't function, you know.

RG: Except Castro. (laughter)

AH: Well, you know—

RG: Whether he's functioning or not, he's still in power.

AH: Yes, yes, he's still in power, but can they get bread?

RG: They're starving.

AH: Yes.

MG: He got what he wants. He wears his little running suits with his little American logos on there.

AH: (sounds of agreement)

MG: Right.

AH: Yes, it's true.

MG: It's too much.

AH: Well, all right, so, you want to go back to the notes?

MG: Yes.

AH: Okay, we'll finish this stuff up. Okay, first air-conditioned dining. Okay. We kind of covered that with the Tampa Theatre.

RG: When we removed it, in the first air-conditioned dining room during the preparation for the 100th Anniversary renovating the entire restaurant. We repaired all the roofs, replaced the roofs. Our HVAC company, CGM, Mike Charles is the president/owner. He calls me and tells me this week, "We removed this air handler from your roof and we're looking at the serial numbers and how—we don't understand this, there's only two digits! That can't be right." I said, "Well, Mike, in 1935 it was left up there, how many places had air-conditioning?"

AH: Yes.

RG: He says, “Can I have this? (laughter) It has to be in a museum.” I says, “It probably should be.”

MG: But they left all that equipment up there.

AH: Yes.

RG: They left parts of it up there.

AH: Yes, that’s interesting. Okay, so, it’s (inaudible). Re-released in 1905, *Don Quixote*.

MG: Oh.

RG: It was the 50th anniversary of *Don Quixote* [dining room]. They did a book with artist’s rendering of one-hundred-and-eighty-odd pictures and color photos.

AH: Okay.

RG: And I found that. We had it. I don’t know where it is. The 400th Anniversary of *Don Quixote* [*The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of La Mancha*, by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra] just took place now, and our 100th anniversary of 2005.

AH: Yes.

RG: And during that period. What was the question there?

AH: I don’t know. It just says—I mentioned to some Casimiro—

RG: It was 1905, it was the 300th anniversary of *Don Quixote*. And this beautiful book was released with artist drawings of *Don Quixote*, and my grandfather had read the book. And he was so inspired by this madman who had this dream and visions. So, then, 1905, 1935, I think about it now it seems like so many years. But this book inspired him so, much. And the 300th anniversary, this newest edition in Spanish—we have it somewhere—and so, I think *Don Quixote* inspired him. When people ask me what’s my favorite movie, the first thing that comes to mind is *Spartacus*. It’s that 1958 [1960] more or less, starring Kirk Douglas and Janet Leigh, or is it Janet Leigh? And Tony Curtis. There are certain things that motivate you. For *Spartacus* motivated me. This person willing to fight, to give up his life to provide freedom for his family, his wife—

MG: But he was on [the] life of *Don Quixote*.

RG: But Missy, this is what inspires me. And my mission [is] trying to provide freedom for my family and work hard to give them peace of mind. *Don Quixote*, this book, this movie was nineteen—this was fifty years ago. So, here we’re talking of *Don Quixote*,

thirty years before when my grandfather built the room. He read that book at some point and it inspired him. And that's how the Don Quixote dining room came about, and the Spanish government during the Chicago World's Fair; they had that small mural of Don Quixote fighting the windmill, which received a blue ribbon. And upon the finish of the Chicago World's Fair, they credited my grandfather's hard work and they gifted it to him. The minister of tourism gave it to him.

AH: Really?

MG: Mm-hum.

RG: Yes, it's right in the Don Quixote dining room.

MG: You've seen it many times.

AH: And which world's fair was this, nineteen?

RG: Chicago, thirty-five [1935]

AH: I think so, yes. Okay. Well, that's fascinating. I didn't know that. That's beautiful.

RG: I've got a little book that I thought you had, that has all these little stories on all the little pieces. And in that room in 1946, this beautiful vase was gifted to my grandfather from the president of the Cuban Senate (inaudible). Something inspires people to do great things. And *Don Quixote*, the 300th anniversary, inspired my grandfather.

AH: Yes.

RG: And it inspired my dad as well. He had read the book, and in the sixties [1960s]. He hired Segú Demesa, a very gifted artist, Cuban artist, to paint every painting from that book. All one-eighty-five, one hundred-eighty-six paintings. And my dad had the largest collection of Don Quixote paintings. And in every painting he, this gentleman, did a great job at doing copies. So, I think that my dad was inspired by that, by that impossible dream. And that inspires me as well, because if you dream it, you can accomplish it.

MG: If you don't dream it, you don't have a life.

AH: Well, you know, and it's interesting, I see lots of things that Wilder wrote about Columbia patrons while there traveling overseas picking up little items of art, little figurines, or tiles and bringing it back and gifting it to the Columbia. And [Tampa Bay History Center Board Chairman] George Howell's grandfather was one of those people.

RG: Yes.

AH: Yes.

RG: I didn't know that. I was talking to George today, and his dad, he was a cracker and my grandfather a Cuba, and they were good friends. When (inaudible) opened the Marine Bank, my grandfather bought stock. And we didn't know it, until after my mom passed away, that we found out we had all this shares in SunTrust bank from the Marine Bank selling to so-and-so, to so-and-so. And that was a great investment.

AH: Oh, yes.

RG: But my grandfather was that kind of person, quiet, I think, personable but caring, and recognizes individuals that were loyal. And to have been able to become friends with Clewis Howell, who was a Tampa socialite was, I think, quite a coup.

MG: Well, I think, and I discussed this with a very good friend of ours, Lynn Culbreath, that you—everything goes in circles and the Culbreath's—his grandfather was a chef. And he's an extremely good friend of my grandfather's, which was during the (inaudible).

AH: Yes.

MG: Anyway, she heard Culbreath and my grandfather were very good friends. And like I told Lee, I said, "Lee, somehow, something happened when the Latinos and the crackers became divided."

AH: (sounds of agreement)

MG: It really did, Lee, I mean, Andy.

AH: Yes.

MG: And what happened, now I see is it started to circle again.

AH: Okay.

MG: Here we are we're talking about Clewis Howell. We talk about the Culbreaths and H.L. Culbreath's son. I mean this—and I told that to Lee, and Lee said, "You're exactly right." We don't know what happened, something happened, but it got ugly. Maybe that's when they started investigating all these mafia people—

AH: Okay.

MG: —and the crackers went, "We've got to get the hell out of here."

AH: Yes.

MG: I don't know, but the damn tile is not in here. (sounds of disappointment) I'm going to get the picture for you.

AH: Okay.

RG: You talk about icons in this industry and you have to learn, I tell my daughters, (sound on tape) my dad always told me that history was the most important subject. It was very interesting. And I never understood that in high school why he said history was so important. It wasn't until later that I realized how important history is. History repeats itself. When you see empires fall and both countries, governments, businesses, it doesn't matter. You look at the mighty GM [General Motors] and where they are today, the IBM's [International Business Machines Corporation] and so forth and their heydays. And it's changed, and you have to change with it.

MG: But aren't they only circles, too big?

RG: In my icons, I looked at—when I met Mr. Ray Castro in nineteen, in 1968, fifteen years old, kind of a hippie, you know, I think I'm a hippie: I'm Jesuit [High School graduate]. But I had been suffering from this infection I had in my back from playing football. And they had to put these injections and my back would constantly bleed, but I'm going through old town and I'm going come back with this new look. And I'd buy these big wide lapel see-through shirts and I'd get these red, white, and blue patent leather shoes with stars on them.

MG: Don't we still have them?

RG: I don't have that one.

MG: The red patent leather shoes.

RG: These are red, white, and blue patent leathers with the stars on them.

MG: Oh, no, okay.

RG: They are different shoes.

AH: Okay.

RG: I bought all my stuff there. I wanted to learn. And I met Mr. Ray Castro who my parents told me about. I had met him probably when I was around thirteen or fourteen [years old], at a *Holiday* magazine award dinner. And he had been at the Columbia and it didn't mean anything, I heard about Mr. Ray Castro, at fifteen years old things don't mean a lot. And you don't understand. But I met him and we're going to this wedding and I'm going, "Why are we going to this wedding?" And I went to his restaurant, which I believe was Jacques, and it was just the most elegant restaurant, right off of Michigan

Avenue. And here I thought the Parrot Garden Room was beautiful and the sky light, this sky light must have been—

MG: (inaudible)

RG: —a hundred feet across and octagon shape, and it would slide off.

MG: How did your parents meet them?

RG: Maybe from *Holiday* magazine, maybe from Cuba, maybe—I don't know. We were in the *Holiday* magazine award in Las Vegas and those people from that great restaurant in Mexico City came up to me—

MG: Right.

RG: —and my dad, the only time he'd know who was in the (inaudible), he'd gone there with the heroes.

AH: Okay.

RG: Which (inaudible) of that restaurant and the gentlemen came up to us and said “Are you the son?” and not that (inaudible), and the gentlemen says “Was Cesar Gonzmart your father?” And to be here in Las Vegas at the Bellagio [Hotel], this dinner, in one of the finest fine dining restaurants in the country, he actually recognized me, he said he knew my father and my mother. It made me very proud, because now they're coming back to the pinnacle. That was my goal. My dad lost the *Holiday* magazine award, which was predecessor to the dining DiRoNA [Distinguished Restaurants of North America] award.

AH: (sound of agreement)

RG: He was devastated. He was devastated when he lost the Golden Spoon from *Florida Trend* that we've won it for nineteen, twenty years in a row. And he was devastated. And he said, “All these people don't know—

G: Where are all these awards?

RG: Some probably [were] thrown away. We had them all hanging on the wall. We realized we didn't have—we had, the last one was maybe ten years old. He said he hadn't got it. And my dad was devastated. I remember the hurt in his eyes.

MG: Oh, yes.

RG: I remember the hurt that he did not receive the *Holiday* magazine award. That he did not receive the Golden Spoon. And blaming them, and the fact was, we were living on our laurels, and we didn't deserve it. But Cesar is the only is the person alive, and I'll say

it today with the utmost respect, that could've kept the Columbia alive through his showmanship. He had to make sacrifices in the quality of food, possibly to try to have cost in mind.

MG: But we survived.

RG: Maybe it wasn't the right thing. It harmed our reputation. But we got people in and the restaurant survived. And it was that goal, I established certain goals after my dad passed away that I wanted to achieve in my lifetime. And one was to regain the *Holiday* magazine award, which is now the DiRoNA, and the *Florida Trend* Golden Spoon award. When I received a call from Robert Toff, food editor—

MG: We were in—

RG: He says that we are receiving the award. And that they're going to now—that we're going to get the award, and to come to Ft. Lauderdale for the dinner. Well, I'm there at the hotel with Melanie, and I get a phone call from Dianne Osse, my assistant, that Mr. Howell Stamen, the chief inspector for the DiRoNA award, was trying to reach me.

MG: And I had no clue this is what—because he's that kind. He doesn't want to tell me, because in case it doesn't happen.

AH: Of course, of course.

