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Interview with
FRANK CUELLAR, SR.

July 13, 1978

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Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Floyd Jenkins

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Approved:

Frank Cuellar Sr.
(Signature)

Date:

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Business Oral History Collection

Frank Cuellar, Sr.

Interviewer: Dr. Floyd Jenkins

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: July 13, 1978

Dr. Jenkins: This is Floyd Jenkins recording for the Business Archives Project, North Texas State University. Today is July 13, 1978 and I am interviewing Mr. Frank Cuellar, founder and Chairman of the Board of El Chico Corporation. We are recording at his home in Dallas. The address is 8303 Inwood Road. Let's start by going back and getting the family history. Let's talk about your recollections of where your parents came from, how they got to Texas, how they lived and work up to when and where you were born and the kind of life that you had growing up as a boy, and where you went to school. Let's start with your recollection of how your parents got to Texas and how they lived.

Frank Cuellar: Well, you know my dad and mother both used to tell us their background. And they were born in the state of Nuevo Leon which is right in the north part of Mexico close to Laredo. They were pretty smart to make the decision to leave Mexico because they didn't like the

life of Mexico, the government and things like that. And they used to hear so much about Texas and the United States, and they wanted to come to this country. So they were born in a little old village called Miery Noriega in the state of Nuevo Leon which is somewhere close to Matehuala. I have been wanting to go there to see their place, but I never have. So they got married and decided to come to Texas.

Jenkins: Do you know about what year they got married?

Cuellar: It was 1891. They married and they came to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. They looked for some work on this side, and my dad found a job in Texas in a chuck wagon. In those days he used to tell us that they didn't have many fences. People were building fences and raising sheep and goats and a few cattle, and they were building fences and they hired several people in this chuck wagon. And my dad was a cook.

Jenkins: This was on a ranch?

Cuellar: Yes. And, of course, there were no highways. He mentioned that, I think it was Callihan.

Jenkins: Callihan in Texas?

Cuellar: Yes. And the Mexicans call it Callihan, it could be Calijon. Anyhow he used to cook corn bread, beans and

meat. He used to kill several head of sheep to cook the meat for all the employees. And they had this chuck wagon and they moved from one place to another. That was 1891.

Jenkins: They had chuck wagons on sheep ranches as well as cattle then?

Cuellar: That's right. So anyhow they lived like that for a while and my mother she used to take in . . . she used to go around places and wash clothes. You know they didn't have any money, no education, they didn't even know the language-- the English language.

Jenkins: Is that right?

Cuellar: Nothing but Spanish. So they are bound to have pretty rough times. But finally after awhile they decided to move from Laredo to San Marcos, if you know where San Marcos is.

Jenkins: Yes.

Cuellar: The other side of San Antonio. My dad used to tell me that in those days they didn't have no highways, hardly any railroads, and they would just ride horses through the trails. So anyhow, when they landed in San Marcos . . .

Jenkins: About what year?

Cuellar: That was in 1892. The time they moved to San Marcos. And that's where the first child was born. His name was Jim, and he is still living today. He is the one that lives in the valley.

Jenkins: You call him . . .

Cuellar: Called him 'Santiago.' In English, Jim. He was the first son born, and then my oldest sister was born. Her name was Gavina. And they lived in San Marcos a little while. When they first moved in there, it must have been cotton picking time because they said the day they got there they didn't have any money. They didn't know how they were going to buy some breakfast the next morning. And it happened to be that the moon was shining, full moon, and my Dad went and picked a little cotton at night so that he could get a head start for the next day.

Jenkins: Is that right. Picking cotton in the moonlight.

Cuellar: Yes. That was pretty hard. So anyhow, they lived there a while and then after two children were born, then they moved to Lockhart, Texas, which is only twelve or fifteen miles from San Marcos. And in Lockhart Amos was born and then Isabel, who is still living. She lives right here in Dallas. Then Manuel, but he is dead. Carolina was next. Carolina was next to Manuel and I was number seven.

Jenkins: You were born in San Marcos?

Cuellar: No. In Lockhart.

Jenkins: In what year?

Cuellar: December 3, 1903. So I will be seventy-five my next birthday. We lived in Lockhart, and then another child was born. But

she didn't live but about two or three days and then she died.

Jenkins: Let's pause here and get into the record that you have a pamphlet which takes your geneology back to your great grandfather?

Cuellar: Right.

Jenkins: And your great grandmother. And we will include a copy of that record in the transcript.

Cuellar: I will be glad to give you a copy. So I was born in 1903 and in 1908, that was in January, we moved. We moved from Lockhart, Texas, to Rosebud, Texas. That's Falls County. Right after we moved, my brother Mack was born. Of course, I failed to say that after I was born in Lockhart, then I had the sister that only lived two or three days and then another sister was born. Her name is Maria. She is still living. She lives in Oklahoma City. But then Mack, he was born . . . I don't know what day in January--but it was in January, and he was born in Rosebud, Texas, Falls County.

Jenkins: What is a bigger town than Rosebud that we would recognize that would tell us about where it is?

Cuellar: Rosebud, Texas is about thirty-five miles east of Waco. Lockhart is about thirty miles east of Austin. Now we lived in Rosebud from 1908 to 1913. So in 1908 I was five years old, and I remember it a little bit. And 1908, 1909, 1910

1911. This must have been about 1912, because we moved in '13 so this must have happened in 1912. They organized a band.

Jenkins: In Rosebud?

