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Richard Gonzmart oral history interview by Andrew Huse, December 6, 2006

Richard Gonzmart (Interviewee)

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Andrew Huse: —the little Siboney thing that I wrote. You know it says that the Columbia [Restaurant] with the Siboney and all of the entertainment and every thing that they were throwing a party every night and they were inviting everyone to come along you know, and—

Richard Gonzmart: They decided that that was a party and everybody would—the women would dress in their finest gowns and sequined dresses and gentlemen in tuxedos or black suits. Every Saturday was a celebration of life. It seemed like just routine to me. Everybody did it. You’d go there and you’d have buckets of ice—

Melanie Gonzmart: (speaking at same time) I’ve never seen something—

RG: —you’d have buckets of ice and bottles of whiskey, bottles of VO, bottles of Cutty Sark or J&B.

MG: I’ve never seen so many women dressed so beautifully.

AH: Okay.

MG: I mean chiffon and sequins.

AH: So the bottles of whiskey were on the tables you mean?
RG: And everybody would serve themselves.

AH: Okay, well that’s certainly a different age.

RG: Yes. (laughter) Buckets of ice; bottles of whiskey and mixers. And they would just live it up. And the next morning they might go to Dr. Tony Parrino’s house at eleven, and he had a bartender and they would start drinking Bloody Marys at eleven o’clock.

MG: And they had a full meal when I tell you (imitates large meal). I mean it was all over again.

AH: Yeah.

MG: Instant replay. These people had an incredible constitution.

AH: Yeah.

MG: There is no way I could—

AH: No doubt.

MG: And it wasn’t a small group. It was a large group. I mean what Richard, twelve to—

RG: The question was to me. You weren’t there. I was there. You’re answering my question.

MG: You’re right.

RG: You go ahead and answer the question—

MG: I apologize. No, I apologize

RG: —and you break my train of thought.

MG: You’re right.

RG: She answered it.

AH: Well, at the same time I think in a way Cesar and Adela kind of, just encouraged an extravagance. They themselves were something short of movie stars, but something close for the Tampa area, right?

RG: Somewhat in this area.

AH: Yes.
RG: Admired by the Latins and the Anglos probably, what’s the word? Loathed them because they were just these flamboyant people.

AH: Well, certainly not all Anglos did because, I mean—

MG: Not always.

AH: —because there were quite a few who ate at the Columbia and joined the party on Saturday’s right?

RG: Yes.

AH: I mean what would you say the composition was there? How many Latins to how many Anglos?

RG: I don’t know.

AH: Yeah, hard to say, right?

RG: The table was comprised of Tampa natives that were Italian or Spanish I would say right? [to Melanie] Cuban? Mel?

AH: At your parents’ table you mean?

RG: Yes.

AH: Okay. Well consumptions changed a lot. I mean dark liquor was—

RG: Dark liquor was popular then. There was scotch and VO and Canadian whiskey.

AH: Yes. The Wilder pieces\footnote{[Transcriber’s Note: Interviewer Andrew Huse is referring to Paul Wilder, who wrote newspaper column-style ads for the Columbia Restaurant]} said the same thing. That there was a lot of bourbon and scotch right?

RG: Bourbon and Canadian whiskey.

AH: Okay.

RG: It was good bourbon, yeah. I didn’t know. I just remember the Canadian, VO and Cutty Sark and J&B.

AH: Okay. And so when did the transition into wine really, I mean I know that the Columbia always encouraged the people to drink wine, but—
RG: The Columbia wine list was comprised of French wines, Italian, German and maybe three Spanish wines. The Spanish wines weren’t very recognized. The wine list in Spanish—after my visit to Spain, probably in the seventies, I took off all of them. And for a period I had no wines other than Spanish on the list. People said I couldn’t do it. I said, “Why not?”

AH: And what’s the composition look like now? It’s still mostly Spanish right?

RG: Eighty-five percent Spanish.

AH: Okay. And what else do you have in there—American?

RG: We do American; we do a California. And some South American wines; a few. I’m eating too much here. Only Californian from my family that went there.

AH: Oh I see.

RG: We are just trying to stay with a certain theme. Every Saturday night—I thought everybody lived that way.

AH: (laughter) Yes.

RG: I thought everybody dressed up on Saturday nights that way and everybody just drank. They say they drank responsibly. I’m sure they got toasted, but somebody drove everybody home.

AH: Yeah. So, what were some of your parents’ favorite dishes when they went out on Saturday night?

RG: My dad, on Saturday night, put prime rib au jus on the menu.

AH: Okay.

RG: And he served it on Saturdays and that’s what he would eat and tell everybody they’d have to eat. That was his favorite dish.

AH: Okay.

RG: My mom, I don’t know what she ate. She ate more traditional than my dad, but my dad would always eat steak at the Columbia.

AH: Okay, so he was kind of a meat and potatoes guy.

RG: Yes. He used to do a twenty-ounce prime rib.

AH: Wow.
RG: I’m stuffed. I’m stuffed, I’m sorry. Melanie, what did my mom like to eat?

MG: Chicken. Her favorite food was chicken.

RG: She liked the dark meat.

MG: She liked dark meat.

AH: Okay.

MG: She loved the back.

AH: Oh I see.

MG: She would roast her chickens whole in this pan that I have and then she would break it apart with her hands and she would always eat the back before she fed us.

AH: Oh. Okay.

MG: And she would scoop these little (gestures).

RG: Oh I don’t remember that.

MG: And it was killer. I can’t make chicken like that. Andrea [Richard and Melanie’s daughter] can.

AH: Oh she can make it.

MG: Yeah. She just—

RG: She did a great job with it the other day; worked for seven to twelve hours.

AH: Okay.

MG: And mother would marinate in with lemons and garlic and—

RG: Butter.

MG: And she [Richard’s mother Adela] always had to buy her chickens at the Davis Islands Supermarket.

AH: Okay.

MG: Because they were the fattiest ones.
AH: Okay, excellent.

MG: And she had just chicken and we would all die for it. And she would make the little round potatoes, remember?

RG: And the rice.

MG: Yeah and the good rice.

AH: Oh yeah.

MG: Always the good rice.

AH: Now is the good rice—is it like a fried rice? What makes it dark?

RG: Browned butter.

AH: Browned butter?

RG: You get the butter and you brown it

MG: You brown it.

RG: You’ve got to cut the onions and you’ve got to brown it until its dark, fresh basil, chicken stock. First, with the good rice you start with one stick of butter—

AH: Okay.

RG: —one (inaudible) to cook right.

AH: So, you brown the butter and then you add the rice?

RG: Yes, you brown the butter; you get the rice and you put the carrots—I mean the onions—in there. You get it brown. Then you put the rice in there which then the butter’s still browning and you leave it in there for what? Three minutes? The rice gets brown in color. And then you add the chicken stock. And so the butter is the secret ingredient as far as I am concerned and the fresh basil.

AH: Yes, I always wondered about that because the first time I had it I don’t remember it being dark, but then every other time after that it was and I always wondered—God, it really is a rich—

MG: And with the fresh basil, it’s even better.

AH: Yeah it adds some freshness to it.
MG: Oh yeah.

RG: Oh I’m full, I ate too much.

AH: Well that’s not such a bad sign for a man with a sour stomach.

RG: I could eat. I could actually eat the salad with the rice.

MG: Take your time. We eat very fast.

AH: Do you want to adjourn back to the couch? Are you okay here?

MG: [to Andy] No, I want you to finish.

AH: Okay.

MG: I want you to finish.

AH: Okay. Well so you started full time in the restaurant in seventy-three [1973]?

RG: Yeah.

AH: Now would you—

RG: Seventy-four.

AH: Okay. Actually, before we go there what else do you remember about your grandfather? I mean what other kinds of things did he teach you along the way? When did he pass first of all?


AH: Oh so you didn’t have that much time with him really.

RG: I remember him. I was eight or nine. Actually, I think it was July 7th. He had gone up to Rochester, Minnesota to the Mayo Clinic and they put potassium directly into his veins and it killed him. It gave him a heart attack. Today they would be sued, but—

AH: Nothing?

RG: —And he had cancer. I remember my grandfather and going to his house and he had a bar one day and he saw me drinking and he wanted me to drink something and he gave me a shot glass full of scotch and I was drinking it. And he smoked cigarettes all day long and so he gave me a cigarette and I’m running around my parents’ house pretending I was a choo-choo train and my mother was not very amused by my grandfather’s actions. (laughter)
AH: Okay.

RG: Smoking a cigarette and drinking scotch at five years old.

MG: What about the time he taught you to shave?

RG: I remember him taking me into his bathroom and I asked him about shaving. And he takes me in there and I am standing on the chair and he has his electric razor and he’s pretending the shaver was on and it’s buzzing. And my mother walked in and got furious with him. I could remember that disillusionment when I found out that he said there weren’t any blades in there. I really thought I was shaving.

AH: Oh. Okay.

RG: I guess he took the blades out. To this day I won’t agree that he did. I don’t know.

AH: Yes.

MG: Well, it’s typical. I mean he would do that to Lauren [Richard and Melanie’s daughter] to aggravate the hell out of her—

AH: Oh I see.

MG: Right?

RG: Yes.

MG: Adela being the only child and being a little spoiled.

RG: (talks to the dog)

AH: So where was the— How much did you get an idea of the bigger picture when you first started?

RG: What’s that?

AH: How much of an idea of the bigger picture did you get of the Columbia kind of strategically? Did you start out just really localized in what you were doing?

RG: I started off working at the restaurant at twelve. I was working during the days in the kitchen and all and as an adult I was working there. And I just had certain responsibilities. I was like an assistant manager.

AH: Okay.
RG: We didn’t have titles then. I was just helping the people who ran it.

AH: Okay.

RG: I don’t know. I always thought that to be a part of the Columbia was special.

AH: Well it seems like many, many other people felt the same way. When did you get an idea that the Columbia wasn’t like other places? You know, there are lots of restaurants out there, but people don’t have the same allegiance to it.

RG: To me it was just, my parents were my parents and they didn’t feel there was anything— I thought that everybody lived like we did.

AH: Yes. (noises, pouring)

RG: I don’t know, I can’t tell you. I guess when I was twelve years old and my father and mother were invited to Spain to be the guests of Generalissimo Francisco Franco for two weeks in the month of September or October. I thought that was pretty cool seeing my parents on Spanish TV and talking and I didn’t understand really.

He was the head of the country and I didn’t understand and that was kind of special. The Administrator of Tourism [Manuel] Fraga Iribarne is still alive and he entertained us. And that to me was when I realized that that was pretty neat if they would entertain us in Spain with the president. It was a big deal.

AH: Well they got awards and everything else.

RG: When I was fifteen I was in Spain in Palma Mallorca and we went swimming and went back to our motel.

MG: We being?

RG: My brother and I. My brother lost his watch— his second watch. He lost his Rolex skiing in Hillsborough Bay. My dad gave him a Timex. We went back to get it and we found out that Timex that swings up and down the water.

On our way there we talked to a gentleman who talked to us late in the day and he told us, “If you’re from the States the next time you have to go to a restaurant in Florida, they make the best paella in the world, the Columbia.” That’s when I realized also— see here I am in Spain and somebody is telling me that my family makes the best paella.

AH: A Spaniard told you that? Okay.

RG: He didn’t know who we were. We told him we were the owners and [he said] “Yeah, yeah, yeah, right”
MG: He laughed at them.

AH: He didn’t believe it? You said you were fifteen at the time?

RG: Fifteen; and my brother was twenty.

AH: And this is in Palma—

RG: Palma Mallorca, Palma de Mallorca.

AH: Okay.

RG: One of the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean.

MG: Well you had gone to visit your brother. How did you get there?

RG: I was studying in Spain. We were going to drive down to the South of Spain. Two miles outside of Madrid he was falling asleep so we went back and we caught a mail plane at around eleven o’clock at midnight, one of those DC-3’s that stopped at all these cities.

We got to Palma de Mallorca at about five in the morning with no hotel reservations. We didn’t know where we were going so the taxicab driver took us to the beach. We went to the beach. All of the hotels were full and I remember just lying on the lounge chair on the beach trying to sleep.

AH: (laughs)

RG: We got a hotel for eight dollars a night and that was pretty neat. We were on a very tight budget. And when you walk down the hallway to go to the bathroom and take a shower. That was a first for me. We had hotdogs for thirty cents; went out to the discos. It was neat.

AH: And you said you were fifteen at the time? So that would make Casey like twenty?

RG: Yes.

MG: Five years.

AH: Yes, interesting.

MG: (inaudible)

RG: (talks to the dog) Okay, what other questions? Sorry I’m just—
AH: That’s all right. We’ll pick it up where we left off when we finish up. So let’s just get you out of assistant manager position. What point did you start receiving more responsibilities?

RG: When they opened the Café. It was a restaurant within a restaurant, a non-union restaurant within a union restaurant and Mr. Alley—Jim Alley? No. Edward Alley?

MG: John Edward Alley.

RG: John Edward Alley. He used to help us with our situation with the union because it was the only time he had ever seen a non-union restaurant operating within a union restaurant. The place was packed and then once you get that responsibility, it got great reviews, four stars—

AH: So this was the Café? The present day Café?

MG: It’s a restaurant.

AH: Yes, I’ve seen some of the printed things saying, “The Café at the Columbia” or something like that? Okay.

RG: That was that restaurant within the restaurant.

AH: So how does that work?

RG: We hired young ladies, for the first time, as cocktail servers [and] bartenders. We actually hired a cook just for the grille who was non-union. The union basically won out because we became more of a bar and the union waiters saw how busy we were and they were slower. And they started bringing the Columbia menu and saying the prices were very reasonable.