RG: So, I'm going to pick up this award that I knew would make my dad so proud, it's one of the top twenty restaurants in Florida. And Mr. Howell Stamen, I knew he was the—I had talked to him. I had called him to see what I had to do to be re-inspected, because I felt confident. One of the secrets of our success is have confidence in the part you sell, and I had confidence in what we were doing. And he tells me, "The last time I was there, the food wasn't very good, the service was sub-par, the wine-list was not much to be desired." I said, "Mr. Stamen, please have one of your inspectors come." And so, he left a message for me to call, wouldn't say what it was, not to tell anybody. And I call and he says, "I'm not supposed to tell you, but I was there with my daughter and what you've done with the Columbia is just amazing. The food was spectacular, the waiters were so knowledgeable of your outstanding wine list, and you're going to receive the award." So, here I'm going now, I achieve these two major goals in the same evening.

MG: He cried.

RG: Yeah, I cried. And then the following year, we were out of the country. But Robert Toff had decided that the Columbia, Florida's oldest restaurant, stood the test of time and was now being inducted into the Hall of Fame. So, I looked, and I thought, "Hey Dad, we did it." And Andrea went to receive the reward.

MG: He liked me more.

RG: He loved Melanie, and he was disappointed that Melanie wasn't going. So, he liked Melanie a lot more than Andrea.

MG: (laughs)

AH: Yes, right.

MG: We only slept together (inaudible).

AH: Yes, yes.

RG: But the thing was, (laughter) I remember though, I remember the hurt my dad had when we lost the Golden Spoon, and [I] heard about this Robert Toff and what he called him. One day, Robert Toff was on Channel 13, 12 o'clock news. And nobody ever knew what he looked like. And I sat there with camera, taking pictures.

MG: And we put them in the kitchen.

RG: I put them all over the kitchen. It was like a wanted ad. If you spot this man—

AH: (sound of agreement)

RG: It's because, yes, we did—but you know, I think we gained his respect. And that's what I wanted to do. And the legacy I wanted to leave was that I brought the Columbia back to the glory that it had and deserves—

MG: Without a doubt.

RG: —during this time. And just hope the family understands the hard work, because although we are one hundred-and-two years old and we've got these awards, these great awards—

MG: One hundred and one.

RG: One hundred and two.

MG: Are we one hundred and two? (gasps) That's right.

AH: (laughter) Yes.

MG: You're exactly right. Mea culpa.

RG: I tell them you can't rest on those laurels, you're only as good as your last meal.

AH: Yes.

RG: And check—and it's a lot of—like right now with the Cuban sandwich, after reading the article you wrote, disappointed, very upset.

MG: (laughs)

RG: But you know, because I made a much better sandwich than I think anybody in Ybor [City] but I realized that (inaudible) the ham was salty, and I've tried to discover why. I believe if you slice the ham too far in advance—

AH: It loses the water?

RG: It loses the water and the salt comes out.

AH: Yes, yes.

MG: But you (inaudible).

RG: But the pork although I liked it maybe eight years ago, had a lot of flavors. I felt like it was not authentic, wasn't real, it was a fake.

AH: (sounds of agreement)

RG: So, I went back and I said, "Okay, hey although I made my sandwich better than it was years ago, and better than other people." I went to the drawing board. And right now, taking the measures the way it was done from my early memories of being a young boy, when the sandwich was made in the window of the café, with the stainless steel sliding, swinging glass door. Where they would get the ham, they'd score it with the knife, and they would pour sugar on it and they put it in the oven—

MG: Did they put the cloves?

RG: No, I don't know if they put the cloves, they probably didn't—but they'd put the sugar and they'd caramelize it. And so, when you'd slice that, it's like pork fried rice sometimes, the pork has that red sugar outside—

RG: —gives it that flavor. But people aren't going to understand—the same thing when I sampled it, when I tried it, I got that flavor, that sweetness out of the caramelized sugar on the outside which just gently hints that sweetness in the sandwich. And you don't understand what it is. And then I went back to the fresh pork hams and realized, "Hey, let's do our own marinade of a sour orange type marinade." And you can create a sour orange by doing lemon and orange actually—

AH: Sure.

RG: —and make it. And seasoning it and roasting it and making it until it's cooked. Maybe it became a little more difficult, but we discussed how we could do that.

And when I sliced that pork, it brought back memories of when I was eight years old, ten years old, twelve years old. I can remember when my father changed it. But now, all of sudden, this pork, the consistency, the flavor, the tenderness yet the firmness of the meat when you blend it with this ham that has been caramelized in sugar. These two main ingredients, four ounces of ham, to two-and-a-half ounces of pork, to an ounce of Genoa salami and I am bothered by salami I use, although I use a Genoa salami, the salami I remember as a child had peppercorns in it.

MG: Right. And it was a little bit rubbery.

RG: It had peppercorns in it. And nobody does it that way. And I have been on a mission trying to find it. When I was at Cacciatori and Sons [Grocery Store] on Armenia [Avenue] and they had some they told me the name, a different name that it wasn't Genoa salami. And I remember as a kid that's what we'd have with peppercorns.

MG: Oh, it was, yes, I know what you call it. It was—

RG: But I ordered it from our supplier. It didn't work.

AH: Okay.

RG: So, you got that influence of the Spanish, the Cuban, the German, and you bit into that occasional peppercorn, that gave you that tang.

AH: Yes.

RG: So, my quest in a hundred years is to go out—is to make the best Cuban sandwich I possibly can. And do it to the best, we buy the best ingredients and sometimes, you got to just do things. And doing the research, I found that using the real pork actually costs less than what I was using. It was convenience. And to do things good, you have to sacrifice. And so, it's like that with everything that we do, all the food items. Nothing can be done quickly. Sorry to get on that. I was talking about—

AH: Oh, no, it's okay.

RG: —about food.

MG: Roberta.

RG: Roberta Castro (inaudible).

AH: Yes.

RG: She had sisters. And I remember, I don't know, I think one of her sisters, from what she had told me some time ago, she had wrote to somebody, she had read an article in

Southern Living, and wrote to my PR [public relations] person. She's a nice person, you know, she's happy. If that's what you like, but that fact that she's coming to meet us, it's—life it about relationships.

MG: Well, its too late now, she can't have you.

RG: She's married and happy and so, forth. Life's about relationships and that we lost that relationship, that friendship that they had with other restaurant business—

MG: Because you were rude.

RG —to me it would be neat to see her, meet her husband and—

MG: Oh, is her husband here to?

RG: Yes, her husband's here to. You know, her kids and stuff—

AH: Melanie thinks she's like out on her own, like scouting out—

MG: Yeah, looking for my husband.

RG: Her husband knows, you know, you've heard the story, but it would be kind of neat to—

MG: Are we going to have to reminisce? Tell them how we do it?

RG: But it's you know, when I look at people that inspire me, there is a gentlemen named, oh god, what was his name, Richard Mellman, Rich—

MG: Coleman.

RG: Great restaurateur, and he knew about the Columbia, and he did some things, different concepts. Another gentlemen named Larry Levi, Chicago Levi organization, I met him one day at his Italian restaurant. He says, "I know your restaurant, you all do a lot of volume." And blah, blah, blah. But the respect that the generation before did something. And I think about the people I met at *Holiday* magazine award at 1415, Ernie's of San Francisco, landmark restaurant. And unfortunately, they had nobody to take over and they retired and just closed it. But I think of the Red Room in Ybor, that red-wash wallpaper. When we re-did it we couldn't find it, and we found remnants of Ernie's in San Francisco, they had a warehouse there. In the movie *Vertigo*, when Kim Novak is meeting James Stewart, he's meeting in Ernie's, and you'll see the red flocked wallpaper is the same paper.

MG: Same paper.

RG: They had closed. The paper was there, so we were able to do it. So, that thing about Ernie's—I remember meeting the owner (inaudible), a legendary restaurant, again, his son, they followed. And all these restaurants that were legends, and when I was twelve or fifteen about 90 percent are gone, or they're sold.

AH: Oh, yes.

RG: Either they didn't change with the times or lost interest. Or the family never took interest. And look at the famous 21 in New York City, Jerry Burns just passed away, ninety-seven years old, but he sold it twenty years ago. It's just tragic to see nobody followed in their footsteps.

MG: I remember when we went it was probably right after Andrea was born so, it had to be the early eighties [1980s] and your parents gave us all those names of all those all those restaurants.

RG: Nineteen eighty, 1980. We went to San Francisco, my parents gave of the names of all these restaurants they knew. But we had ten days and more restaurants than we had days. So, we're getting down to the end and we're getting down to the end and there's not enough days left. And we started eating a lunch at eleven, a lunch at three—

MG: No, no a lunch at eleven, dinner like at five.

RG: No, no, no like lunch at , lunch, dinner at three, four, five and then dinner at eight, nine and then chocolate soufflés everywhere. In ten days, I gained ten solid pounds.

MG: Me too.

AH: Wow.

MG: And I was like really skinny.

RG: We went to Kan's [Restaurant]. We went to Fournier's [Restaurant], all these great restaurants. And I'm telling Melanie, I said, "We're out of time."

MG: We've got to double up.

RG: We started doubling up. We get to second meal, we can't really eat. But we eat this food and then we'd get to the third meal, I said, "How are we going to eat?"

MG: Well, the last thing we want to do is disappoint his parents.

AH: Yes.

RG: It was educational. It was an experience of learning—

AH: Of course, yes.

MG: And to go to these places, it reminded us, with the black wall paper in there, I mean, this was just, this was like home.

AH: Oh yes. I've got another one I'm still working on.

MG: This was like home for us.

AH: Yes.

MG: I mean it was, it was like going home.

RG: You know, that was my dad, that my dad— when I found Melanie again. Doctor— When I met her when she, I was sixteen and she was fourteen. I was madly in love with her. And I didn't dump her like she thinks.

MG: (laughs)

RG: Melanie, please let me just say the story. Because you know I was so young. And I remember telling her when I was sixteen, I wanted to marry her. But I realize at seventeen how serious I was, I didn't have any other real experiences with other girls and I felt that I needed to date some other girls and I did. And I got involved, got in a situation with a person I felt so sorry for. I realized that I couldn't make that mistake, so, I was a freshman in college, started communicating with her. And then we got back together. And then I was going to (inaudible), I purposed to her at the same table I sat at in the Patio dining room table in ninety-three [1993]. That second day I saw her when she at a shower at the Columbia Restaurant and I came in to see her, because she wasn't allowed to date. I had just met her three days before.

MG: I was fourteen.

RG: But then I purposed to her that I was going to marry her when I finished college. And my dad tells me he says, "Listen, you know, you're going to be miserable; I think you should get married now. Don't wait until you come back, you'll be lonely, miserable and unhappy. Get married now and we'll help you."

AH: Okay.

RG: So really, okay. And what a dream come true, he's going to put me on the payroll and give me a check. And then he gave me the American Express card. Our two week honeymoon in Spain was with the Torres family during the harvest at the end of September. It was wonderful.

MG: Well, we planned our wedding around it.