Cuellar: In Rosebud. Here I am . . .

Jenkins: What were you playing?

Cuellar: The triangle. The triangle, you know.

Jenkins: I played that myself.

Cuellar: So in 1910 I was seven years old.

Jenkins: You were the youngest one in there weren't you?

Cuellar: The youngest one. It was about a twenty brass band and it was real nice. And my brothers were in it. This was my oldest brother which is still living. That's the one that was born in San Marcos.

Jenkins: Your oldest brother?

Cuellar: Yes. And the next one, Amos, that's him right there (points to picture.)

Jenkins: All of your brothers were in the band then?

Cuellar: Well, those two and myself. And I had some cousins. This is a cousin, and here is another cousin. He lives right here in Dallas. He is about the same age as Jim, which is also a Cuellar.

Jenkins: Who organized the band?

Cuellar: A fellow named Porfirio Lopez. And he was from Mexico. He was a . . . well, he was good because he organized and they made some good music. And did you know that they used to invite the band to go play for big deals like picnics and things like that. I remember one time the fire department had a deal showing equipment and they hired a whole orchestra. Anyhow any where we went to play, people gave tips in those days. They didn't have much money but a quarter was a big quarter. And only two people got tips. The professor and myself, because I was the youngest one. And when we were farming . . .

Jenkins: And your dad was farming all this time?

Cuellar: He started farming since we . . . since he got to San Marcos way back in those years, 1893, somewhere around there. He really believed in farming, and he got to be a good farmer, a sharecropper. When we lived in Rosebud in say about 1910, I was seven years old I remember.

Jenkins: You started doing some farm work?

Cuellar: Yes. We didn't go to school because there was no school near us. Since we didn't have no schools, my dad hired an old man, he was an old soldier from Porfirio Diaz, you know. Porfirio Diaz was a big president for thirty years, I think in Mexico. So this was an old soldier. He must

have been, as well as I remember. He looked to be about seventy-five, eighty years old, and he was pretty well educated. And he told my dad, he said, "Look, you don't have to pay me anything. You just feed me and give me a place to live." He says, "You have lots of children. I will teach them how to read." So my Dad went for that. My dad didn't know how to read. My mother did. So he hired this fellow, and he lived with us, and even the neighbors would come in to take lessons from him. And by golly, we learned how to read. We began to read in Spanish. So we didn't go to American schools. In 1913 when we moved from Rosebud to Kaufman, Texas--that's about thirty-five miles from Dallas east of here--we moved in November and school was already going. We didn't try to go to school right quick because we wasn't acquainted with the people. But we started. And since my brothers, after this band, they learned how to read notes. This fellow was a pretty smart fellow. And every one of his group could read notes. So when we moved away from Rosebud, then they keep on with the music, and had a guitar and a mandolin, this and that. And my brother, Amos, he was real good. He started playing on the piano and by notes, because he knew notes. And so we got pretty popular. The family was very popular on account of that music. And

the neighbors said, "You are going to have to go to school." So in 1914 when school started, me and one of my sisters--two of my sisters--went to school. The first day I went to school I didn't know a word in English. And they just threw me out there, start playing with the children. . . with other children. But, you see, in 1914 I was eleven years old, and they put me in the primer, and all the other kids . . . cause I was a big boy, so I felt kind of embarrassed. But do you know the teacher, when she started on the first book and went on pages and he said, "Why, you know how to read." I said, "Well, I know how to read Spanish. I don't know how to read English." So anyhow, to make the story short, in one year I got to the second grade. We go pretty fast.

Jenkins: Did the teacher speak Spanish?

Cuellar: No. But she says, "You're going pretty fast." You know, when you know Spanish and then you change to English, if you already know how to read in Spanish you go pretty fast. So I went pretty fast.

Jenkins: Do you remember that teacher's name?

Cuellar: Yes. The last was named Glass. Just like glass. The first year. The second year was Lantrip, and his wife was also a teacher. She was the one who taught me. They called

her Kitty--Kitty Lantrip. And I didn't go to school but very few years, because I got to the sixth grade. We used to have. . . in school we used to have . . . on Friday evening we had spelling matches, and we had arithmetic matches, and do you know I was in the sixth grade and I competed with some of them that were in the seventh and eighth. I was good with figures. I was really good. Arithmetic didn't give me no trouble at all. So I competed with some much higher grades.

Jenkins: By the time that you were in the sixth grade, had you caught up with the people your age?

Cuellar: Almost caught up with them. And then when we were reading something like in Texas history, and when it came to that Spanish, boy, I could beat them. To me it was natural because it was Spanish. So we worked, we worked hard, I tell you. Farming. We worked with mules. My dad, even though he didn't know how to read, but he had something. My mother, she had the ability of cooking, and she also had the ambition of going into business. My dad, his ambition was farming. Oh, he thought there was nothing in the world better than farming. He thought farming was the best thing.

Jenkins: What was he growing around Kaufman?

Cuellar: Nothing but cotton and corn and, well, some oats and sorghum. All the feed stuff was for the mules. Because we had

horses, we had mules, we had cows, we had pigs, we had chickens, we had hogs, and we had to raise . . .

Jenkins: So his cash crop was cotton. Everything else was to take care of the animals?

Cuellar: Right. The cotton was the only thing that we could sell for cash so we would buy clothes and other things. Sugar and coffee and things like that. But we would raise practically everything.