    And it became—when we expanded the room to front and knocked out the wall. I was given the responsibility to do that and given the permission to open up the Warehouse bar without ever telling my dad. And basically six weeks from—he found out about a week before.

AH: Opening? Yes.

RG: Yes, something like that. He gave me enough rope so I couldn’t hang myself.

AH: I see.

RG: My toes were touching the ground.

AH: (laughs)
RG: I couldn’t totally destroy everything. But that was at the time that Ybor City Columbia was slow, due to difficult times.

AH: Yes.

RG: And the food wasn’t as good so it was to bring the locals back in so.

AH: Okay. So then the Café was mainly a watering hole place for drinking?

RG: It was a restaurant per se.

AH: Okay.

RG: For a restaurant we served our famous lobster tails for two dollars over cost and I felt like, hey, I want to get the top dollar spenders, the big spenders in Tampa. Australian lobster tails for one pound tail, the rest we were selling for $29.95. We sold it for $14.95. And I was selling Dom Perignon for two dollars over cost. I think we were selling it for forty-four dollars a bottle which was a lot of money. Back then, the restaurants were charging ninety to ninety-five dollars.

We get to the point where we were the largest user of Dom Perignon in the state of Florida. And Moet et Chandon was not happy because we were ruining the image because we were making all the other restaurants look like they were thieves charging ninety to ninety-five dollars, but we got the people. Forty-four bucks was a lot of money for people, but people had money.

A guy came in and he said to hold this table for him every night and if he didn’t come just charge him. We would get the table all ready and we were just serving Dom Perignon left and right.

And that brought beautiful women. It brought the men. So we had a solid run for about four years. We went to New Jersey to bring a band back that would be different. We had Dick Rivers who had just started. We brought in a band called Street Beat and we created the band and brought them down and did a teaser I called, “Street Beat on Broadway”. Seventh Avenue was known as Broadway.

AH: Yes.

RG: Nobody knew what it was and it was really commercial saying, “Street Beat straight from New York City featuring Joey Mangione.” And I’ve never said it was Chuck Mangione’s brother, but everybody assumed it was Chuck Mangione, and everybody turned and said, “That’s Chuck Mangione’s brother.” “Really? I don’t know. Is it?”

MG: What? (laughter)

AH: So was he? Or was he not? No he wasn’t.
RG: No, his name was Mangiove, not Mangione.

AH: Oh!

RG: It was my marketing ploy and it was the whole bit. Then somebody came in that knew Chuck Mangione’s brother, whose name is “Gap” Mangione, and he said, “That’s not Gap!” And I said, “Who said it was?”

MG: But Gap played.

RG: I brought Gap in after that.

MG: Gap was awesome.

RG: When they were gone for a few years on vacation. I brought in Gap Mangione who is a pianist. (laughter) I had met him in Atlanta, nice guy.

MG: How many celebrities have you had play there though Richard? Many.

RG: Chicago one day was playing a concert up on the stage and there were about five players up there. Kenny Loggins walked in the bathroom one time and we thought after a concert and jumped up and sang six songs. Al Giroux; George Benson. And it was neat.

MG: Who was that other guy too that was so good.

RG: Dave Mason.

MG: Dave Mason.


RG: He had the keyboard player who was the keyboard player for Vanilla Fudge and they came to the Columbia. And someone bothered him who was a Vanilla Fudge fan. Dave Mason was bothered by the fact that people walked in (inaudible). But the other guys were cool.

AH: Now this is at the Warehouse or the Café we’re talking about?

RG: Both.

AH: Both. Okay. So tell me about, what is the strategy then behind—you just wanted to cut prices to attract people?

RG: Actually we sold cocktails. If you offer things that people love—they liked the lobster tail, but not for twenty-nine bucks. So I sold it basically at cost, two dollars over
cost. My strategy was that the grocery stores like Publix during Thanksgiving, they offered turkey cheaper than I could buy it. It’s a lost deal. But they sold you the stuffing. They sold you the cranberry sauce. They sold you the vegetables, the salad and so forth. So my idea was just get them in and they didn’t care. Because I figured they would have a couple drinks.

And all my wine was priced different and different strategy you know two or four dollars over cost. It was getting people to drink and get a certain clientele. But the problem with that is it’s a short run. It was like three or four years of having that and it was like Studio54 and we were standing outside and it was like, you can come in and you can come in—

MG: Yes.

RG: There was a line.

MG: (speaking at same time)

RG: It got to the point that the whole restaurant was full. People just wanted to be in it all over the place.

MG: There was nowhere else in town to go to like that. He was always ahead of his time. Okay? And I remember— he always had a futuristic thing going on. Remember (inaudible) Always.

AH: So this was the late seventies that you did this?

RG: Seventy-nine.

AH: Okay, seventy-nine [1979]. And was the Warehouse at the same time then?

RG: The Warehouse opened in eighty-two [1982].

AH: And this was— where was this?

RG: The Warehouse was behind the kitchen and there was a long hallway that we created and you walked through the Cafè. It was meandering and it was a great place to meet women or for women to meet men. It was very dark and four feet wide and you would walk through there.

MG: (inaudible)

RG: There was a real low ceiling over the stairwell that was about six foot-four. And I remember seeing someone like Dave Roberts the Buccaneer [football player] try to walk from one room to the other and he had been drinking and he hit the low thing. And we had to put up a sign— “Beware Low”— and he knocked himself down. And so we
created the Warehouse because nothing else was happening in Ybor and the Café was packed and we thought Warehouse was jazz and jazz was where you—the Café is where you go to down a couple of scotches to talk to a girl and once you had that girl the Warehouse was where you would go to sit and listen to some jazz.

AH: Okay, a little more romantic.

RG: Yes and they were both packed. Probably the Café sold more because people drank more. It was just a great combo. It was rock jazz and fusion jazz.

AH: Okay. Now you were mentioning that you had seen a concert or something was there some sort of inspiration for this? You started to mention it.

RG: I used to go to concerts to try to bring the artists back. I’d bring the musicians back. Not just something unique in Ybor to do something. We were in our late twenties and we wanted to create a place for us to go where people wanted to go and where the young professional lived and it became very successful. It was a good place to meet people. I just got idea. I’m not sure how I got the idea.

MG: He was just very fortunate; he knew many of the promoters so we would go to all the concerts because he loves music so very much and chances are we would get back stage to meet everybody.

AH: Okay, so then they would be invited. Yes, because there wasn’t any other place for them to go while they were in town.

RG: There were other bars, but they weren’t like this. There were disco-type bars and stuff.

AH: Sure

MG: Even that was out.

RG: It was different. They were looking for a different type of environment. You had Robiconti’s—Jim Robiconti; Hector Robiconti. So there were different places to go, but it was just a different overall environment and all the old Tampa people were there and my goal was to bring all the old Tampa people back to the Columbia that they had forgotten because they had probably gone through the difficult years of the fifties and sixties.

AH: Yes.

RG: So we reintroduced them.

AH: Okay. So in a way these kinds of new things introduced a new generation and brought some of the old people back too. Okay.
RG: People of all ages.

AH: Because I had seen lots of promotional materials for it, but I had never known what the story was there.

RG: I used to do all the promotion. I had a couple of people assist me and we got different types of promotion like the radio or mail-outs.

MG: And TV—lots of TV too.

RG: We did backstage passes for people who were good customers. We didn’t charge them anything; it was a backstage pass so when there was a line you could come in. It was like by invitation only backstage pass. And then the Warehouse had a different name for its pass. We had an entrance for each club and people went back and forth.

AH: And I had heard that Cesar had dreamed of having different themed nightclubs in Ybor City once upon a time and things, so in a way your—

RG: We did it for him.

AH: Yes. You brought those dreams to fruition.

RG: You should have seen—he didn’t necessarily like all the noise. He used to be amazed at how many people would come in and it was packed and people dancing and he would just stand there in his suit and tuxedo, arms crossed and (makes a face).

AH: (laughs) Now—so you set it up without his knowledge. Tell me about that. I mean you got the idea—

RG: I heard about a band that was in Orlando called Tapestry and I went down there December 3rd to see them play. And I really liked them and I asked when they were open. And they said that February their contract was up. So I told them, “Well, I’ve got a club and my band’s going to be leaving at about that time too. When can you come?” And so they agreed and believed me. And one day they came in about three weeks before we opened to see the club. So I said, I fired the band before you came in—

MG: He was a liar right from the start.

RG: —and we’re redoing.” It was just way beyond—it was just under construction. So I said, “We’re redoing it. So I finally said (inaudible) and we showed it to them. So I said, “We’ll be ready!”

MG: Do you remember when it rained?
RG: (talking to the dog) But then we did it without a permit. The first day we started to contract the building inspector came and said, “You need a permit for this.” And we said, “We’re just fixing the warehouse up.” And I was telling him the truth. Our dad saw air conditioning and said, “Since when does a warehouse need air conditioning?” And that’s when he had an idea. Well then three days before the club opened a couple things happened. One– it rained real hard and the roof was not sound and I had eight inches of water in the back of the club. I had to puncture a hole in it so it would drain out. This was the driveway; this was the garage for the Tropical Ice Cream Factory so it was at a pitch.

AH: Okay.

RG: So it was like where they put the trucks so the thing was loaded with water. And a story came out about the band because this writer for the *Tampa Tribune* knew who they were and then so I was excited. Tapestry was coming to Ybor City. This came out before the day we opened and so the building inspector came back all pissed off and said you need a—I’m going to red tag you. You can’t do anything else. And I said, Okay, we’re finished. (laughter)

We finished and that bar actually opened. It was a part of the Columbia and it actually wasn’t wet zoned. And I never went for wet zoning. I just assumed that alcohol and tobacco had no idea, which it did not until last year. They didn’t know it was a restaurant that had been at it. So we had that whole block wet-zoned last year. But when the (inaudible) opened the door and I said I’m not going to get a permit for wet zoning. We did our best to make sure we did everything right. And we opened up and it was great.

MG: He actually did it backwards.

AH: Yes.

RG: I felt bad that we did it all ourselves.

MG: It was off standing from the Columbia.

AH: Yes, it was separate. So 2005 was the first time you were actually zoned to sell on that entire block?

RG: Yes, 2004 or so. They came in and tried to stop us from serving and selling liquor in the gift shops and said we couldn’t do that. And we said, “Why not?”

AH: Oh, I see.

RG: And they went back and they found that they didn’t show that it was zoned. And I said, well it is. They didn’t even show The Siboney. So we went with our attorneys and we didn’t own the back lot; it was actually an Ice Factory. But we never went to city council for the wet zoning. Everybody just assumed it was. And Alcohol and Tobacco now saying, it is.
AH: Okay.

RG: Before—a few years ago.

MG: But wait, we always—and I am asking you this—do we have the oldest liquor license?

RG: Well, we’ve been there since Prohibition so we’ve had a liquor license from Prohibition on so we have to have one of the oldest liquor licenses.

AH: I would say so.

RG: Yeah, I mean there were no liquor licenses in 1929.

AH: No there certainly weren’t.

RG: I’m going to get another bottle of wine. I’ll be right back.

AH: Okay.

MG: He is having such an attitude. I’m taking notes.

AH: Okay.

MG: I’m going to fill in the frickin’ blanks because he doesn’t take credit for what he—

AH: Yeah, we can fill in the empty spaces.

MG: You’re going to have to ask him. Wait let me get the (inaudible).

AH: All right.

RG: When the family was nominated for the Family Business of the Year in the state of Florida we were honored and I said shoot we’ve just come out of all these difficulties. And I was thinking how is that ever going to be possible? And we filled it out and with the help of the Dean of Business at the University of Tampa and we won the state competition.

AH: Okay.

RG: And he said you have a legitimate shot of winning the national title. We were in the large business category. Two hundred and fifty other employees or whatever it was and we were going against these pharmaceutical companies and big companies around the country and then we won it, the National Family Business of the Year, Mass Mutual Insurance.
That was to me a very, very special time. It showed that we gained respect from the business community I did and turned around the business from my dad being an entertainer and not worrying about the quality of food or service and we built it up and so we won that award. And when they came—Mass Mutual came to the Columbia and we did a presentation of the award and they gave us the prize. At the time my grandchildren were only six months or so. And can they remember it? No. But they will know that they were there and they will be told the story and my earliest memory being three and a half, what do you remember special occasions or special events and I wanted them there and they were there and it was a big honor. My mom was alive when we won for the state. I don’t know if she was for the national, but we did that and then look at the competition was amazing.

MG: (inaudible) the babies were five months old and your mom, the babies were born in October and your mother, oh no she wasn’t.

RG: She wasn’t there for that. She was there for the state. We have picture of her at the University of Tampa. Then the judges, the nationwide judges, I’m not sure of this woman, her father was a judge. This person’s name was Beth Silver and I think she said her dad was a judge; he was an entrepreneur, a professor at Babson College which is a prestigious business college. And she asked me to do a case study; this is in 2002 I guess. My mom passed away in December. It was 2003. And she asked me all these questions and they did like the different stages of the generations and all the names and I’ve got the report of the questions in my office. I can probably send them from here to you actually.

AH: Okay.

RG: And her dad was a professor at Babson and they have been studying our family every year in the semester. They said they (inaudible) break them up into teams and this young man Josh Neman whose family were Iraqis and he contacted me and asked me some questions and they were just fascinated by the family and wanted to know some new data because they get graded for doing a presentation to the class of about fifty people. And we started talking about what’s happened. And I said, “Would you like us to come there?” And he said, “Would you really come?”

MG: (inaudible).

AH: Yes.

RG: Well he called, well I guess they tried to get me to come in the past and we started talking and he gave me dates and they had to make up a class and they tried for the last Wednesday, but I couldn’t because I had a presentation with my major suppliers.