Side A ends, Side B begins

RG: We planned around September, because it was slow time and school was going to start in Spain. So, we go there and then we drive along Spain and we go to Madrid, we have to find a room. But my dad gave me American Express. He says, "Part of your education is eating at the finest Spanish restaurants everyday." So, it was wonderful. So, now I'm getting a hotel room, I'm getting a check, I'm going to school, and come back to my wife who cooks and so forth. And then I finish my vacation and we're tired of eating out. My dad is asking where we are eating. And I'm tired. And in front of the Columbia in the parking lot, in space number five, on the east side of the parking lot, he looks at me says, "Are you finished with your education?" I said, "Dad I'm finished, I'm ready to go to work." I can never forget that sinking feeling in my stomach when he says "You're done, you're sure." I said "Yep." He says "Well, get ready to work long, long hours." And I said "Holy mackerel, I'm now an adult." About a month later after working days and nights I tell my dad, "Dad you know there's this graduate program in Madrid. I would like to go do it again." He says, "I gave you a chance and you blew it; it's over."

Mackeral, so, there I was making two hundred dollars a week, married, and now responsible for everything, but I tell my kids, "Hey, once you quit school you're finished with school, that's it, it's real life." But forever, I'm thankful like, we married three years, we couldn't run back to our parents. There we were in Spain, and we couldn't run back to go to mom or dad to complain about something. Our friends didn't interfere. I thank my dad for giving us that year of being able to have the foundation for a great marriage.

AH: Well, now on the other hand too, your dad kind of did you a favor by making you work and, by saying, you know because a lot of people get too much handed to them, right?

RG: My dad was very kind to me. And the fortunate thing was I—Casey never really ever worked a day with my father he says—I worked with my father a lot. I learned the good and the bad and the ugly from him. And the good was caring for people, keeping your word, when you make an agreement with somebody, you fulfill it. The ugly was maybe not always being totally accurate with numbers to the press or to people and playing games and not being satisfied with what they were. That could be the bad and the ugly. You should be proud of whatever it is you've achieved or you've done. And it was a dreamer and I looked at it and realized that the way he was doing business and then he passed away. It was because he couldn't exist in the world the way it changed. Today in the day of computers—

AH: Yes.

RG: —and information. And I had then to become my own person. He was a person of tuxedos and diamonds, cufflinks and stuff.

AH: Yes.

RG: Elegant. And kissing the hands. You know, to try and do that, people would say, “Oh, look at that jerk, trying to be his father.”

AH: Yes, yes, yes.

RG: One woman came up to me once, [and said] “Well, you’re not as handsome as your dad.” I said, “Well, thank you very much.”

AH: (laughs)

RG: You know to try to be your own person. I was more—

MG: (inaudible) his mother.

RG: I was more of the athlete. My dad, I remember when I was at high school, Jesuit, he always was working, always came to attend all of my football games, always watched, always was there with my mom, my dad—my mom and dad were always there. I remember the first game I played, that they got lost going to Palmetto. And I had scored an eighty-nine yard touch down in the first play of game. The second play was sixty yards, had one-hundred-and-fifty yards and two carries. And I was throwing up, couldn’t play the rest of the game. They missed the whole two plays.

AH: Oh man.

MG: Thank God.

AH: Yes.

RG: But I remember my dad [was] proud of those achievements. And he realized my athletic—he was a musician. He was never allowed to be an athlete.

AH: Yes.

RG: He was a musician. So, I think he was living through me. And so, when I was being recruited by all these schools, I remember the coach from the University of Minnesota was there, and then Steve Garvey and Duffy Daugherty from Michigan State recruited me. He was trying to convince me I should go to play football. I had all these scholarships. And I said, “But Dad, let me ask you this question. Do you want me to be a professional football player or a restaurateur?” He said, “That’s a stupid question!” It was a serious question.

AH: Yes.

RG: Because at Michigan State—

MG: It makes you sit up and think.

RG: University of Denver was where I decided to go to school my sophomore year. They had no football. At the time, they were the best restaurant school.

AH: Okay.

RG: And all that Michigan State had a hospitality school. And they weren't going to let me study hospitality, because my grades weren't good enough. They wanted to make me study P.E. [physical education]. So, I started realizing I'm not going to be professional football player. My dream as a child, and some of my friends, Mark (inaudible), Dave Devansa, Vince Poren, and we would talk about and play football in front of my mom's house. We would tear up the yard, and they would be sore trying to tackle me. It was always just play football at Jesuit. I achieved that goal. To go play in college, didn't know if I wanted to really do that. I had seen people, wasn't fun, it was now a job.

AH: Yes.

RG: And the idea was to get the education. And then when I told him I asked that question do you want to be a restaurateur or a professional football player. And—

MG: It was part of that.

RG: It wasn't a stupid question. And then I think back now, it probably was a difficult time, to go to a private college was very expensive, to have gotten a full ride at Florida State, University of Tampa—

MG: Pardon me, I think more so, he was so proud of you, at how successful you were at football. He never thought it wasn't something you wouldn't pursue. He, to him, he was living vicariously through you.

RG: And I just didn't want to fail. He always told me, "Whatever you start, you never quit." And I didn't want to start something I wasn't sure I was going to do. But you know, I had University of Tampa, they introduced me at half time, I think they were playing Vanderbilt, I think—

AH: Okay.

RG: —half time. They introduced Freddie Soloman, who they'd signed, who went on to be a star quarterback and wide receiver (inaudible) they'd sign him. And they saved me for the very end. There were forty thousand people in the stadium. Here you are seventeen years old, and [the announcer said], "Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the guy we have to sign, Richard Gonzmart." And I remember my head was so frickin blown. And I have the scholarship signed by the president, by the coach. I should frame it. But my brother told me, "You have to leave home." So, is the right thing to do? Well, I can hardly walk today but I can. But I looked at my dad, he was an influence, but I feel like I

made him proud. He liked my athletic—he's the one that got me to do the triathlons and so forth. I'm not that great a musician.

MG: You did that because you wanted to.

RG: No, he asked me, he said he—don't tell me, I know why I did it. Because back in 1985, I gained this weight and he said, "You should start running." He always enjoyed me doing it. It inspired him. I knew it made him proud.

MG: You're right.

RG: I knew it made him proud. And so, I started doing it, because that was what my forte was. I studied piano, I studied violin. How do you follow in the steps of Adela and Cesar?

AH: Yes.

RG: And I played loud rock and roll music. Studied flamenco, but no, you've got to be your own person.

MG: (inaudible). Okay I'll shut up.

RG: The tuxedos and all that were his thing, and so, I tried to do the complete opposite. I am Cesar's son, but I am Cesar in 2006.

AH: Well, that's just it. Anybody trying to do what Cesar did would look ridiculous. It was perfect for its day, but today it wouldn't work.

RG: You go kissing hands today—well, Cesar can get away with that, you know but I'm different. I'm very—

MG: Flamboyant.

RG: I'm not flamboyant. I'm not, my presence is not—my dad was different.

AH: Yes.

MG: No, it was different. I mean, Andy, I remember—may I speak, Daddy?

RG: Sure.

MG: I remember being a cheerleader, and watching these two people show up at the football game, I mean, he's in his tuxedo because they're going to the restaurant. And she is dressed to the nines.

AH: Okay.

MG: —and they enter, like she always said, “Make an entrance, just don’t walk into a room, make an entrance.”

AH: Yes.

MG: So, she enters and it’s like they’re holding court. But I said to myself, “If those were my parents, I would be embarrassed, but I really think these people are very cool.”

AH: Yes.

RG: They had the ability to pull it off.

AH: Yes.

MG: And we all knew that they were so busy, they didn’t have to be at the football game, and they would stay and watch their son and then they would go to the restaurant.

RG: I can remember going to Maas Brothers [Department Store] once. My dad was buying something for my mom at the make-up counter, and he says his name, and the person at the counter didn’t know who he was. He says, “You don’t know who I am? You don’t know who Cesar Gonzmart is?” Like [he was] insulted, like he’s this movie star and he had his own television show. And I remember thinking, This is my dad. How does everyone know who you are? He was insulted, they should know the Columbia and him. And so, sometimes, when somebody who doesn’t know the Columbia and who I don’t know, I chuckle to myself saying I feel just like my dad, like, “You don’t know the Columbia?”

AH: Yes, yes.

MG: He’s just like that, Andy.

AH: Oh yes, yes.

RG: It’s a bigger town now, Andy.

AH: No, it’s a different world now.

RG: It is.

AH: Okay so, and then I’ll replace jazz with Latin rhythms—

RG: Yes.

AH: Big band, orchestra. Okay.

MG: Are we doing good tonight, Andy, or what?

AH: We're doing good. We're covering a lot of ground here. And that's one thing with oral history, it really is cumulative, you know, you're not going to cover everything in one night.

RG: No. There are so many things, what we need to do is do a recording and—so many things we remember. On January 21st, when we were supposed to meet Tampa Catholic Football program is having a banquet and they wanted me there at 5:30. So, I have a problem, I'll be a little later.

MG: I told them—

RG: They want to recognize my contribution. And so, I've got to be there. We could do it latter that day?

AH: No, that's fine whatever you want to do.

MG: Well, Andy had had (inaudible).

RG: I know he told me, I know, but when they call you up and say—

MG: I understand.

AH: Sure, well, we can reschedule it, I mean, that night for latter that night or another time. Yes, that's fine.

RG: Seven-thirty or so.

AH: Okay. That's fine. Okay now for the Paella [Spanish rice dish], it's just the food and the seafood that's available.

RG: The Paella, you know, I'll go back to 1968, fifteen years old, I'm studying six weeks in Madrid, Spain with my brother, going to university, taking some courses. It's not university courses and my brother had his girlfriend there, who I didn't know and wasn't supposed to know, she became his first wife, and he decides we are going to go drive to the south of Spain one day. And we get in the car, start driving, and we're ten minutes driving, he starts falling asleep at the wheel. He says, "I don't think I can make to (inaudible). I said, "I don't think you can either. We've only gone ten—you know, we haven't gone anywhere but ten miles—

AH: Yes, yes.

RG: —we have about six more hours. So, we go back, he drops me off. We catch a mail plane that night, a DC3 prop. It makes a bunch of stops. It makes a bunch of stops on the way. It's like a thirty-nine dollar flight to Marbay.

AH: Okay.

RG: We go to Marbay. And we get to Marbay at five in the morning, no reservations, no nothing. We get off and we get out of the plane, this DC3 and we ask the cab driver, “Which way is the beach? Where is the beach?” We don’t know where we are going. He said, “You want to go to the beach?” “Yeah.” We go. And it’s still just like six in the morning. Everything’s closed, everything’s full. I’m lying on a lounge chair out on the beach trying to sleep, you know just hurting. And we finally get into a hotel or a hostel whatever you want to call it at eight dollars a day.

AH: Okay.

RG: And you have to walk down the way to get your shower. We were on a very limited budget and we’re eating hot dogs for sixty cents—

MG: Filet mignon.

RG: —and so, my brother had lost his Rolex that summer in Tampa. We were water-skiing in the bay and we were in our boat and my dad was in his yacht. And we were supposed to meet my dad, and my dad yells, “Where the hell have you all been?” And he is yelling at me and my brother says, “Well, he can’t get much madder. Where have we been? I lost my Rolex; we’re looking for it.” [Father says] “Fine, I am going to buy you an alarm clock so, you can hang it around your neck.” So, then my dad buys my brother a Timex watch, and now we’re in Palma Majorca. And we go back and I walk down the hallway—I had just taken my shower—my brother says, “I lost my watch.”