Jenkins: Did you have a garden also?

Cuellar: We had a garden, and in those days we didn't have no refrigeration. And the farmers, they had to find a way how to preserve their food. For instance, meat. My mother, in the winter months, we used to kill hogs, you know.

Jenkins: Yes.

Cuellar: And they made bacon. What we needed was . . . well, it wasn't no bacon, it was salt meat. And you could take that meat and put plenty of salt, salt was cheap. We preserved that and it was good eating.

Jenkins: Right on through the summer.

Cuellar: Yes. And then the . . . not the fat but the lean meat, my mother used to season it with pepper, and with some of the lard. She used to put it in cans, and when the weather in the summer was 100°, that meat didn't spoil. We had plenty to eat.

Jenkins: Just kept it in the lard then?

Cuellar: Yes. Just kept it and that preserved it. The seasoning and the lard just preserved it. And that's the way we used to keep the stuff in the summer months. Sausage in the winter--they killed hogs and they made strips of meat, and when you had a blue norther, you know, they killed the hog and we hung that meat and that cold weather dried that meat. And after it was dried, my Dad had a wooden block about this big, take a hammer and beat up this meat. And they called it dried meat or dried beef. Sometimes we killed a yearling and those strips of meat was about this long and dry, you know, with the cold, and you just beat it. You see some dried beef in the market. Have you seen it?

Jenkins: Kind of jerky and that type of thing?

Cuellar: Yes. It's thin. Okay, after that meat had been dried and beaten with this hammer and spread like a piece of paper this big, you could put it in a trunk and it wouldn't spoil because it dried out. Then it kind of dehydrated. Then my mother when she went to fix it, she added some water to it, and seasoning to cook it. Well, it was dehydrated, and that moisture would get back in there and boy that beef was good eating, good eating.

Jenkins: So you had pork and beef right on through the hot weather because of preserving?

Cuellar: That's right. That's right, without any ice. So I tell my children today I say, "You know I feel sorry for you all because if we was to have something happen, you know, war or something and we run out of stuff," I says, "you take me to the farm. I can survive because I know how to live that way." The young people today, if they don't have an air conditioner, they couldn't live without air condition. Can't live without it, and in our days, we didn't . . . say taking baths. We didn't have no running water. What did we do? In the winter months when it was freezing weather, we had to go out and draw the water with buckets, you know, from wells, bring it out and we had little old stoves with wood; put the wood in there and build a fire in the kitchen and close the door to the kitchen. And that's what we used to take baths in. We had a big tub, warm the water on the stove. You had to live somehow.

Jenkins: How often were you taking these baths?

Cuellar: I kid my nine children. I say, "Did you know when we lived on the farm we had to take a bath every Saturday regardless whether you needed it or not?" They would laugh about it. But it was true. That was about the way it happened. Now you take the men, the grown men, with shaving. A lot of them would grow a beard because, you know why they grow a beard? Because they didn't have anything to shave with.

And a few of them learned about the straight razors and they learned how to shave. Put soap . . . and I saw a man one time, that . . . he take a bottle, a glass bottle, and break it, and pick up the pieces of glass and look at that edge, and he shaved with the glass. And he shaved a little while and throw away that glass and pick up another one, another piece. Have you ever seen it done?

Jenkins: No. I sure haven't.

Cuellar: I saw a guy shave with broken pieces of glass.

Jenkins: Did he use lather to go with it?

Cuellar: Yes. Oh, yes. He put soap . . . he put soap to soften it. In those days you had to . . . you had to figure out how to do things.

Jenkins: No double blades.

Cuellar: No. So then . . .

Jenkins: Have we had all the children born by now?

Cuellar: Well, that was . . . when we moved to . . . let's go back to Rosebud. In Rosebud, Mack was born and then Alfred. He is dead now. And then Gilbert. When we moved in 1913 to Kaufman, there was one more born. That was Willie Jack. That was the last one. He was born in 1915, about two years after we moved there.

Jenkins: How many children then had your parents had?

Cuellar: Well, they had thirteen, but one of them died, remember. So we were only twelve. But my mother adopted one girl because this girl . . . her parents died and nobody would adopt her and . . .

Jenkins: Was that in Kaufman?

Cuellar: Yes. And a priest came over and told my mother that, "You have got lots of children, but you can have one more." And she says, "Bring it over." And she adopted one more child. We were twelve and her made thirteen and my dad and mother, we were fifteen. We lived in a four room house.

Jenkins: On how many acres?

Cuellar: When we started there was a great family in Kaufman called Nash , and they are still there.

Jenkins: Nash?

Cuellar: Nash. In fact, Mr. Nash right here in Dallas had the Empire Bank. He was president, and then from the Empire he went to the Bank of Commerce. And one of the Nashes is still the Chairman of the Board today. Well, we were raised on their farm way back yonder in Kaufman in 1913.

Jenkins: Was the Nash who was in the development of Flower Mound, was he part of that Nash?

Cuellar: No. No, that was Nasher. These people were named Nash. We are great friends. They think because we have been knowing

each other since 1914-1913, and we think a lot of the Nashes and they think a lot of the Cuellars because we have been together for many, many years. And so when we lived on the farm, we were fifteen and my mother and dad. My dad had to build a kitchen right next to the house. We had a long table with two benches. And in the morning the girls, my four sisters and my mother, they did the cooking. And the boys, we had to get up early in the morning. We didn't have no clock. We went by the sun. We started working in the mornings when the sun rose and we worked until sundown. And in the morning while we were going to feed the mules and milk the cows and feed the hogs and feed the chickens and everything in the morning, early in the morning, a little before sunrise, the girls and my mother were fixing breakfast.