MG: See I told him (inaudible).
RG: Well all I could do is say, what I said was, in the past they have tried to get me to go and I couldn’t go. And he didn’t think we would do it. (Melanie laughs) And what I did was I wasn’t going to be able to go because the West Palm Beach marathon was taking place that Sunday. I was presenting a sponsorship. I was supposed to be running a marathon relay with Bill Rogers. He’s a four-time New York and Boston marathon inner. Nobody will ever do that again. And I’m there reading and I’m getting Google, “Bill Rogers will pass the baton to Richard Gonzmart in the marathon.” And I went [sound of exasperation]. Well I hadn’t been able to run because of injuries and so I decided I should really do this Babson College, I was going to send Andrea there by herself and she might have been a little intimidated. So I had dinner with Bill Rogers last Friday night and assembled a team to do the relay. I just put this in there and at the start of the race on Sunday they’re still saying, “Bill Rogers is going to be leading off the relay and handing off to Richard Gonzmart, owner of the Columbia” (laughter). And my team is like, “You’re the only person we know who can get press for doing a race and not even being there.” (laughter) Bill Rogers even though he is in his late fifties, early sixties is in great shape. I can’t run.

MG: I’ll have to Google him because I don’t know who he is.

RG: I have pictures of him. They sent me pictures. He was really, really nice. I sponsored his being at the West Palm Beach marathon. My thoughts are you get involved in the community and you sponsor life-style changing type of health and fitness events. It’s a positive thing. So I brought in Laura Drake who I had been sponsoring last year as a professional track athlete and her boyfriend John Docks used to race relays for me and (inaudible) in the Eighties and now does these hundred mile races. And I brought in another young man from Jupiter Beach that I sponsor and he was a state champion for a few years and I asked him to take my spot and he was like a kid and his wife didn’t know who Bill Rogers was. He said, “you don’t know what a thrill this is, to be taking the baton form Bill Rogers!” So Bill Rogers, his fiancée told me he wasn’t really too motivated about running when he got to the race, but after that dinner we had to raise money for cancer research and meeting my team and meeting me, he was all excited. And he ended up, it was a mixed team, but we ended up having the fastest overall time in the relays.

MG: But who was the most motivational person at that race? (makes a motion to Richard?)

RG: Well we did it. So I went to Babson. I got there, I flew back form West Palm Beach and got to Tampa at 10:45 because I committed as the Hispanic Man of the Year to being in a fashion show for this Hispanic Women’s Association which creates scholarships for Hispanic women. And I said I would do it if my daughters would do it. So we get off the plane and come pick up Melanie, get there at 11:30, the fashion show starts and I had to leave at 1:30 because my flight to Boston was at 2:30. People say why do you do that to yourself? And I say well that is when I am in my element. I love to create chaos. I love chaos. If there is no chaos, I will create it. I need that excitement and that adrenaline and I didn’t sleep much.
MG: I guess I’m chaotic! (laughter)

RG: I woke up the day after my wine dinner with Bill Rogers at West Palm at three in the morning and stayed awake and then I went to do the fashion show. My daughter and I did it and modeled two of the outfits and I felt like a rock star kind of. Everybody’s looking and they pushed us ahead in the second group and I said, “I gotta run!” And took off all the clothes and I balled up my clothes and—

MG: (inaudible)

RG:—we took off for the airport only to find out; we got there only to find out the plane was an hour late. We got to Boston and met Jimmy, my roommate who is a wonderful friend. But Jimmy doesn’t know how to entertain you other than feed you.

MG: (inaudible).

RG: So we get there and he has chocolate fudge for us and we ate I think eight times in the sixteen hours or so.

AH: Oh my.

MG: Oh my! (laughter)

RG: We ate some, ate some more. And we ate that night at a place called Abe & Louie’s a local restaurant for tourists and it’s a good place. And I told you we had to go back to the hotel and I woke up that day at three in the morning and Jimmy picks us up at 7:15 to go eat at Mike’s [City Diner]. Mike’s is a legendary place for breakfast.

MG: Tell him what his mother says about that place.

RG: He’s making (inaudible) and his mother says, “But Jimmy what kind of restaurant is that?” And Jimmy says, “Mom, it’s not for you. [Jimmy’s mother] Well why don’t you take them to the Ritz Carlton for brunch?”

MG: His mother is—

RG:—a very, very elegant woman.

AH: Yes.

RG: And she would never make it there. And I said “Mrs. (inaudible) it’s okay because I like that.” We like that extra grease. That’s a real breakfast. They get the ham off the bone and they carve it and we had home-fries and eggs over easy. And Jimmy said, “You have to eat more.” So Jimmy went up and ordered fresh banana pancakes where
they put the banana mixture on the grill and they slice the bananas right into it so it sits there—

AH: (sound of craving)

RG: —so we said Okay we’ll eat some. So we eat that.

MG: He’s [Jimmy] our restaurant tour guide.

RG: So we left and now we’re riding to Babson and now Jimmy stops to get a ham and cheese croissant at a place he likes. So I said, “I’m not eating it. I’m not eating it.” Jimmy ate it. Andrea ate some. (Melanie laughs). We get to Babson on a Sunday because they are making up for closed classes and they had some of the parents there of some of the students that were going to present. Interesting the professor was delighted and excited to see us there and he said, “I’ve tried to get you in the past, but you all could never do it.” And he mentioned, and I asked him, “How are they going to do?” And he said, “of course they are going to get a good grade just for bringing you here”. It was a three-man team, Irene Asturias(??) from Guatemala, a young lady. Josh Neman(??), Iraqi, his family were Iraqi immigrants to the US and that’s their name and a young lady from Cincinnati, Ohio, Cleveland, Ohio. And so we did this and the class didn’t know we were coming. The presenters did and the professor knew and professor—

MG: The professor did know that. I didn’t know that.

RG: No, the class did not know we were coming. We sat down and there were all these parents and they put up our name and my buddy Jimmy’s name and Andrea and Richard. And the professor said they were going to get started and the professor said, “we are going to start with the Columbia today.” And they were talking about it and they were talking about the history. It was neat. They went from 1905 on all the generations and some of the problems we might have. And then they said of course you are probably wondering who these people are down there and they introduced us. And they didn’t really act great, but you could see they were excited. And I talked about the history and the problems. I had concerns about the fourth and fifth generations because most family businesses fail up to the second to third. Most don’t make it to the second. Second or third is the big failure because then you have siblings and family and that’s what happened to my parents, except they bought out Lawrence and Casey Hernandez.

My parents being only children didn’t think that they would have a problem and now the question that was brought to them was what’s happened since? We’re facing that crucial second to third generation transition. My two daughters have been working. I explained the situation that my brother is going through his third divorce now. Talked about his children and how they never really worked in the business. What they talked about earlier before I went on was about how so many families and the children think they get out of college and they’re going to earn six figures. They’ve got these delusions that they’re going to making six figures and they’re going to be a vice-president and it doesn’t exist.
RG: And we talked about how Casey’s daughter Cassandra thought because she was a general manager for Ruby Tuesday’s that she was going to become a divisional manager or something. And I’ve been—(inaudible) October 7th and she didn’t quit talking until November 7th and she thought she would wear me down. And I told her she still has to work two years as assistant manager. She doesn’t know our food. Our daughters knew the food better. And finally I had a frank talk with her a week ago I guess. She showed up unannounced to Curt my C.E.O. and then to me. I’m very harsh and I realize that and I’m very honest. And I know that is not necessarily good, but people know where they stand.

I asked her, “What do you do with your life?” [Cassandra] “I want to join the Columbia. [Richard] You’ve been saying this for almost a month and a half and you’ve never talked.” And I said, “If you think you’re going to join our company after the holidays you’ve got another thought coming. I’m not going to tolerate that. We need you now.” And I said, “you went to West Palm Beach with Laurie (inaudible)” our group sales manager. “You told us it was an opportunity and you never talked with our general manager.” And she said, “Well that’s because he was sick and I didn’t want to bother him.” And I said, “Don’t give me that bullshit. He was working. You went off with Laurie (inaudible). You think you’re going to be the P.R. person for West Palm Beach; it’s not going to happen.” I went on to say, “I worked for my dad for twelve years and you have to put in your time.” And I said, “the best value you bring to the family is going to West Palm Beach we’re having a family member there to talk to the guests that come in, show them the pictures, brings a lot of value to us. And that’s really the biggest impact. Here is what we are losing annually.” I said, “You want to be a star, here is where you can be a star, but you have to work the schedule.” She wanted to walk only days, didn’t want to work nights, didn’t want to work weekends. So now she started working. So I told that to the Babson College and after giving the spiel about where we’ve been, where we’ve gone and where we’re going and questions and answers. And the students asked some great questions, very interested.

And after it was over, after one hour some of them followed me out and wanted to know if they could stay in touch with me and wanted my card. A young man and his family is in the ice-cream business in Pennsylvania. He lived in Orlando and said he would love to talk with us to maybe do business. And family business is important and so it was a great experience. And I saw one of the young ladies who had gone to Dunkin Donuts to get some coffee for the class because it is six hours straight, no breaks. No breaks. And (inaudible) there and she had to get up just as we were finishing and she got up to thank me for the great presentation. It meant a lot. These are international students a lot of them. And the young man who contacted me Josh is leaving for Hong Kong I think next year for a semester for studying. He wanted to know if I knew anybody there, I said, “No.”
But the fact that they study our family business as a case study every year because they say its classic. It is ideal the industry we’re in and my daughters told me--my brother’s children aren’t on the study because they weren’t there and my children have been in a position of change. But my daughters said that to have their name on somebody’s exam kind of feels eerie to them. But it was a pretty big campus, not big buildings. I think it’s a small school. I don’t know, but you can just tell it’s a wealthy school. Arthur Blank, the founder of Home Depot and the owner of the Atlanta Falcons has the Arthur Blank Entrepreneurial School building there. I don’t know if he went to school there. Every building has somebody’s name on it and a beautiful, beautiful campus and smart kids. So to me, that was neat. My buddy Jimmy, they acknowledged him, I think he was kind of amazed that here were these kids presenting slides of the family and the story timelines and some of it was dated, but that’s what they study from the website, but that made me feel that our restaurant is special.

Sometimes people think, you know--I am--I will say I have a big ego, that’s fine. I say I can be arrogant, that’s fine. (inaudible) I just expect, I think we’ve earned that right. We do a good job. One of the tough things, I’ve been able to make all the decisions for a lot of years and that’s okay. My brother’s divorced now. (inaudible). He wants to prove that he hasn’t had any part of the business for twelve years. That he shouldn’t be credited for the increase in the business. Well that’s not going to fly. It bothered me when he told me that because he gets the same salary I do. And here he’s agreeing that he doesn’t do anything. I told them that. But it was special.

Last week, this is okay for the book, we went to the 21st Century and its a hundred year old company, but we, businesses fail because they don’t adapt to the times. Independents complain that the chains have cut on their business because independents don’t reinvest in their stores. They don’t invest in their staff. They don’t hire professionals. They don’t train. They don’t stay with the times; they just stick with the same menu. If I’d stuck with the same menu when I started working at the restaurant, we’d be broke like (inaudible). Everything at one time was canned, but canned (inaudible). We had a (inaudible) salad. Everything was canned. Well here in the 21st century I’ve hired a company called CRN, they act as a purchasing agent for us. They go out and they negotiate and get contracts on meat for certain periods and help us. And they get a certain percentage of our overall purchases. Well this let us to now interview four distributors. Our current one has been suppliers for eight years. Sysco Food Service, the world’s largest food supplier was one of them. The president is Paul (inaudible). His determination for eight years he stayed in touch with me and every other month courted me and he invited me to lunch. He supported my causes financially, my runs, my rides, smart. He was one of the people. Another one was Gordon Food Service, a family business out of Grand Rapids Michigan. I’m amazed that they can grow. They’ve been buying up territories and they bought a supplier that I used to deal with Henry Lee. A past owner called and asked to please talk to me. I didn’t think they’d have a chance. The other one was PFG and that was the second or third largest food distributor.

PFG came in, and this is where my arrogance comes in, and I was dressed in my Cesar Gonzmart golf polo shirt and slacks and they were sitting outside. I went outside to meet
the people, I never met them. They never contacted me. The president of the company looks me up and down like “who are you? Like, what are you doing here?” It was obvious he didn’t think I was professional, that I couldn’t be. And he just had this thought process. Well the two people who were working the account did most of the pitch and then the president started talking this typical sales bullshit. I was trying to ask some questions, but he would never let me ask the questions. I was getting (inaudible). So then in that harsh, direct tone that I have and I said, “What do you know about our business?” And they started answering and I said, “I’m not asking you, he’s the president. I want to know what he knows about our business.” And he said, “Well I think you’re ninety-five years old.” And I said, “No we’re one hundred and one. [President] Well I was only off by six years.” And he said, “I came there once with my wife for dinner.” And I said, “Do you know what our cuisine is? [President] Yeah, I do.” But he didn’t know what our cuisine was.

MG: That was the one question both of my children told me, “Mommy they will never forget that.”

RG: They’ll never forget what?

MG: That—.

RG: I mean everybody on my team wanted to crawl under—

MG: I know Andrea was like (makes face?).

RG: They all wanted to crawl under the table and the gentleman we hired to do this process. He asked, “What pissed you off so much?” And I said, “Well it was the first impression.” Number one, during this whole process of six to eight weeks, they never once tried to call me. Everybody else did. Gordon Food Service wound up sending their family jet to take me up to Grand Rapids to meet the family (Melanie laughs) numerous times.

AH: Wow

RG: And the president tried to call me and we still haven’t talked. He tried to call today after knowing he didn’t win it to thank me for the opportunity.

MG: (inaudible).

AH: Yes, it really is.