MG: The Timex.

RG “What do you mean, you lost your watch?” We’ve got to go back. So, I’ve got to put on my cold bathing suit. We’re walking down the beach. We’re talking. We get there we see a gentlemen, start talking to him and he sees we are from America, he says, “Are you from the states? If you ever go to Florida, the best paella in the world is at the Columbia Restaurant, Tampa. Probably never heard of it.” I said, “Yeah we’ve heard of it, it’s our family’s.” Right, it’s your family’s.

AH: Yes, yes.

RG: He says, “The best Paella in the world is at the Columbia, Tampa, they make the best Paella.” We were going on and on and we’re there—my God, it made us realize how famous the Columbia was.

AH: Yes.

RG: I mean, here we are in Spain. And so, meanwhile so, we talked to him and we were waist high. My brother finds his Timex. And we found it. So, I had to go take another shower. And I go shower. But that was a great experience though.

AH: Yes.

RG: Fifteen years old, eating sixty-cent hot dogs, eight-dollar hotel room.

AH: Yes.

RG: (inaudible)

AH: Dreaming of the Paella back home, yes.

RG: That's my first realization. I remember going to Spain at twelve though, at the invitation of Francisco Franco, that my dad had talked to Franco, he bought (inaudible) he's still alive.

MG: (inaudible)

RG: Who was the Minister of Tourism and it ranged from a (inaudible). They were going to recognize him with a Five Forks [award], highest rating from Spain. And being an outstanding Spanish restaurant in North America. And my mom and dad were so nervous. I had never seen him nervous like that. Because they had to dress in these tails and they had to use the proper formal language in Spanish. And in Tampa, we speak Spanglish.

AH: Yes.

RG: And then I'm there in the hotel room. The next you know, I'm there watching T.V. and there's my father and mother on T.V. with Franco.

AH: Yes.

RG: And we had a limousine and a person with us for two weeks. It was kind of neat. I remember having lunch with (inaudible) the Minister of Tourism. They were doing a special dinner toward the end of the visit—

AH: Wow.

RG: And my mother was telling us, again I'm twelve, and my brother is seventeen, sixteen, and she says "Now, don't make any faces, whatever they put in front of you, eat. Don't say anything."

AH: Yes.

RG: And we're trying to be proper. And we are sitting next to (inaudible) grandchildren and we're given little (inaudible), which looks like linguini and garlic. And I'm eating with a wooden fork and it tastes good. And the (inaudible) tells us "Look closely, you can see the eyes and the mouth." What? Eyes and mouth. They were baby eels.

AH: Wow.

RG: My brother gets sick. I'm following my mother's orders. I've got to eat the whole thing. And my brother gets now violently ill the rest of the night eating—

MG: Because of the age difference.

AH: Yes, yes.

RG: He just turned seventeen, but that was—it was in a palace, actually.

AH: Yes.

RG: Most of the restaurant was in a palace at dinner.

AH: Okay.

RG: Whenever I see the baby eels, my brother still can't eat them, and I can't wait to eat them, because it brings back that great memory and that experience.

AH: Yes.

MG: But even me, when I see those eels, this is the story I think of.

AH: Yes.

MG: I think of these little girls saying, "Hey, look at the eyes. And look at the little mouth." I mean—

AH: Well, there is something about at that age, you like to eat something that almost like gross people out or the novelty of it.

RG: They were trying to gross us out. But I kept on eating. And I don't remember anything else I ate. I just remember that. And that's it.

MG: And then your brother being sick all night.

RG: And then we had to catch a train to Barcelona. My brother sat on the toilet the whole night. And I think I told you that there was actually a hole in the ground. And he just sick and I laughed and laughed and laughed.

AH: (laughs)

RG: And I remember my brother and my father in France. We had gone to this Hungarian restaurant, and we were there drinking champagne and my dad was drinking champagne. And he was drinking and drinking. And my brother was drinking and my dad and somebody were talking about how he played the violin. And he starts playing the violin with the violinist and I couldn't tell the difference, my dad says, "That violin was so out of tune." And my mother says, "Why didn't you tune it?" He says, "Because I'm too drunk!" (laughter)

RG: I remember getting back to the hotel and being young, I could hear my brother throwing up all night long from drinking champagne and sick from that. But it was great memories. I remember my mom and dad on that same trip in France, and we were at a restaurant where they gave the menus for the prices only to the men. My dad didn't get it and my mom gets it. And my dad starts ordering oysters.

MG: All the other men—

RG: "We want two dozens oysters!" And my mom says, "We don't want oysters." "Yes, we want oysters." [said Cesar]. "You really don't want oysters." [said Adela]. And he goes on. Back then, sixty-five [1965], they were a dollar an oyster and my dad didn't know it. Whether he could afford or not, he was going to do it right. He was on the SS France [ocean liner], had a suite.

AH: Yes.

RG: I remember when that bill came, my dad's look, oh man.

MG: (inaudible) I told you not to order those oysters.

AH: (laughs)

RG: Those are memories.

AH: That's good stuff.

RG: I remember—there's a great restaurant in Barcelona, Los Caracolas. It's a one-hundred fifty, hundred-and-sixty-years old. My dad knew the owner there. And he'd stand there and sign the books, he'd walk into the bar, and get to the dining room, you have to walk right through the middle of the kitchen. And they had a dessert called Crema Catalana, Spanish Crème and caramelized sugar. And they would get this iron that was electric and put it on the sugar and caramelize it. And my dad loved that. He wanted to do that, he bought the irons. Not realizing, thinking that it was two-twenty [electrical current] versus like one-ten.

AH: Yes.

RG: And it couldn't ever get to work, my dad always went to do it. He tried and tried. Because he loved that dessert. That was just the greatest thing.

MG: Twenty-eight years ago.

RG: No.

MG: I was pregnant with Andrea.

RG: This is forty years ago, he went to (inaudible).

MG: Oh excuse me.

RG: Forty years ago.

MG: We did again twenty-eight years ago.

RG: Forty years ago he wanted to do it.

AH: Okay.

RG: He always wanted to do this dish and he had bought these irons, and it just didn't work. And he had to leave these iron plugged in and they're dangerous. And so, some years ago, I was thinking about, you know these torch things they used to weld.

AH: Yes.

RG: And if I could use it. I went and got a torch. And memory—I kind of fulfill all my dad's dreams. So, the Crema Catalana is on there, on the menu, because of him. We do it tableside. Bread pudding is always something he wanted to do as well, because he wanted to utilize the old Cuban bread. He hated to throw it away.

AH: Yes.

RG: We did what was called a Pudding Diplimatico, which was a Cuban bread pudding which was made with canned fruit cocktail. Canned.

AH: Yes, yes.

RG: It was terrible.

AH: Yes.

RG: Just terrible. In quest of my dad's dream I went and throughout talking to other people, and we did a variation of the Brennan's [Restaurant] New Orleans' family, who

my mom and dad knew. We did a White Chocolate Bread Pudding with Bacardi Rum sauce.

AH: Oh, it's good, yes.

RG: And so, here we do, using the old Cuban bread, and I think about my dad and say, "Gosh, Dad this is the best thing; it's good for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and for dessert." But we sell so much, we have to use fresh bread.

AH: That's a good problem to have.

MG: You dad was a simple eater, really. He would love to hollow out the butt of the bread, fill it with olives.

AH: Okay.

RG: My dad loved this olive sandwich. And on the anniversary of my dad's death, I made an olive sandwich and I didn't taste it until I got out there, and sat on his grave to talk to him.

MG: He went to the cemetery.

RG: I started eating it and I said, "Dad, this is terrible." Every time I eat it I say, "Dad, why did you eat this!?"

MG: I know why.

RG: And I ate it. And I said, "Dad, I can't eat it anymore." I just sat there with it. (inaudible) out there but that's when I started saying, forget about the olive sandwich. It's not going on the menu. The bread pudding can go, but not the olive sandwich.

MG: Yes, but Dad reached a point where he didn't trust anybody in the kitchen. He was afraid somebody was putting something in his food and stuff so therefore, he would only eat like stuff like olives.

AH: Yes.

MG: That nobody was cooking.

AH: Okay.

RG: He thought people were trying to make him sick. It was just a phobia.

AH: Yes.

MG: It was a phobia.

RG: But I think there is a reason for almost everything I do. Further back then sometimes I even realize why I do it.

MG: It's called senior-itis.

RG: No, there's reasons. Like the [inarticulate] we had artichokes hearts and hearts of palm. Why? Because when I was a young boy we used to have artichoke hearts and hearts of palm on the menu and I used to love them. And they loved them. And those are things that kind of went by the way side. And we're trying to create this dish. And we're going to create it and we're doing it with vodka. I realize that vodka didn't have any flavor. Having a bottle of vodka in the kitchen is very, very dangerous.

AH: (laughs)

RG: It wouldn't make it to the dish, it would make it to the chef. We're going to drink one, then. That why's that dish (inaudible) because the artichoke hearts and hearts of palm. And my mom used to feed me, because I didn't like a lot of vegetables and I really enjoyed that.

AH: Okay.

MG: But that's I'm saying I mean, I remember your mom, she loved hearts—I put hearts of palm in the salad tonight—artichoke hearts. I mean, artichokes to her were the bomb.

AH: Yes, yes.

MG: If she could get artichoke bottoms. She found a source just for the bottoms. She could stuff the crabmeat.

AH: Oh yes, yes.

AH: I had that at Brennan's in October.

MG: Really, it was to die for.

AH: It's some kind of—I think it's eggs, with artichoke bottoms.

RG: Sardou, sardou.

MG: Sardou.

AH: Yes, that's it, yes.

MG: She would make it like appetizers. She would get these bottoms—I don't know where the hell, what her sources was, make this crab meat—

AH: See, I don't think I could've gone, but I was traveling with a friend of mine, and his father-in-law gave him two-hundred-fifty bucks and said, "Go!" You know—

RG: That's the life.

AH: It was good.

MG: That's a meal.

RG: (inaudible) It's hard to justify spending thirty some odd dollars for eggs.

AH: It is, it is. I mean, it's over-priced. It's good. Is it worth that much? I don't know.

RG: (inaudible) Now her daughter—

MG: Ellen Brennan.

AH: Okay.

RG: —my mother, they knew each other from *Holiday Magazine*—

MG: Tell the story. About the fur coat.

RG: What?

MG: The fur coat.

RG: No, that was (inaudible) 1917. Our parents knew them. They were at the *Holiday Magazine Award* and she, this (inaudible) San Francisco. And this young lady doesn't have a coat of any sort, and she goes to dinner and my mom sees she is going to be cold. She gives her a fur coat to wear, a fur coat. And she sent a cookbook to my mom thanking her, that young girl. The impression she [Adela] made, autographing it to her and this is what it's all about. The restaurant business not being envious of anybody, it's respecting those that are professionals, that respect for another. And one of my goals, Andy, this year and I wanted to do last year, was to create an organization called *The Premiere Familia de Restaurants*, the first family of restaurants of the United States, restaurants that are seventy-five years old or same family ownership.