Jenkins: You did the chores before breakfast.

Cuellar: Yes. That's right. Then tortillas, the flour tortillas. They made, I remember in the morning for breakfast they had a stack of tortillas about a foot high, and we all sat down and my mother had a big platter about, oh, about two and a half feet long. Great big like a tray. And they filled the big stove, you know, with wood. And we had so many chickens we had lots of eggs and we had plenty of milk and

we had butter and everything. And she fried about, oh, about three or four dozen eggs. And some of the eggs . . . she had a great big skillet made out of cast iron. And we didn't have no shortening, nothing but hog lard. And she cooked about three or four dozen eggs in that big platter. Some of them up, some of them straight, because some people . . . some of the boys wanted over and some of them . . . and then cooked meat, you know, bacon, hog meat, plenty of it and tortillas and coffee. Put it up there on the table, and that big stack of tortillas was just coming down like this. We ate every one of them. We ate good. Then after that we would go ahead and harness up the mules. If it was in the winter we would be plowing, or in the winter we also cut our own wood, and we had to have plenty wood for the winter.

Jenkins: Did you have a wood area?

Cuellar: Oh, yes, we had plenty of wood. We would go out and cut this wood. And my dad, he meant business when he told us we gotta go and cut wood. And if we didn't be fast enough he would get on us and we were afraid of him, too. And I'll tell you another thing that my dad did. When we used to plow, he had about twelve or fourteen teams of mules. And he hired some extra help, outside help, and he'd tell us, we had to work hard. We couldn't sit down, and it would be too bad if he caught us sitting down.

Jenkins: Now with that many teams of mules, how many acres was . . .

Cuellar: He started with two hundred. When we went to Kaufman, the Nashes owned four thousand acres. They raised horses and cattle. They had two stallions and each stallion had about fifteen, twenty mares apiece.

Jenkins: Were they raising work horses?

Cuellar: Work horses, yes, and also cattle. He had about five or six hundred heads of cattle, and my dad supervised the whole four thousand acres plus the farming, and we had plenty horses, and I remember I had a Shetland pony. When I was maybe about twelve years old I could ride a horse as good as anybody. And in the summer was a lot of ticks, you know, and he built a dip, put some creosote dip and we used to dip the cattle and dip the horses. And to round up all these cattle, just like you see on television these cattle, that's the way we used to do it. Just like cowboys. And we get all these cattle together and dip them, and that killed the ticks. And then the horses. Oh, we work hard, but we enjoyed it.

Jenkins: You lived well.

Cuellar: You know, I go back and think today, we worked hard but we had a lot of fun, like rounding up the cattle. Then we had to brand them, castrate them, too. And brand these

cattle and, oh, we had lots of fun. So I tell my grandchildren today how we lived, and they say, "Boy, you talk like you were in the movies." I said, "That's about the . . . " And then we farmed. When I got to be--going to talk a little bit about myself--when I got to be about seventeen, eighteen years old, you know, I quit school in order to help raise up the other kids.

Jenkins: You went through the sixth grade was it?

Cuellar: I got through the sixth grade, and I quit because I had to work because we had . . . you see, we were twelve and I was number seven so it was five more, but I had to help raise. They couldn't work. They were too little.

Jenkins: Were some of the boys leaving home by that time?

Cuellar: One of them got married and pulled out, and then the second one. Anyhow, when I got to be about seventeen, eighteen years old, I start thinking. I said, "This farming is not for me. There is bound to be a better way to make a living." And I said, "When I grow up I am going to try something else." And I got to be eighteen. Now I remember the first World War, 1918, I was fifteen years old. I couldn't go to the war because I was too young. And when World War II. . .in 1940 I was thirty-seven and I was too old. I missed both of them. And, anyhow, when I got to be about seventeen

or eighteen, I says, "Wait 'til I grow a little more, and I am going to quit farming." So I got married when I was twenty-four, but when I was about eighteen, nineteen, I used to cut hair for the neighbors, you know. They didn't pay me nothing. And my brothers, somebody had to cut their hair.

Jenkins: What kind of equipment did you have?

Cuellar: We didn't have nothing but a comb and scissors. That's all we had. And my dad used to cut our hair in the beginning, but after I got about sixteen or seventeen I started helping him, and I had plenty of practice on all my younger brothers. I used to cut their hair. And then the neighbors found out that I cut hair pretty good, so they started. So before I married I decided to put in a barber shop. That was before I married. And I still got my barber chair. Do you see it? That's in the den.

Jenkins: I don't guess I noticed.

Cuellar: I will show you.

Jenkins: Did you actually go into the barber business?

Cuellar: Yes. My dad bought a home downtown for rent, and couldn't rent it and it was vacant all the time. And I told him one time, I said, "How about me using one room." And I used to work on the farm and on Saturdays I'd go down there and cut hair. Used to charge twenty-five cents a hair cut.

Jenkins: What kind of equipment were you using?

Cuellar: In those days I had to buy me a clipper. I have still got them.

Jenkins: My mother cut my hair with that kind of clipper.