RG: And what do people do this week in order to try to lure us more. He actually had the best overall price mark-up. Down in Miami, they have concerns in Miami about the distance. They’re going to build a place in Ocala and freight is more expensive to go down there and we pay for extra freight. But they wanted to do all kinds of stuff. They
had the most mark-up, but then he was willing to for transition for one year give me a one percent rebate off five percent of the cost. So people wanted to give me money.

MG: Well they’re looking long term.

RG: Yes, but they came in with two people. One guy got the information, this other guy named John (inaudible) who called me constantly to the point it was almost a nuisance (laughter).

MG: But Richard needs a lot of attention.

RG: No, but yeah I need a lot. I’m—

MG: High maintenance.

RG: — high maintenance.

MG: No, he is (laughter)

RG: I’m high maintenance. So I just wanted to talk with him. I didn’t want to just visit I wanted to see the presentations and after it was all said and done, US Food Service, our current supplier through this whole process was not wanting to co-operate. They said they wouldn’t give this supplier, this person working with us, the information. They said they don’t do that. Yet, their company does with other places. They were being hard-nosed and the sales person for us has done a great job and his district manager, I’ve worked with him for twenty years through different companies, but their vice president of sales, a guy named Robert Langhouse—could you turn that [music] down somewhat?

MG: Yes.

RG: Robert Langhouse single-handedly destroyed that whole presentation. His attitude on how, he just had an attitude. And then the president Dan (inaudible) who was new to the company about one year he was their presentation and he tried to call me to go out to lunch. And really no communication and when the presentation came up he did nothing. Well Sysco was last and they came in with their eight vice presidents and they came in with how they were going to do this and that and they cared. Well it was a toss between Gordon and them and we went with Sysco and it was just an example that hey, you expect, I want to feel important. You want the head guy; the president of Sysco wanted us bad. So I wanted to feel that we were important.

There are wine companies that I’ve felt that way. Like I said, I’m very loyal, but I had lunch one time with the steak manager for Freixenet Sparkling Wine. I had dinner one night probably four years before that, three years, with the president of Freixenet USA and this young man from Spain who was part of the family and he asked me, “You should help me find a way to serve sparkling wine year round.” So we offered to go off to Spain to come up with an idea to serve the sparkling wine. And we were doing one
hundred and twenty cases a month. I call and meet with this woman and tell her, “we went to one of our GMs and we’d like you to host us one night in a hotel and dinner.” Well she first off before saying that told me I was a very difficult customer. And I said, and I looked at her and I blew up off the handle and I said, “I can’t believe she said this.”

AH: And who was this?

MG: The sales person.

RG: This is the sales person for the state of Florida for this company Freixenet telling me you’re a very difficult customer!

MG: Told him to his face!

RG: I think Diana was there.

MG: But she doesn’t say it behind his back.

AH: Yes.

RG: And then I said, “Well I guess I’m demanding.”

MG: He should have really blown up at her.

RG: And then she says about the trip and we’d like what hotel and you know dinner [sales woman] “Well that’s going to come out of my budget.” And I stayed calm and afterwards I said there’s something wrong here. I’ve fulfilled what I said I was going to do for this many years and I’ve become one of the largest users in North America and I can’t get in touch with anybody. So I fired them. I took everything up to four thousand cases a year. Two weeks later the national council manager for the North America calls me, “You’re our biggest customer and I heard you had this problem.” And I said, “Yeah we have a problem.”

AH: Yes.

MG: You just figured this out?

RG: I said, “This is what happened, Lynne (??) needs to give me an apology.” And to this day, the supplier, the distributor has said that she’s never giving me an apology. She could say, “I’m really sorry, she could have said, I didn’t mean it this way.” So I had all their wines, I promoted all their wines. So that one line alone one hundred and twenty cases, one night I sold eighty cases of champagne and so I said well it’s going to come right out of your budget. It was four thousand cases.

MG: Meet your budget.
RG: Meanwhile, I hurt the distributor and her were friends. I realize like I say my arrogance, I expect to be treated—and Torres Wines whose—.

MG: With respect.

RG: The Torres Wines who are the biggest (inaudible) in North America, they say I’m the biggest restaurant user in the world. They’re North American rep has become a good friend of mine, (inaudible). About a year and a half ago I was supposed to meet him at the restaurant and he came in late because he was at Tapas at Ceviche with Gordon Davis and Gordon kept him there. I got mad. I made the guy really, really upset. And I said tell Gordon to sell the wine because I want to be the most important customer. My goal is to be the biggest user of everything. I want to be important to people.

It’s like Booker Noe bourbon now is in Las Vegas doing a seminar on cigars at twelve noon for a nightclub convention. And at ten o’clock Booker Noe, the grandson of Jim Beam’s was about sixty-eight then was doing one on bourbon at ten. I decided to sit down and (inaudible) a small(inaudible) bourbon with five of them and he says, of course, which is a great line, “I know you’re going to say it’s ten in the morning, but it’s five o’clock in the evening somewhere.” So I started drinking this bourbon anywhere up from ninety up to one hundred and twenty-seven proof. And I’m friggen’ lit. And I go to my convention, my presentation, I thought it was flawless. I thought it was the best.

MG: I’m sure you were (makes drunk noise?). (laughter)

RG: I had dinner with them that night Melanie and I. And I started to drink with Booker and you can’t drink with Booker.

MG: He’s a big guy!

AH: He is a big guy.

RG: And we start drinking and I start getting lit and I said, “I want to buy a barrel of Booker.” And I want to buy barrel (inaudible) and a bottle for me right out of the barrel. And the next day they call me and I’m hung over. And they said, “we made arrangements for you to fly from Tampa to (inaudible) to Bardstown to meet—”

MG: Muy inteligente.

RG: “—to meet Booker and his wife and have dinner.” I said, “what the hell is a Cuban going to do with a freaking barrel of bourbon?” A fifty-two cases at fifty dollars a bottle. So I made that commitment. So we went there, we bought, I went and had dinner and I got drunk again (laughter), smoked cigars with him. And at eight in the morning I go out to meet his son Freddy in rack-house C. They call the buildings where they put the bourbon rack-houses and they have each numbers. Rack-house C was his favorite. He liked the way it faced the south and its twelve stories high. And they have probably thousands of barrels, but he likes the middle rack. The higher it is, the more evaporation
on the bourbon it is, the lower, the less evaporation. The middle he said is perfect. And he took five barrels out for me.

MG: What happened when they opened the doors?

RG: The fumes intoxicate you! (laughter). They opened those doors already.

AH: Okay.

RG: And they had the five barrels on a sled and they just took the cork out and they pull it out and put it in brandy snifters and they went left to right, right to left. I said, “Man I’m freaking drunk again!” (laughter). And I said, “They all tasted good! I’ll take the middle one.” And then they took me to another rack-house and they opened the doors and the fumes were just intoxicating and I picked my barrel and Booker gave me a friggen’ smoked ham a dried cured ham to take home. I go to the airport totally annihilated. I put my ham through the baggage check. They said, “What is that?” I said, it’s a ham from Booker Noe!” So now I’m getting hung-over. So now we’ve created the Filet mignon Chacho. I was writing it for— (inaudible) I sent it to you today.

AH: Yes. I saw that.

RG: It was just, I hate writing here on my laptop. So we did that and we didn’t only go through that barrel, we went through two barrels and we go through about three or four barrels a year. We’re one of the largest users of Booker Noe in the world. So—.

AH: Oh wow.

RG: So—

MG: (inaudible) of Booker Noe.

RG: I’ve been to Booker’s house three times to pick the barrels and every time I’ve gotten fricken’ drunk and every time I’ve picked the middle barrel I say, “look I’m not going back anymore, just pick the middle barrel.” (laughter)

MG: No, when he would take me he’d go, “And little lady how many cubes for you?”

RG: One cube, because they drink it neat, straight.

AH: Yes.

RG: If you put an ice cube in it which dilutes it because it melts right away.

AH: Yes.
RG: At lunch time he says, “People use coffee grounds and tea leaves to flavor the water well I like to do something called ‘Kentucky tea’”. He gets ice and water and he pours a little Booker in there to give it a little color and a little flavor.

AH: Okay.

RG: So it was great, but I stopped going. And Booker came to the restaurant a couple of times. I’ve got autographed bottles. One Christmas he sends me something in the mail and we get it and I don’t know what it is. I’m looking at it and said, “Mel, what is this?” And I said, “I think it’s a spread.” I open it up and start spreading it on crackers and, man it tastes really greasy. It tastes kind of greasy. I don’t know it tastes kind of funky man. We keep on trying to taste it.

MG: (inaudible)

RG: It’s supposed to be good. And I said, well “let’s try frying it.” It was sausage. Blood sausage.

MG: We were spreading it raw.

AH: Oh my.

RG: Blood sausage.

AH: How was it packaged that you couldn’t tell what it was?

MG: Because he made it!

AH: Was it in a tin?

MG: No he made it!

RG: It was like, salami like—

MG: It was in a plastic bag!

RG:—it was in a plastic bag with a string around it.

MG: He made it!

RG: It was good enough— for not being southern.

MG: He had his own little house out back for all his stuff, remember?

RG: We don’t know. We don’t eat; we’re not that kind of—.
AH: Yes.

MG: He tells me, “Little lady let’s go look at my smoke house.”

AH: So it wasn’t cured?

RG: No, it was raw.

MG: No, it was raw. And we ate it.

RG: No, it was white and we ate it. We ate some of it.

_Side 1 ends; side 2 begins._

MG: His wife—

RG: We had Jim Beam—He tells this story about—His wife told me this story when she used to use Jim Beam to cook with all the time and she was out of Jim Beam so she poured some Booker inside whatever it was she was cooking.

MG: Cake. It was a cake.

RG: Cake and she put it on and she closed the door [of the oven] and it blew the door off it was so strong.

MG: Well yeah.

AH: Wow.

RG: So Booker gave me one of the original bottles from the first package from the whole packaging.

AH: Okay.

RG: I’ve got bottles like that, very collectible. That’s—that’s important. One time they didn’t want to come to (inaudible) on something and that kind of bothers me. I do—I fulfill my obligations. This—(inaudible) I have met with people from Captain Morgan and that was the largest supplier of liquor, Diageo. And they were going to do all of this stuff for our anniversary and give us menu support, well they never did anything and they said they gave us pitchers that was the dollar for the menu support. And I said, no that was offered. And then they start passing the buck, this guy said, “Next time I’m going to be there.” And I told him, “Look, you know—”

MG: (inaudible) somebody else.

AH: Yes.
RG: “— you didn’t give us the money for last year and you didn’t give us the money for this year. I don’t want your money.” It’s a matter of principle. When you say you’re going to do something, you do it. If I take your money now I’m just a prostitute. It’s not about money. It’s not about that, it’s about I’ve fulfilled my obligation, we created these Mojitos, pitchers, and we go through I think it’s eighty or ninety cases of Captain Morgan a month. We’re bringing the bottle table-side. Doing everything I said I was going to do and now they didn’t do it.

MG: Principle.

RG: So now and Diageo, I’m hard-headed. They didn’t help me. They didn’t support one of my causes, my golf tournament. They called last minute trying to bully (inaudible) to get more spots. So what did I do? We took off Captain Morgan and put Bacardi who supports us (laughter). Diageo owns Dom Perignon and Moet et Chandon, two of the most famous champagnes are coming off my list. I’ve got to stick to my guns because they did not after I said everything they had an opportunity to support my run or ride and they didn’t. So I’m going with some other brands. I just—

MG: Well you support them.

RG: Yeah, I do that. Somebody is not going to come because we don’t have something. We’re going to go with something else that’s probably more money and more prestigious. We’re trying to get Bollinger R.D. which is more expensive than Dom Perignon.

AH: Okay.

RG: You know, I think James Bond drank Bollinger R.D. in one movie. Remember James Bond—was great—he used to— in the early movies? Dom Perignon in 1964 or something like that. So that brings prestige. It’s about relationships. And my relationship with them kind of soured with that distributor. Unless they’re going to do something and they do it. And I expect everybody else to do it.

AH: So do you think you kind of have a reputation among distributors now? That must get back to distributors who are still with you.

RG: They don’t want to make me mad.

AH: Yeah, exactly.

MG: Well they can’t—they are smart to pay attention.

AH: Yes.

RG: I usually get along with everybody, but I can be difficult. I’m demanding. I can be understanding.
MG: But he deserves to be.

RG: The sangria (inaudible)— we use for the sangria I told to make sure we kept inventory—

pause in recording

RG: —responsibility for the investment. Also some man from Miami, he bought it when everything was in Miami. We took it all in one week. They had to bring some more from New York. We ran out of that in ten days. I felt disrespect to our business.

MG: But it was your stuff.

RG: Respect our business and I think—you know—this one guy, a distributor, he kind of screwed me around. If you say you’re going to do it, do it.

MG: He’s had people who’ve worked for distributors quit their jobs.

RG: Well that was because I was at a Christmas show that this supplier was doing in Orlando and he invited me to go so I went. This guy’s a friend of mine, Fred Brown and the president of a restaurant called Christini’s in Orlando. And we go there.

AH: Is this is Crostini’s?

RG/MG: Christini’s

RG: Fine dining Italian restaurant in (inaudible). And the owner sits down, not invited, and starts challenging me.

MG: Who were you sitting with?

RG: Larry Goodrich who is the president and this guy starts challenging me telling me that we were a stupid (inaudible). They offered him, those people offer me all kinds of deals. I’m not going to [the owner] “you’re not going to do any business and you’ll never get this.” And I said, “Look it’s not your problem.” It’s Okay. So I’m a big boy, I can take care of myself. “You’re never going to get any dishwashers. You’re not going to do any business.” And he keeps attacking me. And I’m staying very calm, but she [Melanie] knows. And then my buddy Fred Brown is there trying to calm him down. But the president of the company did nothing. And then I stood up and I started fricken’ screaming. I told this guy, “Look you can let Christini’s have all his business” and . . . him and you know, hey.