AH: Okay.

RG: You see these magazines in the airplanes *Best Steak House*, *Best*— It's all baloney.

AH: Yes, yes.

RG: So, what I would like to do is do this organization where the best—these restaurants are invitation, around the country. We gather together once a year with a mission, to how to help another, to plan, to discuss our succession planning, issues that we have, and how we can help the industry, and how we can help others. I got that idea from the Torres family. There is a Premier de Familias—first family alliance, Torres, sixteen generations in Italy, the Torres. And to look at that, that’s something that you can’t buy, that longevity, family seventy-five years and older. So, that’s something I want to try to do.

AH: Yes.

RG: What are you looking for? Can’t find it?

MG: I don’t have—

RG: We have it. Stone crabs.

AH: Oh, yes, the book.

RG: Yes, but the one that’s autographed.

MG: (inaudible)

RG: I’ll look. I think it’s here. I don’t think I would have it at the restaurant. (whispering) . . .

Pause in tape

AH: Okay, we’re rolling.

RG: Andy, I think the year is 1981, I’m working at the Columbia with my dad. The gentleman shows up from St. Augustine, saying he wants to talk to us about building a restaurant there, that he is representing Lawrence Lewis. And that meant nothing to me. He was sitting at Table 10 in the Don Quixote [dining room], I tell my dad. And like so, many other people always said they had a deal for restaurants and usually it wasn’t true. And I tell my dad about this guy. And my dad kind of blows it off, doesn’t say anything. And about an hour and a half later I said, “This gentlemen is still waiting for you.” My dad said, “Oh God, I forgot. He’s still there.” So, we start talking to the guy, and he says, “I represent Mr. Lawrence Lewis, who would love to have the Columbia Restaurant go to St. Augustine.”

AH: Oh, wow.

RG: My dad is like *oh yeah, yeah right*. And he says he’s in charge of Flagler Foundation in St. Augustine to promote and build. My dad really doesn’t believe him. He’s taking, this is what it’s going to take, he tells the story about 1960, we’re taking a family vacation driving from Tampa to Quebec and he gets to St. Augustine the first day, and he

asks the policemen, “Can you tell me where there is a great Spanish restaurant to go eat lunch?” And he goes, “About one-hundred-and-ninety miles south of Tampa, if you go to the Columbia Restaurant.” And my dad’s there [gestures] and my dad gets in the car all happy. And so, my dad always wanted to have a Columbia there. And the United States’ oldest restaurant. So, we meet with this guy figuring this is just another guy full of hot air. And then we get a phone call from Mr. Hugh Culverhouse, and his chief assistant, Steve Story. They want to schedule a meeting at the University Club [Restaurant], and Mr. Culverhouse was the owner of the Bucs [Tampa Bay Buccaneers Football Team] at the time. So my dad had a lot of respect for him. And we go upstairs, and Mr. Lewis is there, whom we had never met. And Mr. Culverhouse takes my dad outside, and says, “Cesar, Mr. Lewis has a lot of money. He’s my largest client. He had the largest single transaction of sale of property in the state of Florida. He was the great nephew to Henry Flagler. Henry Flagler had no children, and one child that died. And part of the family had inherited the Breakers [Hotel and Resort], and Mr. Lewis had taken over all of the properties in St. Augustine and other places. And they were producing—they had three million dollars a year, the foundation, to build and promote St. Augustine.”

AH: Okay.

RG: So, my dad says, “Well, okay, if you want us to go this is what it’s going to take. We want to you build the restaurant for us, we pay no rent, we don’t make any money.” He said, “But you know this is a 501C organization, we’re charitable—we have to show payment.” And they come up with a deal. And he says, “Well, we won’t pay rent for the first ten years, we make no money, but then we have the option to buy it within ten years of the initial investment.” So, Mr. Lewis wants us, and after hearing Mr. Culverhouse’s plea, about the gentlemen and who he was, and we’re sitting there and they’re agreeing to everything. And now they sell us this property right in the heart of St. George Street, the historical district, which housed an old building. And we have to now replicate the building that was there more or less. We have to now do historical—

MG: Review.

RG: No, we have to go before the historical review board for all the hardware. And now we’re building this building. Now the thing was in St. Augustine, they didn’t want any big buildings. We hired a local architect, Mr. Craig Thor to design it.

AH: Okay.

RG: It was a twenty-three thousand square foot building.

AH: Okay.

RG: What we had to do was we had to make it look like different buildings. And we bought this whole city block, with a parking lot and now my dad can’t believe this is happening. My dad and brother go to Mexico, to Guadalajara, to buy some artifacts and leave me in Tampa. They’re going to get some fountains, etcetera. So, I’m there, I’m

running the restaurant. We're going to have a banquet for Air Florida at the Columbia on a Friday. We had negotiated—they were going to have a direct from Miami to Madrid. And I had talked to them, and we had negotiated eight first-class air-line tickets to Madrid and back on Air Florida.

AH: Okay.

RG: My brother and dad are Guadalajara. I'm getting ready for the party. I think it was a Wednesday or a Thursday I get a phone call. The Columbia Sarasota caught fire. We have a fire in the kitchen. I rushed down there.

AH: Okay.

RG: The kitchen had a fire and they tell me we have to close two weeks. I said, "No we're not." We had the kitchen and we had a prep kitchen. I said, "I'm going to devise a menu." They're telling me two weeks, I said, "No, no, no."

AH: This is after the restaurant had already opened then?

MG: No, no.

RG: This is Sarasota.

AH: Oh it's Sarasota.

RG: My brother and father [are] in Mexico, buying for St. Augustine.

AH: And this happened in Sarasota.

RG: We made the deal. We made the deal; we're buying the chairs and everything. So, I'm left behind, and now I rush to Sarasota. We had this fire in the main kitchens got palms and two weeks I can't afford to be closed. I come up with a smaller menu in our preparation kitchen, I get the restaurant open that next day. Everybody said it can't happen. But now I've got to rush to Tampa for the banquet for Air Florida for five hundred people.

AH: Okay.

RG: Now I'm rushing in my brand new 944 [Porsche], red with BBS wheels.

MG: Wait.

RG: Let me talk.

MG: Well, wait. Tell him the story that you saw this policemen and you're there on the circle and the cop goes, "God, does that car go really fast?"

RG: I forgot that story. I have a Porsche new model called 944.

AH: Okay.

RG: Red. I had gold BBS wheels and this policeman says, “That car must go really fast.” And I said, “It sure does.” So, now I’m going back to Tampa on [Highway] 41 and I’m hauling bucks. I’ve got to get there. I feel this pressure. I like to create the chaos in my life. And I’m going before the Ringling School of Art [Sarasota]. A pickup truck is crossing 41 and I’m heading north, and stops in the middle. I’m not wearing my seatbelt. I hit him broadside. I brace my arms so that I’m prepared, hit him broadside, hit the windshield, my car is totaled. And they want to take me to the hospital. I said, “No, I can’t go to the hospital. I have to go to the Columbia.” And I hit it hard. And then—

MG: But he wants to drive himself over.

RG: I want to drive—I call the dining room manager. Amelio Quadro came to get me. He wants to take me to the hospital. I said, “I have to go to the Columbia.” This is the dedication or the craziness I had.

AH: Yes.

RG: So, now after they clear it, the guys at fault. I hit him broadside seventy miles an hour.

AH: Yes.

RG: That’s when I believed that Porsche— it was a great car. I lived without wearing a seatbelt. I hit him and on the way back to Tampa, now, I’m basically fainting, fading.

MG: Really bad.

RG: Bad, bad shape.

AH: Yes.

RG: And I tell Mr. Quadro, “You have to take me to the Porsche dealership.” And I bought another car.

MG: No, no, he tells me, calls me “Meet me—

RG: At Reeves [Import Motorcars Dealership, Tampa].

AH: Okay.

MG: And I start—

RG: Because I was screwed up. But then I got home, I wasn't able to do anything. And then they did brain scans, of course, I had a serious concussion, but now my parents are coming back. They are concerned. We get the restaurant open. I've got a collar on. Now we are opening St. Augustine, and my brother is in Sarasota working. So, I'm gong to go there to hire the management and the team. This is May. I'm wearing my collar, I take my new car out there. And we start—and that was where I got probably my Master's degree in business.

AH: Okay, yes.

RG: Assembling the team, this young person. I told Melanie I was just going to be there a short while. I'm hiring the team. And they told—the general contractor said we'd open in June something. So, I hired my whole staff and we're training and training and we have no restaurant to open.

AH: Yes.

RG: And we've got this payroll running. And now we've got these people going and going. So, now I—

MG: And we're not opening when we are supposed to.

RG: —and so, now finally we realize, hey we're opening July 4th weekend. The busiest weekend there in all of St. Augustine. We have a V.I.P. party, Mr. Culverhouse is there. And we have these people there. And my mom sits Melanie by Mr. Culverhouse, who likes pretty women.

MG: Let me tell the story.

RG: You tell the story.

MG: My mother-in-law tells me, "Okay, look I've done the seating, Melanie, and you need to—I'm going to put here next to Mr. Culverhouse." I go, "I am not sitting next to Mr. Culverhouse, anybody else. I can't do this Mom, I just can't—

AH: Well, why didn't—

MG: Because I was so intimidated.

AH: Oh. Okay.

RG: He was the owner of the Buccaneers.

MG: I am a kid. I am a kid, Okay, I am twenty-eight years old. I'm like, "Please Mom, don't do this to me. She goes, "Look shut-up. You can do this, okay."

AH: Okay.

MG: “You can do this Melanie. Who the hell am I going to put next him. Okay?” So, I sit next to him. Of course, then I realize this guy is like everybody else. I mean he was schmoozing me. I mean, he was a very sweet guy, I mean. Oh god, that was one of the most—

RG: We go. I tell my wife, I said, “Well, listen I’m going to stay here for the summer, we’re going to stay here. We’ll get a condo on the beach. Listen, let’s just move here for two months.

RG: We’re going to stay here two months and get the restaurant open. And she is, “Oh, I don’t know.” And so, we get our two young daughters who are probably six—

MG: Four.

RG: —and four. And we leave our two cats at the house. And Melanie says her mom will change the litter. So, we come there for the two months and for June, July, and August, and I realized I liked being away from my father and having that freedom and being the first time alone. That delay of opening by about two months incurred big, big loses.

AH: Yes.

RG: And we had to go into our line of credit. So, this went on and on. We opened up with some big numbers. And I brought that a manager from Sarasota that had been with us a long time, a guy from Florida, an Italian guy from St. Louis, and melding these personalities together was tough. But we kept on and I convinced Melanie that we should stay the year. We enrolled our daughter into St. Joseph’s [Academy] school there, take her out of the Academy of Holy Names [Tampa]. And we’re there that year, and then I’m realizing we’re having some difficulties. We have young people working, I’m hearing all these stories of pilferage, of drugs and so, forth. This goes on and on. And probably a year and half after I resolved all the issues—we had did some private concerts with jazz groups there.