Cuellar: Yes, hand clippers. And I still have my . . . this brush, this duster, you know. I still got it. I wouldn't take nothing for it and I've got two straight razors that I had way . . . about fifty, nearly sixty years.

Jenkins: So you shaved and . . .

Cuellar: Oh, in those days that's the only thing we had. We didn't have no fancy razors.

Jenkins: You gave haircuts and shaves.

Cuellar: Oh, yes.

Jenkins: How much was a shave then?

Cuellar: I charged twenty-five cents for haircuts and fifteen cents for shaves. I didn't like to shave people, because some of them had a beard. Have to comb the beard first and get all the burrs out first and then start shaving.

Jenkins: For how long did you barber then?

Cuellar: I had, I think, for about two or three years.

Jenkins: But only on weekends?

Cuellar: Yes, and rainy days and things like that. People knew that I was going to be there Saturday and we didn't pay no rent.

Jenkins: Oh, you didn't live in the house?

Cuellar: No.

Jenkins: You just used it for a barber shop.

Cuellar: I used to have another room where I'd sleep for two days. I used to leave sometimes on Friday about noon, and then I would go down there and some one knew that I was there on Friday night, they used to come and get their haircuts on Friday night and Saturday, and Sunday I would go back to the farm. So, anyhow, I was trying to learn something besides the farming. And I married in 1927. When I married I was twenty-four years old. I tried something else. About two years before I married, about 1925, one of my older brothers moved to Dallas, and he was working at the Adolphus Hotel. And I came to visit him, and I didn't need to work, I was farming, you know, and doing okay, but I wanted to experiment. So one day I came to visit him and say, "Frank, don't you want to go and wash dishes?" "I'll get you a job." They paid thirty-five dollars a month. I said, "I believe I will." And so I went, and I used to wash dishes at the Adolphus Hotel. I worked there about a month all during the winter months. You didn't have too much to do on the farm, you see. And so, the kitchens were too hot and it affected me, my nose bleed quite a bit. And it was too hot and the steam. And then I run into another friend there and got

acquainted and he said, "Why don't you come to work at the Baker? I am working at the Baker Hotel." He says, "I'll get you a different kind of job where you don't have to wash dishes." I said, "Well, I will go." And I go and I worked in the lobby running the Hoover machine, polishing the door knobs, you know, made out of brass, and, oh, I thought I was doing real well because I was learning a new trade, you know. Of course, that was just for the winter months. I had to go back and start the farming again.

Jenkins: More cash though than you had ever seen in your life.

Cuellar: Right. And my dad just give us an allowance--twenty-five cents a week or fifty cents. That's about all. He didn't have it. So I remember I got acquainted. You know, I was getting old--about twenty years old. Had a lot of friends. And since I worked in the lobby, you know, they have planters and things like that and big people smoke cigars and sometimes they lit one of them and smoke about a quarter of an inch and put it in there. So I pick up some good cigars and put them in my pocket and at quitting time at night all the other employees waiting for the cigars. We all had a cigar holder, you know, and I used to tell them, "What kind you want?" What did they call them, want some "Robert Burns cigars?" Everybody went for those kind. Yes, "What kind you want?" Reach in my pocket and give. . . and we were

all smoking cigars like big shots, but they would be second hand. Okay, so go back to the farm and then one time-- that's when I went to work for the grocery store. I went to work for this man in Kaufman. I was trying to get away from . . . I tried every darn way I could to get away from the farm. And my younger brothers they used to say, "You know, Frank is lazy. He don't like to work. That's the reason he go somewhere else." I said, "I go and work somewhere else, true. It is work but it is a different kind of work. I don't like the farming. I don't like to pick cotton or put up hay or things like that I don't like it." So, anyhow, when I worked for this man in the store, I didn't work but a few weeks.

Jenkins: What was the name of that store?

Cuellar: Scasta Brothers. It was a grocery store. They were awful nice boys. And I worked there, but I found out it was just as much dust handling potatoes and onions as it was in the farm. There was a drygoods store, you know. I went and talked to the man that owned the drygoods store. His name was Hicks--S. C. Hicks Drygoods. A real nice store. He said, "Frank, are you working now?" I said, "Yes, I work on Saturdays for Scasta Brothers." He says, "I'll give you a job on Saturdays if you want to work." I say, "Well, I like

that much better." So I switched from grocery store to drygoods store. I work awhile . . .

Jenkins: What were you doing in the drygoods store?

Cuellar: Selling socks, shirts, underwear, hats, shirts. Anything. It was a general store. So they liked me very much, and I used to tell Mr. Hicks, "Why don't you give me a regular job?" He said, "No, we don't have a regular job. I will let you work on Saturdays and on sales, when we have sales." I said, "Well, I want to get a regular job. I can't live on just working Saturdays." So then I had the idea that maybe I could go to Dallas. If I go to Dallas, maybe I could get me a good job. So I told Mr. Hicks, I said, "Mr. Hicks, will you give me a letter recommendation?" He said, "Yes, I will write you a letter." So he wrote me a letter. "The boy knows how to work in a store." I take it to Dallas, but I didn't know where to go look for a job.

Jenkins: Now we are talking about what year?

Cuellar: This year must have been about 1923-24, somewhere around there. When I came to Dallas I say, "I want to go and see if I can get a job at Sears."

Jenkins: Where was that Sears store?

Cuellar: Sears over on Lamar Street. That big building. It was there. When I went in there I don't know how I found my way, but I found my way where I put my application for a job.