MG: And we’re in—(inaudible)
RG: He was attacking me and then I marched out. And one of the girls at the bar said, “Well who did Christini piss off today? What did he do to you?” He has a reputation for it and I left and my friend Fred Brown, my buddy Fred Brown, quit Southern [Southern Wine and Sprits] shortly after that. He didn’t like their culture.

AH: Oh I see.

MG: The whole word around Orlando that next day was—.

RG: I had punched him.

MG: No, who tore his wig off. (laughter)

AH: Who tore his wig off?

RG: Yes but (inaudible) says, “Oh I’m so glad to meet you. I hear you’re the guy who punched Christini out!” And he’s just one of those arrogant guys.

He submitted the wine list to Wine Spectator and he received the Grand Award of Excellence, the highest award, but they took it away from him. They found out he falsified his wine list. He didn’t have the wines he said he did.

AH: What comes around goes around I guess.

MG: Yes maybe, just be yourself.

RG: But the thing is like I said, it’s like with the suppliers that were going to—I want to feel we are really important to them. I want them to—make me feel that way. That I was—(inaudible) and know I’m their biggest customer. But they kind of missed it. Sysco (inaudible) has been trying to get our business for so long, his team really showed they really wanted our business. I just want to feel—when you’re 101 years old I think you’ve proven at a certain time that you deserve it.

AH: Yeah.

MG: Kinda, sorta.

RG: Somebody told me that Creative Loafing [weekly Tampa newspaper] recently they were saying that the two highest over-rated restaurants were Bern’s and The Columbia.

MG: (laughter) Yes, you told me that.

AH: Yes, I was disappointed with that.

RG: You know, it’s just the way they are. When you’ve been around that long and someone says you’re not that good—
AH: Yes.

RG:—somebody (inaudible) get upset. It’s just their opinion, they’re artsy and stuff—so that’s okay.

AH: Well, they’re just critics anyway. I mean, they’re the ones who over-rated the things in the first place like Johnny Cash. Johnny Cash over-rated? I mean it makes no sense to me.

RG: But you saw that movie, *Walk the Line*. I didn’t realize that Johnny Cash had his life in such turmoil.

AH: Oh yeah.

RG: So, this is not about the restaurant, but I don’t know if you follow high school football. High School has a quarterback Robert Marr who is just sensational. And I heard today from somebody that the kids playing there and they’re saying that his relationship with the coach is on the sick side because the coach after New Year’s is taking him in and he’s helping him. Why? Because his father used to abuse him and his mother and so they’re estranged. He was an ex-Buccaneer [the father] and his father at the beginning of this year, his step-father, shot himself and then killed himself.

MG: Oh so the kid doesn’t need help [sarcastically]

RG: So this coach understands and what has he made him? With one more touchdown he’ll tie the all-time touchdowns in one season and he took this team and beat three teams. And Mike Martin tells me from (inaudible) he says, “We had no business beating any of these guys.” I told everybody I said, “we’re going to get our asses kicked” because the Winter Haven the kids were big Armwood [High School] two time state champions in the last four years and the kids were big. And in fact they went to Miami and Washington and these guys were huge and they beat all of them because the coaching staff taught them technique. This is the coaching staff that used to be at Jesuit and they believe in one another and they believe in being a team and not stars.

MG: (inaudible) Father Doyle.

RG: Father Doyle (inaudible) all the coaches were the coaching staff at Jesuit. And three of the kids that were stars are Jesuit kids.

MG: Mike Doyle—I mean Mike Spis(??) is the guy who is married to Gale Sierens [Local NBC News anchor]

AH: Yes.
RG: I look at the relationships and that is probably one of my biggest disappointments now. That the 100th anniversary was at Jesuit, which I was—I always played football at Jesuit high school as a kid and that’s what I wanted to do.

AH: Oh sure.

RG: (inaudible)

MG: (inaudible)

RG: —I had to do what I wanted to do and I achieved all of these goals and I have been supportive of Jesuit and what he’s done to me and it hurts and that he will not meet with me, but with somebody else. He won’t meet with me alone. He’s done that before. You can’t do that with him.

MG: It’s gotta be like more than (inaudible).

AH: And this is Father who?

RG: Doyle.

AH: Doyle.

RG: He’s the president. I was on the trustees that hired him. And I hired him, but then he just has personal problems so.

AH: Well, and—.

RG: Thirty some odd years we did the football banquet at no charge and then he told me that we had to start charging the parents. We had to treat the football team. The problem was that he wanted to treat the football team like all the other sports. And I said, “Okay Father we’ll charge, you tell me what to charge, we’ll give the money back to Jesuit.”

MG: Yeah.

RG: He forces the coach who has been there for seventeen years who was a protégé of my coach and he wanted him out and he forced him to resign and then with that he did not hire his assistant who had been there seventeen years. His assistant was alumni of the school who was probably—from what I hear—one of the best teachers. And he didn’t even interview him and so he left the school.

MG: That’s Weiner?

RG: Yeah, Robert Weiner and then he did not let—he took away the football banquet away from the Columbia, no charge. Took it to a hotel they charged twenty dollars a person.
MG: Wanted his money back.

AH: Yes.

RG: And then I went to see him the following year and I said, Father, (inaudible)—Michael Smedley(??) and I said, “why don’t you let me do the football banquet? Please let me do it.” And we got some of our problems in the past resolved. He said, “It’s not my decision.” So I said, “Can I make an appointment with the head coach?” And he yells at me, “absolutely not!” He didn’t want it to happen. So this year when Jesuit played at Tampa Catholic for the first time, I fed (knocks on something hard) TC (inaudible) and we fed three hundred VIPs and charged a hundred dollars, we fed the team. We fed the team before, we fed the three hundred VIPs. We made five hundred sandwiches for them to sell and Jesuit is playing our hated enemy who we’ve adopted now. I was trying to go there the day of the game, but I had my run, they had a coach’s shirt from Tampa Catholic. They did put for the Columbia Restaurant logos facing Jesuit. And everybody, I heard so many people say, “It’s all Father Doyle’s fault. What is Richard doing there?” I was known as the most supportive alumni.

AH: Yes absolutely.


RG: I was the second—

AH: Oh you mean Tampa Catholic did? (laughter)

RG: Yes. I was the second ever “alumni of the year” at Jesuit.

MG: He was the fastest white boy in town.

RG: But Jesuit the first year they were going to name the alumni of the year I was very (inaudible). The second one they gave it to me because of my commitment. And then to have this happen from Doyle it’s just stupid so.

AH: What position did you play?

RG: Running back.

MG: He was the fastest boy.

AH: Okay.

RG: I was 215 I could run the hundred yard dash in 9:9.

AH: Okay.
RG: So I was fast, but—

MG: He had the only pair of white shoes.

RG: I (inaudible) my scholarship from the University of Tampa. I got something from Babson (inaudible) to get trained in that. But, those are things that are important to me. The way I look at it one day I’ll retire and get back. But right now I’m doing the Jesuit—I’m doing the TC banquet. It’s not about me, it’s about the kids.

AH: Yeah.

RG: We’re making a donation to Joe Capitan Central City to fund scholarships for the kids at TC.

AH: That’s sweet.

MG: Kids are kids are kids.

RG: They’re just kids. And those kids have it rough because the Jesuit kids think they’re all usually rich kids, and it’s tough to get in there so if you don’t get in there you go to Tampa Catholic so people look at you, “You know what? It’s not all about grades.”

AH: Yes.

RG: And so yeah—

AH: (laughs)

MG: (inaudible). We’re just hanging out with you Andy.

(laughter)

RG: You didn’t need to get into my laptop to get my information, my stories did you?

AH: Do I need to get into your laptop?

RG: No I have those stories that you want to see.

AH: Sure, yeah if we can save them on something. I might even have a—

MG:—extra disc?

AH: No I don’t. I usually have my little flash drive. I’ll get them another time.

MG: Maybe, I might have a disc upstairs.
RG: I’m not—told stories in two years.

MG: All you need is a disc? An empty disc? Let me go look.

AH: Yes a floppy or even a, I don’t know.

MG: What’s a floppy? (laughter)

AH: Well you know one of those little three and a half inchers.

RG: I’m going to take my computer now possibly on the cruise. I just hate writing on the laptop.

AH: Yeah the buttons are too close together I think.

RG: Yeah and I have a remote keypad, but I think there is junk in there so it gets stuck so the words, I put a space and it doesn’t space and it frustrates me.

AH: Yeah. Okay. Well as long as we’re talking about patronage and awards and stuff let’s talk about the Golden Spoon Awards.

RG: For the Columbia we won for the first time and we won for seventeen years or so and all of a sudden we didn’t win it and my dad was devastated.

AH: Now this was about the time you came on the scene too right? This was seventy-three [1973] or seventy-four [1974]?

RG: Yes. And we lost it and my dad was devastated, bitching at Robert Tolf and what did he know? And the truth is we had slipped. We had slipped. I took a picture of Robert Tolf on TV Mystery Diner and I put it in the restaurant.

AH: If you have a cd burner that’ll work, yes [to Melanie].

RG: Yes, it’ll work.

AH: Yes, Okay that’s great.

MG: I don’t know.

RG: Yes, I can use them.

MG: I had them because that when I was going to print my own pictures.

RG: So, we didn’t win it, but then one of my goals for the 100th anniversary wanted to get the Golden Spoon again, to get the DiRoNA restaurant award. And not only did we get
the award, but then we were named in the Hall of Fame, the Florida Trend’s Hall of Fame (inaudible).

AH: Really?

RG: —the hall of fame. We won the DiRoNA award which was the key.

AH: Yes, now tell, first of all let’s get a little—

RG: It used to be a part of The Holiday magazine, that—

AH: The DiRoNA did?

MG: The Golden Spoon.

RG: No.

MG: The day we went to get the Golden Spoon. The guy called you.

RG: Ross Staman who is the inspector for the DiRoNA called to tell me that he had gone (inaudible) and that it was just fabulous and that it was great.

AH: He told you that it was fabulous?

RG: It was great and we were going to get the award and he wasn’t supposed to but just before I was going to get the DiRoNA award. I mean the Golden Spoon

MG: Golden Spoon.

RG: We received the news and got both awards the same day.

AH: Do did you know that you were going to get the Golden Spoon or were you waiting on it?

RG: No, no we knew we were going to get the Golden Spoon. We were going to get, we were going to the dinner—.

MG:(inaudible)

AH: You were going to pick it up.

RG: Yes, we were going to pick it up at the dinner and then Robert Tolf who was the editor of Florida Trend.

AH: He’s still the editor right?
RG: He had me sit with him and had me talk to the people since we were the grandfather of all restaurants. There were times when he didn’t like it and that was fine.

MG: I remember taking pictures of Robert Tolf on the TV so we could put his picture up in the kitchen so everyone would know he was coming there to review us. (inaudible) The day we were getting the Golden Spoon award we were in Fort Lauderdale or wherever we were and we were going to go, we were getting ready to go, he [Richard] gets a call on his cell-phone and this guy says you’re getting the DiRoNA award. That man [Richard] cried.

I didn’t know, Andy, I remember seeing the Golden Spoons and I remember taking them down and we were saying put them away because they had lost it.

AH: So they just took them all down?

MG: Because it became a giant . . . gap, okay? I mean we had all these Golden Spoons and then—.

AH: None.

MG: Because his father had lost it. We had gotten really bad. [Melanie whispers and it is inaudible]

AH: Well you can say it so the microphone can listen.

MG: I’m cussing.

AH: No you can cuss, it’s all right, it’s not bad, but don’t whisper it.

MG: But for him to re-achieve the Golden Spoon and now to attain the DiRoNA. The DiRoNa is like the coolest.

AH: Oh yeah

RG: The DiRoNA is a bunch of snobs.

(laughter)

RG: When my dad was alive—

MG: I know, but we still like it.

(laughter)

RG: When my dad was alive we were recognized by the Bay City Western News, the Hall of Fame, it was 1989 and that was to me when my dad was alive it was a big deal to be
recognized by the leading industry magazine, the hall of fame. You know we had not come back from the fall yet and so some maybe thought we shouldn’t have won or we didn’t deserve it. It is very selective and I felt very honored and it made me work harder to get recognized more.

AH: And when was that recognition?

RG: It was eighty-nine [1989]. What drives me is to fulfill all of my dad’s dreams. One time we went to three restaurants and I was going to do that through (inaudible) Mama’s foods and I realized that wasn’t us. I sold my interest in that. I realized that three restaurants wasn’t necessary. But my goal was to achieve all my dad’s dreams. And one was to receive the Golden Spoon award. The Holiday Magazine award again which was the DiRoNA. We hosted that dinner there. And some of the great restaurants from that era, The Holiday magazine, like Ernie’s out of San Francisco, they closed. All of these restaurants have closed. And that was the goal [to win the award]. And my dad used to exaggerate about his sales in the restaurant a lot of times. And actually one time it got us into trouble with the IRS. They’ve seen (inaudible) and they audited us. Well, the sale was the sale, but they called it other stuff.

But I’ve achieved I think the goals my dad wanted. I live for my own self, but I want to fulfill because I don’t believe my dad received the credit. I’m very protective of him. I get very angry because people don’t remember what he did. Not only was he a restaurateur, but he was a showman, but he was a caring person. Only Cesar could have made the Columbia survive. Only Cesar through whatever method it was made it survive. My dad couldn’t be here anymore. When my dad died—

MG: (inaudible)

RG: When my dad died it was probably his time for him because he, the world had changed, the banking had changed, computers brought information and he wouldn’t present. He had a CPA Logan(??) Browning prepare papers for the banks and they weren’t necessarily legit. He did what he wanted and my dad wouldn’t, he wouldn’t share all the information. Only he knew what was really going on and nobody else did to the point where he no longer could control what was happening.