I was in the bar area of the St. Augustine restaurant overlooking the courtyard, and I remember I had a double espresso, and that kind of got me wired. I started getting very anxious and I didn’t understand that feeling—it was palpitations. I thought I was having a heart attack. And then that next night I was not feeling comfortable. The next morning I wake up having the same feeling; don’t tell my wife, I drive myself to the hospital. And they put me in cardiac care. They put nitroglycerine, my blood pressure was through the roof. And what it was the mind is so strong. I had resolved the theft and all these issues and everything was now taken care off. And my mind had checked me out. I was in CCU for five days and then I went, finally, home. But that’s before—[to Melanie] Let me tell the story, Melanie. It is my life. Please let me tell it. Don’t interrupt me, you throw me—

MG: I’m sorry.

RG: Please do not—this was most important time in my life. It was very difficult. Please don't interrupt me. I was convinced I was dying. I did not know I was hyperventilating. I could not leave my house. I would start thinking; I would breathe in a bag. This went on and on. Melanie would say, "Let me drive you to work." We'd go about three or four blocks heading toward—I'd say just take me back. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't take it. And that's before anybody could understand, explain panic attacks. I was ahead of the time. But I finally found a psychologist named Jack Merwin there, who I talked to and did bio feedback and discovered many of the issues that were bothering me. And the bio feedback taught me how to relax and bring all that down. And I did better but then that was 1985 it was resolved, everything was going good—St. Augustine. My dad now wants to open a restaurant in Harbour Island [Tampa]. And I'm feeling this pressure. He wants me to come back and start a Columbia food service, frozen food. I didn't want to get involved. I couldn't handle it. I remember going to see a movie with my wife and my children called *The Flamingo Kid* with Matt Dillon, in St. Augustine. And when I saw him having an argument with his dad. It triggered the panic attack. I realized it had to do with my father. Ashamed or embarrassed that maybe I failed him, I don't know.

I would go into Publix [Grocery Store]. The certain lights they have in there would trigger these panic attacks. This was a year, two-year long struggle. I come back to Tampa. I am in Harbour Island. He is talking to these people. Being in Cesar world and I'm worrying about this and that. And then I met a doctor here, Dr. Saavedra, who later wasn't really a psychologist, but did great things. He made me open up and discover more things that were bothering me. My fear was always that I wasn't making my father happy, because I truly admired my dad. And my dad admired me and appreciated me, but I just never wanted to disappoint him.

MG: (inaudible) he had great expectations.

RG: He had great expectations of the family. But that's why my dad, jumping ahead, when it came time to name presidents he named my brother and I both co-presidents. In the Latin culture, you name the oldest brother. And that was the biggest mistake [he] could have ever done. But this was—I went from restaurant to restaurant opening. I opened the St. Pete restaurant. I eventually learned how to deal with it. To say that I don't ever suffer from panic attacks would be lie. I still may do on occasion, but you learn how. And what happens with people with panic attacks and again I'll talk to people, is that you change your rhythm of breathing, you stop breathing, creating a lack of oxygen to the brain which causes light-headedness. And you feel a sense of just fatality, the worst feeling in the world. And when I talk to people that have had it. I will sit there to make them understand, hey, it's okay. Our minds are so, strong.

So, this is the most difficult time for me. I went there, opened this restaurant, had challenges, corrected it and when I corrected it, my mind said, "Okay, checking out." Breakdown of some sort, yes maybe. Different reasons, but that is where you gain your strength. You have to rebound back, can't check out. My mind is set that, you know, when it gets tough, when it's challenging, that's the best. So, we did that. We opened St.

Pete. And then I started doing triathlons in 1985, because my dad told me, You should start exercising, that's when you do so, good." I am two hundred and sixty-five pounds, I'm starting to ride a bicycle and I hear about this thing called a triathlon. And I say, "Shit I can never win, never want to." And I do a couple with my wife and I get my but kicked, you know, running, swimming, and riding. And then, it's 1988, I think, we're in Miami Beach for a triathlon. I had just bought Melanie an eighty-nine—

MG: Wait, Daddy. You're jumping ahead. His competitiveness took him, Andy, to the state championship.

RG: No, you're jumping ahead. You're jumping ahead. So, I start doing these races as a form of just exerting my energy.

MG: Great, we're traveling.

RG: No, Melanie, you jumped ahead. Please don't interrupt me.

MG: Okay. I'm sorry, you are right.

RG: So, I start doing this to try and lose some weight. Dr. Merwin says, "You need to start doing something to get rid of this energy." And I start riding a bicycle and he's right and running, I was always a sprinter, a one hundred yard dasher, a distance. So, I start doing this and I said I never think I'm going to win. So, I start getting a little quicker and then in I think eighty-eight [1988], eighty-nine [1989] things were better. I bought Melanie a new Jaguar. I had bought myself a new bicycle—

MG: A light weight—

RG: K—I can't remember the name of the bicycle, famous bicycle.

MG: Kestrel.

RG: Kestrel.

AH: Okay.

RG: Kestrel. And I bought these roof racks for her car, and we'd do the Miami Beach Triathlon. And I won my division. I beat this great competitor named Joe Whitlock.

AH: Okay.

RG: Who I had never been able to beat. So, I beat Joe I said, "I beat Joe Whitlock. And then I'm now competitive in my division. I tell Melanie, I tell the kids, "We're going to go celebrate. We're going to go to Ball Harbor. We're going to buy everybody something."

MG: Anything you want.

RG: So, now we can't find any place to park the car. And so, I said, "We'll go up to the garage." Not realizing that we had the bicycle on top, they had this PCP pipe I drive into. It rips the bicycle, gets the bicycle seat, rips the gutters off. The bike puts a hole in the car.

MG: It's terrible.

RG: She looking at her car; I'm looking at my bicycle.

MG: I'm going *my car!* He is going *my bike!*

RG: It was a \$4,000 bike. So, that's when I realize hey it wasn't—the competitiveness in me took over and then we started training. And then started training and then now all of a sudden I'm winning lots of races in my division. I become the state champion. And I am in Avatar, Florida. Young Lance Armstrong, a seventeen-year-old was there at the National Spring Championship with Dave Scott, Scott Ballina, Mark Allen—all the top guys. All the top guys were there. We'd heard about Lance Armstrong. Didn't know anything about him, he's going to get his clock cleaned. And I tell my wife, I said, "Look, you see that tall lanky guy, he's in my division, do you know his name? I had seen him in another race, he's in my division. But I want you to watch, I think he is going to get out of the water ahead of me. But let me know how far ahead he is of me." And now I had not been really able to train on the bike much and I get out of the water, I said, "Am I ahead of him or is he ahead of me?" She says, "Honey, you might as well just go home."

MG: I did. I said, "Look sweetie (inaudible).

RG: Yes, he's way ahead. So, now, gosh. So, there was this guy I did not know and I tried to talk to him once. He was with a girl and going to his room and he kind of blew me off. And I find out his name is Bart Wise. He was undefeated that year.

MG: Rude.

RG: And he was just kind of stand-offish, but Bart—I was his best man at his wedding. He was three-times undefeated, three years undefeated, and three time national champion. And we became best of friends. The good news is he was now not in my division.

AH: Yes.

RG: But now this is what happened. So, we became competitive. In 1990, I told my wife I was training and we were going to do the best. I wanted to be the state champion. And I had problems with my ankle, my Achilles [heel] and I can't get it fixed. And I see a friend, a vet at the restaurant and he says, "What you need is DMSO." I say, "DMSO?" He says, "Yes DMSO will take care of it; it's what they use on thoroughbreds.

AH: Okay.

RG: He says, “You’ve got to make sure it’s clean.” So, my vet gave me the medication. DMSO, is a cleaning agent and anything that’s on the skin will take it in. It takes away the swelling. So, I would go the races with my bottle of DMSO, which I still have upstairs.

MG: No you don’t.

RG: Yes I do. I have it. But the moment—within two or three seconds after putting it on—

AH: Yes.

RG: —on your ankle you get the sensation of smoked oysters in your mouth.

AH: That’s kind of weird.

RG: They use it on horses. But I did that—I went on to be the state champion but now I have to be at a Sant—Krewe Sant’ Yago [Krewe of the Knights of Sant’ Yago, Tampa social group founded by Cesar Gonzmart].

MG: Well, wait a minute you also, have to take credit for the fact that all these guys where so competitive, (inaudible) and now we go take picture of all of them and they’re like—

AH: Yes.

RG: Melanie, but you’re ahead of the game. Let me tell the story. This is this now championship and I’m there. I have been training with a guy, a runner that said, “You have to run slow to be fast.” And I had not worked on my swim or my bike. And I had been at a function with the Krewe of Sant’ Yago that night. And I drive to Miami Beach, to go do the national championships. I’m running out of gasoline. I’m on Alligator Alley [section of Interstate 75] at three in the morning.

MG: (inaudible)/

RG: And I’m with her brother and he says, “Well, you can get on your bicycle to go get gas.” I said, “Great. I get to the hotel at 4:30 in the morning. They said, “We gave your room away. You can go check in here.” I’ve got to be at the race at six in the morning. I get to the race. I go to the race, do it, had a horrible swim, horrible bike, had my best 5k run ever in my life. And I came in—although I wasn’t in the best shape for the whole race—I was ranked third in the nation that year. But then now we realize, triathlons is a great group of people but it’s too much individual. I’ve always loved team sports.

AH: Sure.

RG: So, I convinced Exclusive Sports Marketing President and owner Steve Tebon to do a team championship. And so they would do teams and you get ten people, you get more than ten people, you've got to say who the people are for each race, and you compile the scores. And each winner to see—So, I went now recruiting.

MG: All these people that had been competing against him. They are like—

RG: They were all on my team. We went along to each race and would take two massage therapists. And we're doing food. And so, now we've got the best people. We look in different divisions.

MG: That was the whole (inaudible).

AH: Okay.

RG: And there was a team called team chicken led by Lynn, Lynn, I can't remember his last name. Team Chicken, He's now in Tampa. We're going to this big race. And I have a Bob Donovan who did the cartoons for Bar—Snuffy Smith.

MG: Li'l Abner. No. Okay.

RG: Let me tell the story. Snuffy Smith. He created—

AH: Yes, yes.

RG: Barney Google [comic strip]. And so, he does, we create a coconut eating a chicken sandwich and the chickens head coming out. We'd do tee shirts.

AH: Okay.

RG: We'd do that and team chicken is all upset. And so, we kicked team chicken's but.

AH: And what you were Team Coconut or what?

RG: We were Team Cha-Cha coconuts.

AH: Okay.

RG: And now we went on to win the state championship three years in a row.

AH: Nice.

RG: And then we went to Sand Key. We had a bunch of the Clydesdales, the guys that were racing with me. And we go to—we do a race in Sand Key and get to take place.

And we're in the hotel pool next to the Columbia, and Melanie is going to get Rum Runners [drinks]. And we all of sudden, we have five hundred dollars worth of rum runners. We were celebrating. But it was what—I had now brought camaraderie to the team, to the sport—

(all speaking at once)

RG: And a guy that had went on to become undefeated national champion, Terry Holis, on the way back to Ft. Lauderdale, he had crashed his car.

MG: But these were the people to beat on this team.

AH: Yes.