And I had my letter. I got experience to wait on people. He says, "You speak Spanish?" I said, "Yes. I speak Spanish." He said, "Man, you are the kind we want. We have been looking for somebody that could speak both languages, because we get quite a bit of Mexican trade. We need somebody that can speak Spanish." So he gave me an application. I put everything. He says, "Do you have a high school education?" I says, "I didn't finish high school." I says, "I got to the sixth grade." He says, "Is that all?" "That's all." He says, "I'm sorry, we can't use you. I thought you had more education." I said, "Well, I am sorry but I don't have it." So he couldn't use me. Boy, you know, that's when I saw the daylight. I opened my eyes. I says, "Gosh, what have I done? I missed the boat. From here in my life it is going to be that way all the time. Everywhere I go I am going to run into that problem. Cause that's a problem that I have. I haven't got no education. What am I going to do?" So I start thinking. I said, "Well, I can't go back to school. I am too old now. And what can I do? I can be a barber. I can be a restaurant man. I can . . . we used to have model T Fords, you know. We used to tear them apart and put them back. I can be a mechanic. You don't have to go to school to be a mecahníc.

Jenkins: You did lots of that on the farm?

Cuellar: Yes, we did that. We had a tractor. About that time my dad bought a tractor and we used to repair it ourselves.

Jenkins: Do you remember what kind of tractor it was?

Cuellar: Ford. Way back yonder. So I says, "That's the only thing I want to do." I wanted to create my own job. And I already knew how to cut hair. I says, "I am going to go back strong. I better open up my little shop, cut hair again. I really do, then I work every day.

Jenkins: This was back in Kaufman?

Cuellar: Back in Kaufman. Well, anyhow we got to 1926. My mother was the same way. She was trying to create something to get away from the farm. And she used to tell my dad, "Why don't we move to Dallas. Why don't we move to the big city? We got a big family and you ain't going to have nothing but a bunch of farmers. That's all you are going to have. If we go to the city it will be different trades, and these boys will learn some kind of trade." My dad, oh, he was insulted. He says, "That's all they know, how to farm, and they are going to be farmers, and that is what they are going to do." Well, anyhow, in 1926, and with our little orchestra, you know, that we had. . . we wasn't no professionals. We were amateurs. We did wonderful. We were the most popular family in Kaufman.

Jenkins: You created your own band.

Cuellar: Yes, because we had this orchestra. I remember one time. What do they call it--the County Agent--they wanted to put out a program. And they came to Dallas to WFAA and they say, "Say, lets take the Cuellar brothers orchestra."

Jenkins: There was only Cuellar family in the orchestra?

Cuellar: That's right. So they asked us, "Would you go? Would you go to Dallas and get on the radio?" Sure. We knew how to play because we . . . two of my brothers knew notes, but the rest of them, we just played by ear. And we made damn good music.

Jenkins: What were you playing?

Cuellar: I was playing the trap drums and the guitar. And my sister played the piano, Amos played the trumpet and saxophone, and my other brother, Manuel, he played the clarinet, and one brother played the guitar.

Jenkins: Had any of them had music lessons?

Cuellar: This one knew how to read notes. Amos, he read notes and so did Jim.

Jenkins: Did someone teach them how to play the instrument, or did most of you just pick up and start playing?

Cuellar: Back in Rosebud they learned how to read the music, and then they just would pick up any instrument. They already knew notes, and they could play it.

Jenkins: Taught themselves.

Cuellar: Yes. Of course we had a little talent.

Jenkins: Sure.

Cuellar: Without that talent you can't get nowhere. Well, anyhow we came to Dallas, and believe it or not, one hour program on radio WFAA.

Jenkins: Started off with a one-hour program?

Cuellar: And it went big.

Jenkins: What was it called? Do you remember?

Cuellar: The Kaufman County Farm Agent, or something like that. And we went places from this one deal. The following year we came for the second time. And we used to tell a little joke because when we went back and they announced it on the radio then they gave us . . . they told them who we were and where we come from and what the object . . . speaking of farming, you know. The County Agent that's all his business is farming. The farm was the best thing in the world. So . . .

Jenkins: Do you remember who that farm agent was at the time?

Cuellar: I might be able to remember later, but I can't remember right now. I knew his name. Anyhow, did you know that we had a stack of letters and we had one from Venus, Texas. Do you know where Venus, Texas is?

Jenkins: No.

Cuellar: It's on Highway 67, on the other side of . . . pretty close to Alvarado, on this . . . (interruption). We were talking about when we had the orchestra, that place in Venus and they say, "Did everybody hear you? They heard it in Venus." They thought we were talking about the stars. "No, in Venus, Texas." Anyhow, we had a lot of fun. But then just about that time, 1926, my mother . . . they were having. . . in Kaufman County they had a County fair. It didn't last but three days a year--Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Three days. That was during the fall. So my mother says, "I want to put a little stand up. We are going to sell chili, tamales, and enchiladas and hamburgers." So in 1926 I was twenty-three years old. I said, "I'll help you, Mother." "Okay." So we got busy and the other boys say, "Frank is going to help you in the kitchen and you boys furnish the music for bringing some crowds." Do you know we made a hit. Golly, it . . . a lot of people had a little money but there was a lot of stands, too--a lot of competition. But we were number one.

Jenkins: At the Kaufman County Fair in 1926. That's really where it started.