MG: He lost control.

RG: He couldn’t. So that’s why I say his body then checked out. My dad did not believe in paying professional managers. He didn’t believe in paying salaries. He made a check for two hundred dollars a week and I remember somebody coming to see him one time about a raise and [Cesar to the person] “how much do you make?” And he said, “I take my check for twenty dollars, twenty or twenty-five dollars.” And he [Cesar] said, “Well you make more money than I do.” And the poor guy, my dad threw him for a loop. And the guy’s like “how do I get a Rolls Royce or my day in the sun?” It’s because my dad did business different. And I’m not putting it down, but he did things that nobody else
could have done to keep the restaurant alive. And what I’ve been doing is for respect for my dad and fulfilling them. My dad was bigger than life.

AH: Oh yes.

RG: And my dad was bigger than life and with me—

MG: So are you.

RG:—I could never be my father. My mother, a graduate of Juilliard a wonderful pianist, my dad, a concert master violinist and you know I played piano, I played violin, but I couldn’t be them. I don’t want to be judged by them. One woman comes up to me once and she goes, “you’re not as good looking as your dad.” And I said, “Well thank you very much.” (laughter) You know my dad dressed in suits and tuxedos.

MG: Was tan.

RG: But I think I dress more casually because that’s who I am and I want to be me. And Chris Sullivan(??) out back when I saw them they wouldn’t wear ties or polo shirts because and they said well he can do anything he wants, he’s proved himself. Well once I proved myself—before I go see a bank, “oh I have to wear a suit and tie to try to impress them.” Now when the banks today call me--and one bank the president came to see me and wanted to meet with me and have lunch. He’s involved with (inaudible) chair in ahead of me and he told me, he said, “What will it take to do business with you? [I’m] going to have to have some of your business.” And I said, “Well you may not recall four years ago I went to see your bank and they showed me the door very quickly.” So, those people that—that—

MG: One of our state officials.

RG: No, that was somebody else. It was Dan (inaudible) at SunTrust. Alex Sink was running for C.F.O. She was Florida president. Our company was screwed. My dad had to hire a C.P.A., a C.F.O. for the company and couldn’t give us financial statements. We had no idea what was happening, where the money was going, what we owed. Well, he is screwing around with our bank and not having kept enough funds and they get pissed and Alex Sink was the president and they give me two weeks to find another bank. They fired me.

AH: When was that?


MG: In the depths of the depth.

AH: Okay.
‘94. My dad died. We had the C.F.O. and the money we got from my dad was below this and we didn’t fix the problem, but my dad named both Casey and I both co-presidents. Usually in the Spanish culture they name the oldest brother, but he realized that I was the one doing the work. So what happened with co-presidents is and they asked me at Babson, does it work? And I said I don’t think it works because who makes the final decision?

(Doorbell rings. Dog barks.)

RG: Don’t open the door.

MG: I’m not going to open the door.

RG: Some guy was trying to pass out flyers from [a] Brazilian steakhouse.

AH: Oh Okay.

RG: So I said, does it work and nobody could make the decisions—

MG: (inaudible)—Hey—

RG: Who is it?

MG: It’s the guy I caught earlier (inaudible).

RG: So Alex Sink sends us a letter and I could never even meet with her. She wouldn’t meet with me.

AH: Really?

(dog barks more and Melanie is talking to someone in the background)

RG: And two weeks later—see you later. So when she was running for C.F.O. she came to the restaurant she was asking me for money. (inaudible) called me and I said you know, tell Alex I’m going to talk to her. It bothered me, I’d be—I was nice to her she’s a customer, I didn’t talk to her. You want me to give— she wanted me to give her twenty-five hundred dollars to mention my restaurants. You want me to give you twenty-five hundred dollars to mention my restaurants to get you a job and probably twelve years ago—

MG: Go home! Goodnight! [to people at the door]

RG:—you didn’t care if I died. So I’m not going to give you money when you wouldn’t give me money. You don’t—can’t remember those things. Like right now during this changing of suppliers.
MG: I swear—(inaudible) I haven’t even looked at it.

RG: The changing of the suppliers I told them we will be professional and I will honor all of our obligations and commitments to you and I expect the same because this is a small industry. So now when you’re doing great everybody wants you and when you’re not, nobody wants you. There’re just a couple people and a friend of ours helped us. That’s one of my stories.

My brother was going through a divorce and the divorce almost killed the company. I wrote that in the story. My brother wasn’t working and he was getting divorced. He was staying at my mom’s house. We had the Daytona Beach. We opened three restaurants with no chef really in place. My C.F.O. couldn’t get a profit and loss statement for six months from any of my restaurants. No idea what’s happening anywhere. Nothing was in place. It was a disaster. My dad wanted to do the Daytona Beach. We did it. Our C.F.O—.

MG: Personal guarantee.

RG: Now the building, the design hadn’t changed. Now we were still on the first floor and the company was on the second floor and the cost went up. And what I thought was going to be twenty-three thousand dollars a month for rent for the three restaurants I did not realize had gone up to forty thousand dollars a month in rent. So there was a lot of business that first few months, but we weren’t making any money because we had no controls and we weren’t doing it right.

So my brother now is getting divorced and he’s not doing anything and now Jay Ostrow (??) who was my C.F.O., very disorganized, he’s financing, he’s trying to get a million dollar loan, he’s talking to the bank, he’s finagling doing a Cesar not giving the facts. It wasn’t—.

MG: He borrowed money from your mother.

RG:—he didn’t understand everything. But then what he did was how he financed us was he didn’t pay sales tax for four or five months.

AH: Oh my.

RG: And it came out in the paper the day we were supposed to close on the loan so our banker couldn’t see it. So now your credibility has gone down and I didn’t realize it. Now, I wrote that as one of the stories. Now my brother was not involved. (inaudible) I hired a gentleman, a man who is a turnaround specialist, and we met our C.P.A. firm and we discussed that my brother didn’t really want to do this and I came on as president. And now I have to go see the sales tax who can shut me down, lock me up, put me in jail.

MG: What does he tell me that morning?
RG: And my advisor, we came up with a plan. I talked to Chris Sullivan(??) before and he gave me some ideas so I had to take control of the company.

MG: But that morning he tells me, “Melanie I’m going to meet with sales tax people. I haven’t told you because I didn’t want to bother you, but if I get arrested—.”

RG: But at that point I took control of the company. I had to get rid of the people I had who were like operating officers and this and that and take over and do some of the things that Chris had told me said you shouldn’t give the 1905 Salad away and we made the changes. I went to the sales tax people and showed them how I was going to turn around and how I was going to pay. Meanwhile I’m paying this advisor money that we couldn’t afford, twenty-thousand dollars a month and we didn’t have twenty-thousand dollars to spend, but we needed his advice because of his involvement with banks and negotiating. And now the bank that had the mortgage in Ybor City we were behind with them they were going to start foreclosing on us.

Our building in Sarasota, my brother was talking with the landlord and told him certain things that were dishonest. That guy told me you have to be honest and so they started eviction notices on me. Now, our main supplier, Henry Lee, who Gordon bought afterwards was very loyal to us. I asked my advisor to talk to them. We owed them seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars and I told him, “They think I’m going to declare bankruptcy. I want to pay them pennies on the dollar.” This is our situation. This is what’s happened. Here’s my plan. Here’s what I’m going to do. If you’ll give me a note for seven hundred and fifty-thousand dollars I will pay that back in full within three years and I will be current on every single bill which was tough. I think it was three years I’ll stay current.

MG: What was his name?

RG: Ed Sterling and they were still family and what else did they have to do? They went to the bank and got the note and they guaranteed it and so this went on and on.

MG: And he came back.

RG: So now meanwhile I am still negotiating with the bank with the state. And one day I go there with my attorneys and my C.P.A. firm and they took me to a different room. They took me to the back and they told me, ‘listen I think you’re going to get arrested right now.’ And I said, “Shit.” So I’m doing this all by myself. Well I didn’t get arrested.

MG: Dad’s dead.

RG: I didn’t get arrested. I had to give them my word and I said my word as when I discovered through this advisor to be very honest. When you lie to people and tell them everything is great, well if you’re having bad times people, if you tell them the truth, they will probably support you and help you. If you’re lying to them, they will not.
MG: They won’t (inaudible) or trust you.

RG: Then I went through this with the—and a friend of ours. I hired Dennis Fedorovich. And I hired him and I was very honest about our situation. He had been (inaudible) with Budget Car. And I told him and I had a dinner set up to meet my mom and my brother with his wife and I said, “Do you understand our problem, how bad it is?” And he said, “Yeah.”

MG: He liked the challenge.

RG: Yes. And so within one week before we found out what we owed, we didn’t know what we owed to who.

AH: Okay.

RG: I worked at this bank with Lynn Culbreath who was with Barnett [Bank]. She had worked in the past with my dad, but she didn’t trust my dad because she didn’t trust any of the numbers. Well we went there with information and she, the first time we went there she wanted to show us the door. And then we met again and then Lynn helped us with some funds. Now we are making some funds we need for a bridge. Now Lynn is one of our best friends.

MG: Oh yes. She travels with us.

RG: Yes. We were in the First Union special asset division, that’s problem banks. There was a guy there named Louis (inaudible) who we talked to and he helped and he gave us a little bridge (inaudible). We had to go to Jacksonville to the special assets head. And we found out that the guy there had a problem with my turnaround specialist. He did something for the bank one time and they felt he over-charged them. So they turned down all requests which was like almost fatal.

MG: Kicked us to the curb.

AH: Because of the guy you hired for the twenty grand a month?

RG: Yes because of personal issues and they’re not supposed to do that.

MG: It was Lee Sanders.

RG: It wasn’t supposed to happen and then we—this gentleman that was our special person really believed in us and believed in what we were doing. He just lost a son to a motorcycle accident. But then we went and we switched to Colonial Bank which was manufacturer’s bank. Two young men who had been at First Union who wanted to do business with us, they were in there and they helped us out. (telephone rings) And we started doing this. Meanwhile, we started to turn everything around.
Well the last day, the last payment I am making to Henry Lee I called him and said I was going to fly down to meet (Melanie speaking in the background) him and later “what the hell is happening now, he’s going to tell me that he can’t pay.” I went down there to thank him and to give him his check. I was very loyal to him, but he sold his company to another company in California and service went to hell and I had to switch. I would tolerate all of their operation problems, but I was very honest with all my management in telling them the situation and some bailed. Some didn’t and stayed with me. Well the regional manager from that company tells my GM in St. Pete Columbia that (inaudible) C.O.D hadn’t payed. And we weren’t. We had paid. It was their error and I said, “That is one thing I cannot tolerate, you are undermining my integrity.”

AH: Now who reported this wrong? The bank?

RG: No Henry Lee Food Service. Everything was going fine. I talked to our manager and tell him all of our situations, give him updates where we are and we’re current and we’re doing good and everything is going great, but now Henry Lee the supplier does not make a delivery to our St. Petersburg restaurant and the person over the sale’s person, tells my general manager he can’t deliver because we’re on C.O.D. We had not paid. And it was their error, their error.

AH: Yes, Okay. I see.

MG: (inaudible)

RG: —But I said hey, I told the president I said, “You’re undermining me by doing that” in person. If we were he had to give me that call first so we can discuss it, but you telling my management that, now they don’t believe me and they have to believe me. And that is when I fired that company because you don’t, that’s not the relationship, you don’t tell some people, you come to me and I’ll be honest and I was fair. So these were the most difficult times. I was able to pay off even our attorneys we owed them a lot of money for my dad.

MG: How many millions?

RG: Not millions. We owed a bunch of money to the landlord in Sarasota. I talked to them, made those payments, paid off Henry Lee. I owed the attorneys a couple, a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. I paid them off. They didn’t think I would pay them off in full. I paid them off in full in two years. I paid off everybody. Everybody says when I’m going to do something I say when I’m going to do it we do it. That’s where I gained the respect of the business community.

MG: He buckled down. He told everybody else to buckle down.

AH: Yes I mean—.
RG: We took salary cuts.
MG: Oh no, he took major salary cuts.
RG: We took major salary cuts, yes.
AH: Okay and how else did you buckle down like that?
RG: Just focus and take control and work and do what I know how to do.
MG: You know like Lee Sanders says its penny wise and pound foolish. He needs to look at every date every—
AH: Yes.
RG: He gave me the confidence to be that leader and rise above my brother. And the older brother is always the one. So it gave me that confidence.
MG: He came in there and he figured out the whole situation. And went—
RG: In three years, in three years we turned everything around.
MG: You and Lee.
RG: We achieved what we were going to do, but I realize I was hands on in everything and I then I realized I promoted a gentleman that I hired and it turned out he had problems. He had gotten divorced in the Northeast. He had been a district manager of Ruth’s Christ Steakhouse. He had been director of operations for (inaudible) in New York. And he told me what he made and what he did.
MG: And what he wanted to be.
RG: And I said, “Look I don’t have that position and I can’t pay that much money. And he said, don’t worry one day I’m going to be your C.O.O.” And I liked his attitude it was kind of cocky, I hired him and then it was too late at that point. And then he stayed with me and went in as assistant manager in Sarasota and now he is our C.O.O. and I said, some years ago do you remember when I said you’d never make it? Well, we surpassed that in his salary. But not giving him that control—.
AH: That’s Curt Gaither?
RG: Yup. I’ll tell people I’m an entrepreneur.
MG: You look at Jim Garris who, so many people laughed at us—
RG: He did not.
MG: Jim said, “I’ll stick with you, Richard.”

RG: Yeah some people bailed on us.