RG: But we you know, I went on and we sponsored a young Kim Lewis and Michael Whitehead. We went to the Cancun National Triathlon and I sponsored them to go. I paid their way and it's an international triathlon there are people from all around.

AH: Yes.

RG: And so, we're doing the race. And now the organizers don't speak English—

AH: Okay.

RG: —and so, they had me be the Spanish translator. So, the day before the race I'm there translating through everything. And now the race begins the next day, the waves are twelve to fourteen seas so rough, so rough. They want to make it a triathlon. and Kim Lewis a great swimmer, she doesn't want to get in the water. But this gentlemen, who's a doctor who is paralyzed from a motorcycle accident he jumps in, he's swimming on his back. So, the race begins. They make it a duathlon, which is running, bike, or the swim. Now I had the best swim in my life. I'm out these twelve-foot seas. I'm telling these professional Mexicans, "So, where's the buoy?" Because I couldn't see, I take off my goggles. I came out of the water six overall. And now we get in the race and they're riding and we're doing the bike and we go through these turns. And the Mexicans, how they do it is they hit you with the yellow to make sure you went there, blue.

AH: Oh.

RG: I'm in first of my age group. And Kim says, "Richard, watch out with the turn around!" I don't know what she means. The turn around is all gravel; she had fallen. So, now I get off of the bike finally in first place. Now we begin the 10k run, 6.2 miles.

AH: Okay.

RG: Right through the flooded streets. And I'm seeing condoms floating in the water.

AH: (sounds of disgust)

RG: I said, “Son of a bitch.” Instead of water they’re giving you Coca-cola, this is a little strange. They’re drinking Coke. I came in third overall in my age group. I faded in the sand, but that was—Kim came in first, she won, won a thousand dollars. Michael Whitehead was in first, but blew out his tires because of the course. But those are the things that I looked at and we created the Team Cha-Cha- coconuts, and camaraderie and relationships is what life is about. And we change that. And so, like in the running sports, St. Anthony’s Triathlon, number one triathlon in the country they say, many people, four thousand athletes, they just wrote me a letter yesterday we’re the longest sub-sponsor of the event, because its promoting healthy lifestyles. To me, it’s not about the recognition you get but helping to promote others. And so, I look at triathlons, although I don’t do them because there is too much pressure in trying to win.

AH: Okay.

RG: So, I hate marathons. They’re the hardest thing in the world to do.

AH: Yes.

RG- The slower I run the better but I run marathons now dedicated to those that are suffering from cancer, suffering—that died from cancer suffering from it—that’s, you know, might be a good look at it, that’s—I live to fulfill my dad’s dreams, and to honor his memory. And when I wore a shirt saying *Hail Cesar* in L.A. when I was suffering and feeling the worst, the Lord blessed me by somebody saying, “Hail Cesar.” And that’s what kept me going. But this has nothing to do with the restaurant business but it has to do with being a family business—

AH: Absolutely.

RG: —and the passion.

AH: Yes.

RG: And to honor his memory. He wanted thirty restaurants, so, I realize that’s not—I got involved with Moe’s because I thought it was a way of achieving that goal, but I realize that I could not control the quality, and I did not want our family business to be hurt by the image of that fast casual food, good quality product but—so, I decided that thirty restaurants wasn’t a success, but what I did achieve was much further than he ever dreamed the Columbia’s could ever do in sales. So, that’s better that way.

AH: Yes. Well, let me go back. I just want to ask a couple of questions to help kind of wrap some of this material up. First, I have heard something about there had to be that whole historic review and everything in St. Augustine, and then they wanted to do a dig or something?

RG: They wanted to do a dig where, on St. George Street, I think they did a small dig to find out and it held us up. And then they wanted the building to be similar to what was there, and it was very difficult. They passed laws afterwards never amending anything, although the buildings look like separate individual buildings, it's one big building.

AH: Yes.

RG: You know and the fact that you had to have the right windows to the right hardware on the doors to—it was difficult, made it more expensive. But if you look at it, it's the best thing to do to maintain the historical accuracy of the area.

AH: Now, I have heard that rather than submit to the dig, your dad poured concrete in the middle of the night.

RG: I don't know exactly.

AH: Okay, I had heard about that.

RG: I don't know where you heard that, but I think we were there, we broke ground. I think we permitted then to do somewhat of a dig. But then across the street, Mr. Lewis owned this property my dad wanted to buy for sixty thousand dollars or forty thousand dollars. And my brother and I said, "Well, that's stupid. We don't need that property, we'll worry about it another day." And so, after we opened we realized we needed the property for parking, what have you. Now and they agreed to sell it to us at the appraised value.

AH: Okay.

RG: So, they bring the appraiser and they put there because of the world famous Columbia Restaurant opening across the street the value of the property had increased fifty thousand dollars.

AH: No.

RG: Yes.

AH: Really they did that?

RG: Well, it was the accurate thing because nothing was there, now the world famous Columbia. And I had to laugh. And I remember my dad went to buy property on the beach—

AH: Yes.

RG: —beach front property acreage 40,000 dollars, we told my dad he was crazy. My dad had a lot of wisdom. I learned back in the seventies, I go back to the Columbia, Ybor

City. In front, there was a little alley between our front parking lot. There was a little maybe two hundred square-foot lot that we could have bought for seventy-five hundred dollars, I tell my dad, “We’ll never need that.” Well, the property on Eighth [Avenue] and 21st [Street] bought it. And it became a point now where they’ve blocked us off from going in there. And they’ve towed cars away. I’ve learned through my dad you don’t turn away an opportunity like a property. I convinced him not to do that—

AH: Yes.

RG: —and the property in front of the Columbia now we could have bought for forty, fifty, sixty-thousand dollars now went up to ninety, one-hundred ten thousand dollars, whatever it was. Because of us. It made me feel good but it also, made me feel stupid.

AH: Yes, yes. Well, another question, now dealing with the panic attacks and when you dealt with them, do you think—let’s just say you didn’t deal with them at that time, for whatever reason you know maybe you got past them but—

RG: My dad looked it as a sign of a weakness.

AH: Sure.

RG: A weakness and not to say he looked at it as a weakness in me that I could not deal with it. And I looked at it as a weakness in me that could not understand it. Could not understand it. Here I am this football player, done everything faced all these challenges and that my mind could have such control over me—

AH: Yes.

RG: —it just, my physical being, it just blew me away. It took me a long time but after that, that one time, I was back and living in St. Pete, and I had a blow-up with my father and quit for two weeks. We butted heads, he wouldn’t say—and I quit. You know the panic attacks, I’ll be open to anybody about, because there are a lot of people that suffer them.

AH: Yes.

RG: People are embarrassed, they think it’s a weakness. It’s not a weakness. It’s just something you can’t control.

MG: You can’t control.

AH: It’s just like any illness. If you get a cold, it’s not because you are weak.

MG: But you can’t make it stop.

RG: To say I've never had a panic attack after, no, I've started to have them, and I learned to deal with them. I had one one time in the middle of the night. I was in West Palm Beach.

AH: Okay.

RG: Last month.

AH: Oh.

RG: And the reason was, I brought it one myself. I started thinking about, you know, I'm here I don't have—panic attack. I wake up at three in the morning. I had gone to a wine dinner at the restaurant and I set it off. What happens is then you start changing, altering your breathing.

AH: Yes.

RG: Which then causes lightheadedness, which causes this pain here.

MG: He gets physically ill.

AH: Yes.

RG: I was in this hotel, Crown Plaza, they had this relaxation c.d.. I said, "Let me go put this on." I've got it up in my room, I put it on. And I sat there trying to do my breathing techniques but I didn't have—I don't like to take drugs. I've got something called Bento, I get this—where my abdomen is working three times faster. I'll hit my stomach, and it's—

AH: (sounds of agreement)

RG: That's why I give myself the pain. I've the pain right now. But I can deal with that. But I remember staying in West Palm a month ago. I said, "What the hell am I going to do?" And that's because I thought about it before going. I said, "Maybe I should take my medication." I never do, I never take it with me.

AH: Yes.

RG: In case. And so, I woke up and I started thinking about all these things. And I create the attack and I realize I'm creating it and you can't do anything about it.

AH: Yes.

RG: The panic attacks lasted for two years solid. I was embarrassed by it at that point, but realized it's a modern disease maybe it existed in the past.

AH: They just didn't know.

RG: They just didn't know, didn't know.

AH: Now the question is, is you know you dealt with it when you did, but if you didn't or you had gotten past that the big crisis when your father died, I mean, do you think it would've been possible to get past that if you hadn't dealt with that so well?

RG: Well, you know, the problem with my dad was, I wanted his acceptance that I had pleased him. And a lot of times he never did anything to make me feel like I had not.

AH: (sounds of agreement)

RG: Because I admired my dad so much. I wanted to please him. I didn't want to ever fail him in this athlete, this person who has done everything. And then when my dad, my brother stayed in Sarasota listened to my dad, and we opened up a St. Pete. I created Cha-Cha Coconuts, and we opened up Clearwater. I did that and I think I gained his respect, because to me Cesar was larger than God.

AH: Oh, yes.

RG: And when people say that I'm bigger than my dad, I say, "No, my dad was—"

MG: You are.

Tape 1 ends, Tape 2, Part II Interview continues, Side A begins

RG: —up to his expectations. So, when Cesar named my brother and I co-presidents I felt uncomfortable, because knowing that my brother's older brother, and you should always do this. And then my dad, I wanted to change the way we did business because of—I can remember, before he was ill, a dishwasher came up to ask him about needing a raise and—

AH: Who did this?

RG: A dishwasher.

AH: Okay.

RG: And he needed a raise. "Well, how much do you make?" [Cesar asked] And he tells him. [He] says, "You make more money than I do." He says, "Really?" "That is what I make." And I guess the guys like, "I'm sorry, Senior Gonzmart, (inaudible). And now the guy had to leave saying, "How the hell can I live on Davis Island on the water with a yacht with a Rolls Royce?"

AH: Yes, yes, yes.

RG: My dad's expectations, he always said he wanted to be like George Washington. He says that George Washington didn't want a salary. He said, "Pay me one dollar a year, just pay my expenses."

AH: Yes.

RG: And George Washington's expenses are one million dollars a year.

AH: Yes.

RG: So, my dad liked to do these smoke and mirrors. And he built this beautiful home on Davis Island, had in my brother and my name and then eventually changed it back. He was like caretaker of the IRS, it was a write-off.

MG: But he tried to teach the attorneys how to do it Cesar-way.

AH: Yes.

RG: It was Cesar World. Attorneys would joke [that it] was Cesar World. And so what—Cesar World, we'd make two hundred dollars a week and the company would pay all of our credit card bills, our home expenses, electrical and so, forth. And that didn't work. And then eventually, my brother and my dad, and even I, we had money that we owed the company. And I told my dad, "Listen dad, we need to make a reasonable salary that we live within our means and the company doesn't pay otherwise it doesn't work." Well, at the time my brother was divorced. My brother owed over a million dollars to the company. The IRS was coming down on us. And he said, "How can that be?" Well, it's easy you pay all this stuff. And so, we wanted to change that. And my brother's second divorce. That's when I really realized, I'd changed it before.