Cuellar: That's where the idea originated. It went so big that the next year my mother says, "I'm going to do it again." But in May, 1927 me and my wife got married.

Jenkins: Now was she from Kaufman?

Cuellar: She was also from Kaufman. May 7, 1927. So we . . . this time I told my mother I said, "Well, now my wife can help." "Well, bring her in." And we rented a bigger stand and oh, man, we really went to town. My mother made more money in those three days than the whole family made in the whole year. Because the farming, you know, some years you make money, some years you lost. And it happened that those years it was . . . you get about one good year out of every four. And those three years was some of the better ones. She cleaned up.

Jenkins: Now this is Mama Cuellar that we are talking about.

Cuellar: Yes. It is Adelaida Cuellar. That was her name. Adelaida Cuellar. So after that I start thinking, "That's the missing link that I have been looking for. That's going to be." Go back to Sears, they wouldn't hire me because I wasn't educated. "I am going to make it. I am going to make it in the restaurant business." So in June . . . before this I told my brother, Amos, I says, . . . he also got married. We married two sisters.

Jenkins: Had you known them all of your Kaufman life? Had you known your wife all of the time?

Cuellar: Yes. All her life. The families knew them. My dad and mother knew her dad and mother before she was born.

Jenkins: Oh, I see.

Cuellar: Okay. This is the place, 1928. That's Amos, this is me, this is my wife and that is his wife, and this is my sister. She was working there then. So I started working on Amos. I says, "Amos, let's . . . "

Jenkins: Now is this in Kaufman?

Cuellar: Kaufman. But before this, a little before, my brother . . . I told you one brother came to work at the Adolphus Hotel. And my brother, when he got married, he moved to Dallas and he worked, some friend got him a job cleaning windows. And he was making a little money, much better than being on the farm. So everytime I saw him, I says, "Amos, quit that darn thing of cleaning windows. Let's go in business." "Not me. I don't want to take any chances and go broke." I keep on plugging and plugging until one day he says, "Okay, I'll go in with you." So on June 15, we went in business, opened up the first restaurant and we called it Cuellar's Restaurant.

Jenkins: Cuellar's Restaurant, June 15th what year?

Cuellar: 1928.

Jenkins: In Kaufman, Texas?

Cuellar: Kaufman, Texas.

Jenkins: Let me ask something here because this is a good break place. When your mother started selling this at the

county fair, were the people used to this kind of food?

Cuellar: No.

Jenkins: This was new to them.

Cuellar: They didn't know. Some of them knew tamales, just tamales. And some of them knew chili, but they didn't know what enchiladas were. They didn't know nothing. They didn't know what tortillas were.

Jenkins: When you had come to Dallas to work, did you run in to any kind of what we would call today Mexican food places to eat?

Cuellar: Yes. I remember some places in Dallas, like the El Fenix.

Jenkins: They had already started.

Cuellar: They started in 1918, but we got acquainted with them before 1918. They wasn't in the restaurant business.

Jenkins: No?

Cuellar: No. Mr. Martinez, he used to work for the Oriental Hotel. That's the Baker Hotel before they changed the name to Baker. And then later I remember, because we got acquainted with him, and it is a long story how we got acquainted. We can bring it up some other time. We got acquainted with them and that was before they were in the restaurant business.

Jenkins: But in Kaufman Mexican food was new. You were the first . . .

Cuellar: Not only in Kaufman but anywhere you went. Even in Dallas. Dallas was pretty big then, and there was only about one place

called Mexican Inn, owned by a man named Luis. . . I can't remember his name but his first name was Luis. He had Mexican food. He had enchiladas, chili and mole. Mole is an old dish. Chicken mole. It's called mole. So it was new to the people. And so we went in business in 1928. And at the beginning they went big, because people were hungry. They came all the way from Terrell to eat. But after awhile they just . . . they was but about fifteen hundred people in Kaufman, and about eight or nine thousand in Terrell. So there wasn't enough people there to live. So we started having some trouble. And my brother and his wife used to go and pick cotton one week to kind of get enough to pay the rent. We used to pay thirty dollars a month, a dollar a day. The following week me and my wife went and picked cotton. And so we went on like that and said, "We can't make it. We just can't make it."

Jenkins: The new had gone off of it. The business was . . .

Cuellar: Right. So let's open up another place. If we open up another place then we support two families. One place can't support us. So we thought of Terrell. So in 1929 we opened up in Terrell.

Jenkins: Same name?

Cuellar: Same name, Cuellar's Cafe. And that year, that's when Frank, Jr. was born in 1929. We had the place right next to the

Terrell Tribune, and we had a big kitchen and living quarters up behind. And just a few weeks, a few months, maybe a couple of months before Frank, Jr. was born, I told . . . you know, in those days you didn't take the wife to the hospital to have a baby. You had them at home. And I told my wife, I says, "It sure is going to be funny to bring a doctor here for you to have a baby. We are going to have to get out of here. It don't look right." So we had a friend say, "I'll rent you a room." And just down the street from that lady friend, and went up there and two months later Frank, Jr. was born. And the same thing happened in Terrell. The new started big and after they ate too much food it settled down.

Jenkins: Do you remember what size Terrell was about that time?

Cuellar: Terrell was about eight or nine thousand people.

Jenkins: Oh, I see.