AH: You mean in the dark days?

RG: The dark days. Some people stayed and some bailed, but when I look at people—I used to belong to a group called (inaudible) and I was involved and I stayed for eight years and I got a lot out of it. I just got frustrated to the point with some of the people. But I looked and I told them I was going to hire a C.E.O. and they said, “Well you’ll never be able to do that. You’re too much of a control freak.” And through the tech group I realized I had to be hands off. I do it pretty much now. I’m pretty good at it.

MG: He’s very good at it. I can tell you. What Curt has done for me is give me my husband back and Curt really understands him.

RG: I don’t do it necessarily all the time, but I let him—I’m an entrepreneur. I am not a good manager. I told that to Babson College. I’ll admit that and some people think I should not say that. I’ll tell people I suffer from dyslexia. I’m ADHD. I am. I wish they knew that when I was in school. I was in elementary school they made me feel stupid. I took these reading tests—

MG: (inaudible)

RG: —I took these reading tests and I didn’t understand the problems. I read usually right to left. I read books backwards. I taught myself to do things. I cannot focus. I used to have to right down everything (inaudible). But today they get to help kids. I tell people that because a lot of people have what I have. I had number problems. I was a football player and they would give me the number and I would reverse the number. They would tell me the number and I would go the wrong way. And I felt stupid.

AH: Of course.

RG: And I’d have to sit there and really think about it. So it’s okay.

MG: And some people take all these drugs.

RG: And my brother was diagnosed with ADHD and my dad was. My brother took the drugs and he can’t get off of it. I tried it for two days and I said you know, it’s not me.

MG: He was very hyper I could really control him. (laughter)

RG: C.E.O.’s in the top 500 are usually ADHD and have these problems. We think differently and nobody understands the way I think. Like Sherrod [Andrea’s fiancé?] (??) was asking me who came up with the stage out there and I said. I think different.
MG: Sherrod is ADHD too!  (laughs)

RG: I had to stop and think, like my wine list.  I can’t finish it.  Maybe it doesn’t have to do with my problems, maybe because it is a fear of failing.  Because it is something like a writer or a painter you just don’t want to ever finish.  You don’t want to finish it.

MG: It doesn’t have to be.

RG: No, it has too—it has too

MG: (inaudible)–new ones come out—

RG: It needs to have a list complete. Because we haven’t had one for years—

MG: (inaudible)—needs a job.

Andrea Gonzmart – We don’t need one thousand vin numbers. We are already on vin number seven hundred and fifty.

(laughter)

AH: Really?

RG: We do. The only reason we have the amount of wines that I have is because to be named one of the top thirty-two by Wine Enthusiast in the country makes a statement. We had a guy come in yesterday for lunch that was going to Bern’s for a Vertigo (inaudible) which is a thousand dollar bottles of French wine came in because of our list. But it makes a statement. If you show concern for having great wines in this service then it shows you are serious about food. And those are when the things happen. Now we don’t need to have it. I’d like to get to twelve hundred only a couple bottles of this and that (laughter).

MG: But Andy, let me tell you, this didn’t start out like to get out of work. It started out because the guy just started like collecting stuff.

(speaking at the same time)

RG: Now it started to try and get the respect.

MG: Richard when we were young you collected Richard’s wine list.

RG: Yes, but it was different. It was when they made wines. Today what’s my desire?

MG: Today.
RG: Is to get the Wine Spectator Grand Award. You see twelve hundred wines or two thousand (inaudible). And upstairs in the Hideaway we’re going to make that a big wine cellar. It’s not manageable. But I’ve been telling Curt to hire a wine manager. And Andreas’s responsibility is going to have to be, she likes wine. She’s not at that stage where I am at (laughter), but it’s a headache. It’s a headache.

MG: Well, just the recording of it all.

AH: Oh yes.

AG – The problem is that we’ve lost track of it until I came on the scene on (inaudible) three years ago. And now trying to clean it up is slowly been a three year process.

RG: I’ll buy wine that’s not for sale because we were—

AG – He’ll buy stuff that he doesn’t tell me he buys it and I don’t add it or I add stuff that (speaking at the same time) (laughter)

RG: Before you people knew, but then Ybor— it’s a mess and it’s my fault.

AG – Yes.

MG: But he knows what a good deal is though and you’ve got to do it.

RG: No, there are certain things that nobody else can get I’ll buy all there is, but then we have to sell it.

MG: A good deal.

RG: I’ve got to give it to somebody and hope that she can do it. I’m trying to take myself out of that loop.

AG – It’s almost done.

RG: But it’s you know we’re doing the wine list in a different way and some people think it’s really innovative. And Andrea had a concern and it’s my same concern, the white wines aren’t all together and the red wines aren’t all together. We have a map and we designate like six regions in Spain, The Green Valley is a certain area in the Mediterranean. And so what we’ve done is you look, you go to the Mediterranean and you’ll find the reds and the whites in that area and you get to have an index showing all the wines and so you can look at it. Now the wine list is impossible to read. It’s impossible to select. It’s like Bern’s. It’s Okay, but now what we have to do is—

MG: Simplify it.
RG: No, what Andrea needs to do is then get a list that we do, “Richard’s Wines of The Month”.

AG: The Cliff’s Notes version.

(laughter)

AH: Yes, make it easy on people.

RG: And you present it. Here’s the book.

AH: Okay.

RG: Because when we go to our (inaudible) to Spain now and Melanie was there, we were there with this Duke of Spain.

MG: Marquess!

RG: Well it’s like a duke, a marquess.

MG: . . .

RG: I got an email from him and the chairman of the Marquess (inaudible) that I couldn’t get to ever talk to and he saw my list and they said I can’t believe this (inaudible).

AH: Okay.

MG: Did you hear this story? Did you hear this story? We go there to the Marquess of (inaudible) and Richard (inaudible)—

RG:—for months.

MG:—denying Richard in saying, “you’re nobody, nothing.”

RG: Giving me no attention.

AH: They wouldn’t sell? Is that it?

RG: I asked them for attention for a tour and we get there and I’m asking for possibly some old vintages.

AH: Okay.

RG: And three months later the guy in the U.S says the family says they’re not selling old bottles. I said, “listen we’ve been doing business with the Marquess (inaudible) for sixty
years. My father knew somebody there that I don’t know.” Well I can’t get anywhere. So I go there to the brand new hotel that just opened up at The Guggenheim Museum.

MG: A totally cool hotel.

RG: Now I meet with the export manager who is a family person. I show him my list. I showed him a collection of a wine called *Vega Sicilia* and certain things and he said, “I can’t believe it.” He can’t believe it. So the next day I’m outside waiting for our group and here comes this group. And the chairman of the board is with the King’s daughter’s husband.

MG: His Son-in-law.

RG: He’s the husband of the princess.

AH: Okay.

RG: And the export manager points to me and he leaves this guy and hugs me. “I knew your father twenty-two years ago and I was twenty-one years old and I came to see your father and he picked me up and gave me champagne. And then I called my father and told him how wonderful he was, what a wonderful restaurant and wine list. And then I told him, we found two bottles of 1925 Marquess (inaudible)___.” And he said, “that’s because I sent it to him.” So now, that night he calls me and he wants me and Melanie to join them for Champagne in their bar and so we join them. And now the Marquess of Lanzarote from the Canary Islands joins us and this guy tells the Marquess about my wine list and the wines we have, the *Vega Sicilia*. And he says, there’s nobody in Tampa who drinks those wines, kind of arrogant. So the guy—

MG: Like, you’re not in Miami.

RG: —So the chairman sees my list and he’s like blown away. And he says, “We don’t sell any of our old vintages to anybody in the U.S., but we’re going to send you some of ours.”

MG: But he said, “Why am I not on this list?”

AH: Yes.

MG: Because.

RG: And so we make a big deal. So that’s why we go there. In Spain, we went to the wine show.

MG: The Alimentaria.
RG: Food and Wine expo, the biggest, they say, in the world. And we took Curt, just to go see and meet people and meet other people and meet buyers and we’re walking through to know who you are.

MG: Everybody knows him! We’re in Spain!

RG: And it’s a good feeling to get that respect. To strive to have the best.

AH: Yes.

RG: Everyone wants our wine list. But it’s--those are the challenges. I want to be the best. I want to be recognized, as I have been told by some of the best wineries and owners, that we have the best Spanish list in the world.

MG or AG: We do.

RG: I want to be the best at what--be the best at what I know we can do. I tell my daughter at the same time we have to remember those less fortunate and give back to the community. It’s very important. And sometimes you have to understand that we don’t advertise or we don’t do this, but you’re helping out in the community and that shows your commitment. That’s help(??).

The University of South Florida, I’ll talk about that. Why did I get involved? Frank and Kate Borkowski who were friends of my parents--and my mom said, “My god how important the university was to the community.” And I didn’t understand. And they didn’t—my mom they nurtured them. And then when my dad became ill, the doctors that were taking care of them were from USF.

MG: Dr. Paul.

RG: No, that was later. Dr. Norde and then we went to Cleveland Clinic and the Cleveland Clinic said that he had pancreatic cancer. And the two best surgeons in the world some guy in San Francisco and Dr. Larry (inaudible) in Tampa who is at USF. And then I saw the doctor at USF at the training facility. I still say today people in Tampa don’t know the—

MG: How blessed we are.

RG:—to have this wonderful college here, the university medical school. So that’s how I got involved. Also, my mom told me about this Latino scholarship fund. I didn’t understand that either. Why would you give a scholarship to some Latin person? Well they did the first presentation at the Columbia. It was a young lady and she graduated from USF and she is now a doctor in UCLA and she wouldn’t have gone to school. That’s when it impacted me. And then we started the program after my dad died and created the scholarship and giving the scholarships. We had the endowment now for the—
MG:  (inaudible)

RG:— Cesar Gonzmart and the (inaudible). But then we did the brother and sister that really impacted me, Julio and Elsie Rodriquez. They had a single parent, mother. The father died in the field. And they went on to college. He got a 4.0 in engineering. She was summa cum laude outstanding senior out of four thousand students. That amazed me.

RG: Both are engineers. She went on to work for New Mexico nuclear plant.

MG: (talks to the dog?)

RG: He went (inaudible). They both got their masters. And so it did great. And when Julio came two years ago Christmas, yes two years ago, to thank me because he said, “you know when I was a senior at Brandon High School, I was one of the (inaudible) fields picking strawberries and tomatoes.” It made a difference. That impacted me. Now Andrea goes to the functions with me and we have, I think about seven students now, I think or six students. We’ll have more as the funding goes in there. But that’s how you make a difference in this community. The community that supported you. And these kids that are less fortunate—.

MG: They’re so smart. They’re going to work for you?

AH: Sure.

RG: I’ve adopted USF because I went to Denver, I don’t stay in touch. Madrid? Forget about it.

AH: Yes.

RG: And I’ve adopted it because they care and you see you make a difference in all the different areas, you know, from the library to the athletics to arts.

MG: He’s got his finger in everything.

AH: What’s that?

MG: He’s got his finger in everything.

AH: Yes.

MG: He really does.

AH: Yes.
RG: But also, it is the huge economic engine. I looked at our receivables today and I think we have like six different schools that have had functions at the Columbia in the last six weeks. So it’s good business.

AH: Yes, absolutely.

MG: (inaudible)

RG: When they asked me to give the commencement speech in December at Sarasota two years ago, I sat there and said, “who’s that friggen’ kid who almost flunked out at Jesuit High School?”

AH: Yes.

RG: A lousy student [referring to himself].

MG: (inaudible)

RG: And they asked me to do (inaudible). And they asked me to do this and it made me understand it’s not always about the grades. You have to have a passion and that was probably one of the highlights for me.

MG: At Jesuit High School they used to class them in one, two, three and four.

RG: Mel—

MG: One A—

RG: Yes.

MG: Two B—.

RG: No, no Mel—

MG: Three C—

RG: You’re wrong.

MG and AG: —and Four D.

RG: One is First Year is One A, B or C or D. Four A, Four B, Four C, Four D. Four A was the top students. Four D was the slower students. I was Four D.

MG: And you didn’t know it?
RG: Well most of the Four D guys were the ones that all became successful businessmen.

MG: Oh!

AH: Yes.

RG: But that has nothing to do. It’s about—but you know USF is important to me now. (inaudible) I was in the yearbook two years ago and I was like, “Gosh!” It’s a big thing to me because I was not a good student. And I tell students all the time, “You don’t have to be the best student. You just have to try.” And Andrea (inaudible), we’re going to be working with St. Peter Claver now (inaudible)

AG: Dad told me.

MG: St. Pete Claver is a church block.

RG: St. Peter Claver is an inner city Catholic school. And there are fifteen kids in the fifth grade, seven and six. And I’ve gotten Nike now to be a sponsor and we’re going to put them on a running program starting—I’m going next week I think on the twelfth[of Dec.] to talk to them. And then get them motivated. And the eighteenth they start the program the day before and they’re going to be working during their gym period. And the athletic teacher, (inaudible), I know from St. Barnes. So they’re all excited. So we’ve got Nike promoting, giving shoes to them. We’ve got the YMCA coming to work with the kids during the class and teach them about nutrition and so forth. I’ll be going out there to run, talk to them and motivate them. After they hit certain goals give them water bottles, give them certain things, little prizes. And then the last day will be at the Gasparilla marathon. They’ll get there at a certain time. We’ll bus them in. Work the last water-stop at mile twenty-five so they can see the people coming across for four hours—

MG: They’re dying.

RG:—and they struggle. And so they can understand. And then at five and a half hours we’re going to then go run together as a group.

MG: The kids.

RG: And then with me and us and we’ll run and then they’re going to give them each their own medal. And then at the awards ceremony they’re going to acknowledge every one of them. They’re going to call them up—to give them an award.