MG: Who changed it?

RG: I did. I was changing things. And my brother, when my dad died, his ex-wife, before they got divorced, would not let the children come see my parents. And on my dad's burial, he threw his wedding ring in the grave, on my dad's coffin.

MG: Yes, but, your father's last request was [to] not to have her there.

RG: But so, we did that, but my brother realized it was too late. But his wife was able to involve the company, which could've killed us, into his divorce, because it was co-mingled, because of the way we did things.

MG: She was going to divorce us.

RG: I had to change everything.

AH: Yes.

RG: I've been changing it, because of the way things were done, that the company and Casey were one and the same.

AH: Exactly.

RG: And this went on for two years, and my brothers going to his second attorney and we're going there to talk to the judge about the judges going to say about the company adjoining and pay this. And we're driving; I tell my brother's attorney, I said, "We're going to settle the case today." He says, "We're not going to settle it today." I had gone to see his wife's attorney. I consulted Mr. Lee Sanders from Havana. I took him all the records. If there was ever a time to get divorced, it was the best time. And the guy realized the situation. He was going to settle. And that day I settled the divorce, two years of fighting.

But that's when I realized hey, you have to change things. And just recently my brother's daughter started working with the company, and he was talking to our Chief Operating Officer, Curt Gaither, that there was a woman that worked for us as a GM in Clearwater and went to West Palm Beach as a manager and she didn't have the proper clothes. She didn't have the money, but Curt advanced her the money. I gave him permission to do it to get her proper clothes. Casey, knowing of that tells Curt, "Well, we should give my daughter money too, to go buy clothes. And I found out after the fact. I said, "This is different. This is not an employee, this is a family member."

MG: So stop it.

RG: So, if you start doing this, now you have all these children that start taking money and you're back into the co-mingle.

AH: Yes.

RG: That the company, what I'm saying, so, bang. He doesn't even know that I'm making him pay for it.

AH: Yes.

RG: You can't co-mingle. And so, he's going through his third divorce now and his wife says, "Now it's going to become tough, because your brother's going to get involved." I said, "Well, why does she say that? He says, "Because you're a hard ass." No, I'm a fair person. She's due what she has coming.

MG: You are about the fairest person in the world.

RG: And it's just about doing what's right.

AH: Yes.

RG: But you can't co-mingle. If you start having ten children now having all their expenses paid, you'll kill the business.

AH: Oh, absolutely.

RG: So, I look at that. My dad wanted to have this low salary and tried to milk the money to not pay the IRS. But IRS came back. Because one day, my dad put down that we sold so many millions of dollars in the company. IRS read this.

MG: In the paper.

RG: And they say, "Well, that is double what you made." And they come and audit us, and they nailed us.

AH: Yes.

RG: With numbers that weren't true. And so, I said—you've got to put probably *The Ten Secrets to My Success* in the book printed. I sent it to Carl Cannova, the president of Cisco [Systems, Inc.], who didn't realize that it was my ten thoughts, and he gave one to each of his vice presidents. And one is being open and honest with your family, your vendors, and telling them the situation. Back in 1995, when we had our difficulties, after my dad passed away, we had co-presidents and we decided there had to be one president. And we find out that Mr. (inaudible), our C.F.O. [chief financial officer], was trying money. We had gone through a million dollars for my dad's death. He was going to borrow money to try to solve the problem (inaudible) without solving the problem. We had not had financial statements in six months so, he's going to borrow money. And now he's getting ready to close it and it comes out in the paper that we owe the state of Florida two hundred and eighty thousand dollars [in] sales tax. The bank finds out. I find out. I said, "Holy shit." Now I have got to go meet with the state of Florida. That's a theft, you know they're going to put you in jail. Now I've got to go down there, I've got to talk to them. And I hired Mr. Lee Sanders, this consultant, to help me and I came up with a plan.

MG: And that's more than I told you.

RG: I came up with a plan. And I talk to them, they gave me some days. And I go on and I meet there with my attorneys and my C.P.A.'s and one day they put me in the back room. And they said, "Richard, I don't want you to be shocked, but I think you're going to be arrested today." But I had gone down to see Henry Lee, Ed Sterling the son of the founder of this food service. We owed him seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars and we were way behind. And I said, "Ed, I want to meet with you. I want to meet with you." And you can talk to Ed. "I want to meet with you." I fly down with Lee Sanders and I meet there. And they know the situation is way behind. And they're waiting to here me say I'm going to pay pennies on the dollar. And here's my situation, here's my plan, the same plan I gave to the state of Florida. And these ideas came from meeting one day with

Chris Sullivan flying on a plane to Jim Smith's ranch to go hunt in Tallahassee, he was running for governor.

AH: Okay.

RG: And so, I'm there and I said, "Listen, I want you to give me three years credit seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars and I'll pay you on a monthly basis. I'll stay current with all my current bills." And they're going to go get the note. And they're there, "Shit that sounds better than pennies on a dollar." And they're looking, waiting I tell them the plan and they agree to it. So, now we're forced to pay current by sending a check. Thirty-six months later I call him up and I say, "Mr. Sterling, I would like to meet with you." And they're like, "Holy, what's going to happen now?"

MG: (laughs)

RG: They're waiting for some bad news. I gave them the last check. I said, "I want to thank you very much for your faith and your trust in me." He could've pulled the trigger. The state of Florida could've pulled the trigger. That's where I gained the strength. That's where Richard then emerged being Richard and being honest, and then taking the leadership. My brother is going through a divorce. He's staying at home sunbathing, didn't work. We had a problem in Daytona Beach. We had opened this property. My C.F.O. negotiated the deal, I thought was twenty thousand, it was forty thousand dollars, didn't know what was happening. I negotiated on that. I had do all of that. My brother didn't do anything. So, that's where I asked my mom I said, "You need to give me controlling interest. She would not. But it just bothered me in that (inaudible) realize again he wants to say that he has not contributed to the restaurant in fifteen years and he hasn't, but it bothers me in that sense that he's admitting he hasn't. And that's okay. If both us had been working it would have been maybe a nightmare.

AH: Yes.

RG: But the thing was that's where I gained the strength. I realized the power of truth. Bad news as long as you're truthful, when people lie when it's bad about how good things are and then you have no credibility.

AH: Yes, absolutely.

RG: And so, when you tell them the bad news—

MG: But people had to admire him, Andy, for the fact that he went and being the proud person from this proud family this successful family going, "Guys, I need help. I can't do this. Please understand I'm good for it."

RG: I did that with every person—

MG: Every person.

RG: —that I owed money. I said, “Hey.” And people there were questioning me. And the staff that stayed with me, I’m loyal to them. But that’s when Richard took control of the business and did what he had to do. And that was (inaudible) the best hire, one of the two best hires I’ve ever made. And when I interviewed him I explained, “You know our situation.” He had been with—

MG: Bob.

RG: With a CPA firm for Dollar Rent a Car [company]. And then I had dinner with him and his wife and my mother and my brother. And they understand. I said, “You really understand.”

MG: He wanted (inaudible).

RG: And before, I went to go see a person who’s a wonderful friend now Lee, Lynn Lee Culbreath, from Barnett [Bank], who had done some work with my dad. She didn’t even want to talk us, because she knew my dad’s numbers were bogus and we went there. And we never knew what we owed with our old C.F.O. but within two days of this, we knew everything we owed. I went there with my numbers and she assisted me with a loan to help me get through. But that’s where I started building my credibility. I don’t bank with Linda, Linda and I now are great friends. And I think the credibility—bankers calling me all the time wanting to do business. Presidents of the bank wanting to meet with me I said you know what, one banker I won’t mention the name, he said, “We want to do business with you.” I said, “You don’t recall me calling back in 1995 when I went in to talk to you guys, and you said we’re sorry, we’re not interested.” You’ve got to take the good and the bad and that’s the way it was. But I realized that’s strength, and when you tell the truth it’s not always good.

AH: Yes.

RG: So, when you have a bad down turn and you tell the truth they’ll believe in you.

MG: Well, restaurants are not something that banks truly—

RG: What?

MG: —believe in.

RG: But the thing is (inaudible) banks—banks wanted to give me money left and right. And one bank says two years ago, “We’re going to give you half a million dollar line of credit unsecured.”

MG: (laughs) Where were you when I needed you?

RG: I looked at the sky and said, “Dad, did you hear that?”

AH: Nice.

RG: But the thing is that it is because of being open and honest.

AH: Yes.

MG: It's because of you.

RG: I take credit for that. I didn't used to, I take credit. But I meet with Dan Mahern, the chairman of SunTrust [Bank]. He's talked to me in the past, and he's one of the banks that want to do business. But I believe in business, that you should always have good relationships with two or three banks. You never know. So, and maybe my C.F.O. told him that in the past, give accurate information, have audited statements to be with him. He's very involved with the community. He's involved with the river development, some property I'm interested in doing. So, to sit there and say no, well, no you talk to him. Right now, we have the best relationship with two young men, Al Rogers, Joe Chillura, who are with First Union [Bank], who we were trying to do business with that their main guy shut us down. They're now the heads of Colonial Bank. They are going to Manufacturer's Bank. They believed in me, do and continue to. So, that's who you stay with. You don't switch for a nickel.

AH: Yes exactly.

RG: And people that switch for a nickel—When you have a problem nobody is going be there for you. So, those were the difficult times facing the state of Florida, facing jail—

AH: Yes.

RG:—something that was (inaudible) facing losing everything and then realizing hey that you know I had to protect my mom protect everything. I've written about that in here. I can't find it in my computer right now.

AH: Okay. My one question I have is: how do we deal with this material. I mean like—

MG: You mean (inaudible).

RG: You can put some of that is accurate in there.

AH: Yes, yes, no, no all this stuff that we just talked about. What I meant was the Casey material. How do we deal with that? I mean obviously you can almost mark time by his divorces and each one coincides with a different crisis.

MG: No, we're going to have to be very careful with it. I mean as a sister-in-law I can take the smear of that, but no we can't do that to him.

AH: Sure, sure.

MG: We have to work around it.

RG: It's kind of like Lawrence. It's kind of like Lawrence.

AH: Yes.

MG: Yes.

AH: Yes. Good point.

MG: We'll tip toe around it and just not put too much—give him any really credit.

AH: Yes.

MG: But yet—

RG: Well, you know, he will admit that, he'll tell people—I remember one day a friend of his, Kevin Brown, in Sarasota told somebody that Casey could dance circles around me and this and that. Well, it bothered me, to say it didn't bother me, it did.

AH: Yes.

RG: But you know I'm me. I'm me, and he is him. And he did his thing. You know he liked taking it easy over there and hiding. I had been trying to find him all day. He had his children today. I've been trying to find him. He (inaudible) can't find him. That's just the way he is, he disappears.

AH: Yes.

MG: (inaudible) it's not fair.

AH: No, of course not.

MG: I mean now of course when he needs us he'll call and say, "Hey!"

RG: Lynn Culverhouse says a little late on my part but I just watched the (inaudible) video. And all I can say is wow this is so special and beautiful, congratulations to you all for such a wonderful—

MG: (inaudible) Christmas thing.

AH: Okay.

Interview Ends