AG: Wow.

AG: (inaudible) I guess

AH: That’s great.
AG: — (inaudible)at Gasparilla (inaudible). (laughter)

RG: That’s how you change a life—

AH: Yes, absolutely.

RG: —that’s how you change a life.

MG: That’s—it’s like the people who work the fields, that’s what—if we can do it Andy. (inaudible).

RG: We whipped the cycle with these two kids who became engineers, their daughter, there sister, now is getting one of our scholarships. But these little kids, you know, they’re very polite. But we’re going to work with Central City YMCA too, up to a hundred kids. But that’s how you can change. You’re not going to touch all of them, but you’re going to try to get them motivated.

MG: I’m going to step back with us again and tell you, a lot of people in this community don’t do that.

RG: It’s not just about giving money. It’s about giving your time.

AH: Yes.

MG: Wait a minute. It’s about thinking about it and doing it.

AH: Well it’s about flying out to speak to a class and surprising them.

MG: It’s about caring.

AH: Yes.

MG: It’s about really stepping up to the plate.

AH: Yes.

RG: We’ve been thinking about the Babson—I heard from Josh yesterday—

AH: Yes.

MG: I can step back, Andy even (inaudible).

RG:—he called me to thank me and how great—He’s going to go to Hong Kong next year (inaudible). But I think when you look at—I try to bring Andrea to some of these things. Like I understand—I didn’t expect her to talk a lot at Babson, but just to go and see—.
AG: I talked!

RG: I know. I just didn’t expect you to talk a lot I’m saying.

AG: Okay.

MG: I expected them to ask you (inaudible).

(laughter)

RG: She did great. She did great, but the thing is to go there for them to put the faces
Irene (inaudible)—

AG: (inaudible)

MG: [to Andrea] I asked if Uncle Jimmy was your date? (laughter)

RG: But to do that, did that make you [to Andrea] feel--the question he [Andy] asked me
is, “when did you feel The Columbia was special?” Didn’t that make you feel like your
family and your business was unique?

AG: Well I mean the fact that they were studying us at a college up in Massachusetts
made me feel like we were kind of, sort of, we were a little more different than the rest of
everybody else. (laughter)

AH: Well one thing I found really interesting too is the fact that you went there with your
buddy Jimmy? Was he there with you?

MG: Well Jimmy lives in Boston.

AH: Yes, but you [Richard] went to Denver with him right?

RG: Yes.

MG: Right!

AH: Yes—Okay— which is such a neat, full circle.

MG: But he went to restaurant school (inaudible)!

RG: I became Jimmy’s roommate because the first semester nobody could live with him.
He was this guy who would shoot bottle rockets underneath your doors.

MG: While you were in the bathroom.
RG: While you were sleeping.

MG or AG: Probably while you had constipation

AH: Yes. (laughter)

RG: He would take off the (inaudible). And he would shoot them underneath the damn toilet.

AH: Okay.

RG: And he did all of this stuff that drove people crazy. And one day they did a joke on him that he got really upset. And I just felt bad for him because he was not blending in.

AG: Well no, what I was telling my mother was the only person who would ask me for a date was my Uncle Jimmy. (laughter)

AH: Yes, Okay.

RG: Jimmy was almost ready to tell them to get—you know—he was just being too friendly, but Jimmy is really an innocent guy.

AG: No, he is.

MG: He’s harmless.

RG: He’s harmless, but—

AH: Yes.

RG:—but I can put up with Jimmy. I could put Jimmy in his place. I threw Jimmy up against walls a bunch of times.

AH: Sure, yes.

MG: But not with my children.

AH: He was being a little lecherous?

AG: I can hold my own.

RG: I think you can hold your own, but he calls.—

AH: Well you can certainly outrun him I’m sure, right?

(hearty laughter)
RG: Because Jimmy can only—let me tell you what it was with Jimmy—not with him being fresh, but I know Jimmy. He wanted to go into these restaurants that he goes to with his arm around her [Andrea]—

AG: Oh shit. (inaudible)

RG:—no but that is what it was. I understand Jimmy.

MG: (inaudible) proud.

RG: He wanted to go into these restaurants where people know him with his arm around her, “hey this is my—.”

AG: Wait a minute—.

RG: And whose picture does he have in his house (inaudible).

MG: On top of the TV, me!

(laughter)

MG: Where the hell did this come from? I mean (inaudible).

RG: He’s a good friend, Jimmy, you know, when Andrea and I were talking about business, we’re talking about business, we’re just talking like we normally do. He doesn’t want to listen to that because he doesn’t have that.

MG: He tells Richard, “So are you nervous? Do you know what you’re going to say when you go this college?”

AH: Yes.

MG: Like a (inaudible), “you should just talk about your wife.”

(laughter)

AH: Yes.

MG: And Richard was like, yes—

AG: (inaudible) wrong.

(speaking at the same time)

AH: Exactly, tell the truth.
RG: He said, “Well gee what are you going to do?” I said, “Whatever it is—” we didn’t know the format, but now it’s all right.

MG: (inaudible) roll off your tongue.

RG: But even then he didn’t pay much attention because it’s difficult for him. And he’s a really good friend.

MG: He’s very (inaudible).

AH: He’s what?

MG: (inaudible)

RG: It’s sad, but—.

MG: He’s in another world.

RG: His father was very, very controlling and tough. And I think he went into this coffee cake business and he got caught up in Sam’s Club where they made him produce more and cut his profits. And then all this and then they sent them off to this freezer warehouse to Miami where they told him to send it to. Well the freezer warehouse burns down. He doesn’t understand that he didn’t have insurance for it.

MG: (inaudible)

RG: He loses everything.

AG: This is a trust-fund baby.

AH: Yes.

RG: But it’s sad. I told Andrea, he doesn’t have a phone and he doesn’t have a credit card.

MG: He has no cell-phone.

RG: He had a cell-phone on his dad’s card, but I understand that. I don’t give him a hard time, I understand—

MG: Oh no I never question that.

RG: His parents whenever I see them they thank me for being his friend. He needs a friend and I’m his friend.
MG: But he needs guidance too.

AH: Yes.

MG: And I understand that.

AG: Just the ability of having a friend of longevity.

RG: (inaudible).

MG: But Andrea he’s not capable of really taking care of himself.

RG: It’s like today, my teeth. I’m getting my teeth cleaned and Patty Donovan who’s married to Joey Donovan. She’s Joey’s assistant. (inaudible)’s assistant.

MG: Really?

RG: Yes. She’s a nice, nice girl and everybody—.

MG: (inaudible).

RG: She’s a pretty girl, works for the (inaudible) dark hair. There are two that look similar. And her husband had a sound company. I think he had difficulties. Just tough to deal with. He did it for years and (inaudible). But his brother was in my class. His name was Bobby Donovan.

MG: The most (inaudible).

RG: He’s a genius. But he’d make fun of people he’s [a] genius. He can’t live in our world. And I befriended him. He wrote comic books. His dad did Barney Google for Snuffy Smith.

AH: Okay.

MG: Oh he did that?

RG: He used to draw cartoons and give them to me colored and it was like me and him going to Mars (inaudible). But Bobby can’t live in this world and Bobby is now at an assisted living facility.

MG: Yes.

RG: And I went to go see him because Bobby just—people make fun of him.

AG or MG: I would like to go see him.
RG: Both of my daughters will always defend those that aren’t just (inaudible).

MG: Richard took in the (inaudible).

AH: Yes.

MG: But we have this giant book the guy sketched because his father was a cartoonist. I have Richard as Superman!

AH: Yes. I’d like to maybe scan a couple of those for the book even.

RG: It was a neat book man. He’s genius.

AH: Yes.

RG: He’s genius. But he’s just too, too smart. He’s not, he’s too smart. He’s off the edge.

AH: Yes.

MG: Well wait—.

RG: Sometimes his nails are like this [imitates long nails], growing. And they used to have this medication to treat schizophrenia. And I haven’t seen him in years. But I have got to go see him because— you should see—if you [Melanie] could get the book and show it to him.

MG: I think (inaudible). Do you have time?

AH: Sure, yes.

RG: For the girl that’s not that pretty. Or the guy that’s not that much of a jock, I feel bad for those people. I’ve always liked the underdogs and that’s the way I look at it. Poor Bobby Donovan, it’s sad. Where’d Andrea go?

AH: I think she went next door to get Sherrod.

RG: But you know it’s—my mom and dad always taught me—and people always ask me where did I learn to be so giving. I guess I was taught that. But I remember first grade my mom had given me twenty dollars to pay for the tuition. It was the first grade and I had it in my pocket. And Sister Mary John, first grade teacher, would do these little bowls out of plaster-of-paris and she was talking about how we wanted to collect some money for the poor in Central America and I gave her twenty dollars. I was in the first grade. I didn’t know. And I did it because I felt like we were supposed to do that.
And they called my mom like two weeks later that she didn’t pay the tuition. She said, “What happened to that money?” I said—I remember, this is one of the things I remember—“mom I gave it to Sister Mary John for the poor people who don’t have any food in Central America.” And remember it was a lot of money for them struggling. But she couldn’t get mad at that and just remembering—no matter how much we’re suffering ever, no matter how bad my things are, somebody’s got it a lot, lot worse.

AH: Yes.

RG: You know, I give to the point to more than we should, but I always say if it doesn’t hurt then you haven’t done enough. And that’s my philosophy. And that’s why I run marathons because it hurts. You pray and you think about people. But that is what I am trying to instill in this next generation. Lauren is busy being a mom. And this one here [Andrea] is very much like me and I’m trying to judge where I was at this stage. And so I mean they’re probably there. She’s not working a lot right now with her house and she has a responsibility, but come January she’ll have to do more if she wants to earn the respect of everybody. She has worked a lot in the past. But I take her to everything I can and my dad always reviewed profit and loss statements with me and my brother never worked with my dad he says. And that’s a huge loss for him. He liked being alone in Sarasota and that way he didn’t have to work.

But I always look back on my dad and my grandfather that brief time I knew him and the commitment. My grandfather they said sometimes stayed there for twenty-four hours. He’d sleep standing on his feet at the cash register. Stories I hear you know. And you have got to work as hard as you have to get the job done. I always tell my daughters the first course I had in Denver in hospitality, Dr. Douglas Kiester(??) the head of the Westwood school—first day. I can’t tell you that I got a lot out of college. I could tell you everything I got in a few minutes. There was one, “never count how many hours you work in a week.” It means you’re not happy and you’re going to think you’re under paid. If you have to count the hours it means you’re not satisfied. That was one of the things he said.

Another thing that I missed in exams, what is BCG? And it’s amazing how certain things stick out in your mind. BCG—BCG—Beer Clean Glass. We’d gone to the Budweiser and they gave all us, you had to clean all the Bud glasses a certain way because if it has any film the head goes down.

AH: Yes.

RG: Professionally a lot of them were business classes, he said, “it’s Okay to make a mistake as long as you don’t commit the same mistake twice.” You learn from that. So I always tell people I make more mistakes than anybody. So that was another one. Another thing Dr. Kiester(??) said was, “don’t drink with your customers, you could become an alcoholic.” So I don’t drink at the restaurant.

AH: Yes.
RG: Because if you start drinking at the restaurant on a nightly basis then you have a problem— I don’t drink—

*end of interview*
For Interviewer/Interviewee

Remaining Questions on the Richard Gonzmart Interview:

Sometimes difficult to understand what is being said. The empty underlines note spaces where speech was inaudible.

All underlined words, phrases, and sentences note that the transcriber/audit editor had difficulty understanding and need to be verified.

Below are specific instances:

Page 1 Dr. Tony Parrino’s (unsure of the name and spelling)

Page 3 Wilder pieces (unclear. Who or what is the Wilder Pieces???)

Page 5 And it was killer. I can’t make chicken like that. Andrea [Richard and Melanie’s daughter] can. (Andrea?)

Page 9 When I was fifteen I was in Spain in Palma Mallorca and we went swimming with Hector Motel[?]. (Hector Motel??)

Page 10 I [or he] was studying in Spain. We were going to drive down to the South of Spain. Two miles outside of Madrid.

Page 10 Alley, Jim Alley? No. Edward Alley? (Alley??)

Page 10 John Edward Alley (is the name and spelling accurate??)

Page 10 So this was the Café? The present day Café? (??)

Page 16 Tropical Ice Cream Factory

Page 20 — her boyfriend John Docks…. (accurate spelling??)

Page 21 —Irene Asturias from Guatemala, a young lady. Josh Neman… (accurate names and spelling??)

Page 24 I’ve hired a company called CRN (abbreviation??)

Page 25 and 26 —their vice president of sales, a guy named Robert Langhouse (accurate name and spelling?)

Page 27 Lynne (accurate name and spelling?)

Page 34 Robert Marr who is just sensational—. (correct name and spelling?)
Page 34 He was an ex-Buccaneer [the father?] and his father— (not sure who was the ex-Buccaneer)

Page 36 That’s Weiner? (correct spelling?)

Page 36 Yeah, Robert Weiner— (correct spelling?)

Page 37 to Joe Capitan Central City (accurate?)

Page 38 Robert Tolf

Page 39 Ross Staman

Page 40 Robert Tolf

Page 41 Bay City Western News (accurate?)

Page 44 Gene Ostrow (correct name and spelling?)

Page 48 Leigh Sanders

Page 49 Like Sherrod [Andrea’s fiancé?] (correct spelling and relation?)

Page 51 The Green Valley (??)

Page 54 . Dr. Norde (correct spelling?)

Page 57 St. Pete Claver is a church block (correct name and spelling?)

Page 57 St. Barnes (correct spelling?)

Page 58 Central City YMCA (correct?)

Page 65 Dr. Douglas Kiester the head of the Westwood school— (correct name and spelling?)