Cuellar: Every day there was something else. 1929, in those days I didn't read the news. I was busy trying to make some money. I didn't know what the heck was going on. Today I go back and read. The depression in 1929 was when the stock market crashed. And people, I remember, in Kaufman and in Terrell the banks were closing. All kinds of business was. And our poor devils, we didn't know, we didn't have no money that much or anything, and try to live through the depression? It

was impossible. So when we put in the place, we got everything on credit, and we lasted eighteen months. Just about the last eighteen months we had paid, the business had started going down, down, and down and no business. And did you know . . . I tell this story, that I didn't know I was broke until a man told me. There used to be a grocery company there, and I used to buy all my groceries, and I didn't pay until the end of the month. And one Monday the salesman came by to pick up the order. He says, "Frank, I am sorry to tell you, but this order is going to come C.O.D." I says, "C.O.D.? Why are they putting me on C.O. D.?" He says, "Because you are broke, that's why." I didn't know I was broke. So I says, "By golly, he is right." So, the landlord was a rich man. He was the editor of the Tribune, a wonderful person, a wonderful friend. He says, "What give you the idea of closing up?" I says, "Well, I am broke." He says, "You can stay there as long as you want to and you don't have to pay no rent. You don't have to pay me the rent. Just charge it." I says, "Yes, I am going to be sold to you. One of these days when this thing is over, I am going to be so deep in debt I will be working, I will be sold to you." I says, "No. I would rather quit. I would rather go broke, and if things change someday I start without any debt."

He says, "Well, if that is what you want to do." Mister, I walked out of there and all I could take--everything was already paid for except I was behind rent. All I could take was my hat, and believe me or not I was really hurt. Going broke, you know, and I don't know if other people have that experience or not, but boy, I felt like I was leaving my heart in there. So I just walked out.

Jenkins: You couldn't take your equipment with you? And nobody would buy it?

Cuellar: No. He had a mortgage on it. There was a contract that said if I didn't pay the rent they take the . . . so I lost everything. We got to Kaufman and Amos was up there. And I told him I says, "Look, what are we going to do?" He says, "I'm going to quit." He says, "I have been offered a job in Mexico and that is where I am going." He says, "I think this is where we . . . you and I are going to split up." He says, "But if I go to Mexico and I hit it lucky and make it, you can come and join me. You stay here and if things change and I don't make it in Mexico I'll come back, and we will get together again. But we have got to do something because we are going to starve to death here." So then I find out that in Malakoff, Texas, they had a big coal mine, lignite coal mine, and they had a big payroll. The man told me that down here you can make money because we got lots of money.

I says, "I believe you have." So then I had to quit Kaufman, and I had to borrow money to move to Malakoff. We went to Malakoff. We took our equipment.

Jenkins: What happened to the Terrell place?

Cuellar: The Terrell place closed up. We just walked out. Walked away from it.

Jenkins: I'm sorry. Back in Kaufman . . . what happened to Kaufman . . .

Cuellar: I moved all this equipment. I moved it to Malakoff. I couldn't make it in Kaufman, and I moved to Malakoff.

Jenkins: Okay. What I am wondering is was someone running the Kaufman place while you were running the . . .

Cuellar: No. No, it was discontinued.

Jenkins: I see.

Cuellar: So I went over there. I called that a failure right there in Kaufman, and I took my equipment, of course. It wasn't worth three hundred dollars. I went over there, and I set it up, and Amos took off to Mexico. I opened the doors and man, here comes the business. I mean good business. I was taking a hundred dollars a day. I thought that was wonderful. Here fifteen dollars a day I was making. So I says, "Boy, now we are safe--going to sit on the top of the world." We were in Malakoff and we were doing real good. "Boy," we said, "We are okay now." And did you know

that it was about ninety days after we were there doing real good business, the depression was still getting more and more. So one day they announced that the mine was going to be closed.

Jenkins: We are talking about what year now?

Cuellar: Now that must have been about 1930. So when they closed the coal mines, they had a great big payroll, thousands and thousands of people working the coal mines. Boy, I am telling you that was just like taking the rug out from under your feet. Went down to nothing. Just no more business.

Jenkins: After just ninety days?

Cuellar: After ninety days. So there I was again in trouble. So then I didn't know what to do. Then the landlord says, "Look, don't get scared. This thing is going to blow off. They are going to reopen." He says, "I'll tell you what I suggest for you to do. You lock the doors." He says, "Go visit your brother." Because just about that time this man that my brother was working for, he says he was interested in me going over there and join Amos. He says, "Why don't you . . . you are going to lock up the doors." He says, "You can go with me and I will bring you back in two weeks. We will just go as a vacation, and you don't have to spend one penny. I will furnish you everything." So I says, "Well, I think that's a good idea." So I took off, and my wife said, "Well, if you are going over there, I'll stay here with my mother."

"Okay." He took me to Mexico for two weeks. After we got out there he had a big farm. Had a tractor and everything. My brother was up there. The minute I got there, "Get on that tractor and go to work." I knew how to drive a tractor. So the two weeks come up. He said, "Look, we got something very important, you can stay another week or two more weeks. You ain't got nothing to do. That man is going to own your place all right." So anyhow, he gets me to stay another two weeks. That was a month. Did you know that story of 'next week' and 'next week' it went on for ninety days. After the ninety days then he said, "Well, why don't we go back and bring your wife and your boy." He says, "You are going to like it here." Well, the darn coal mine was still closed. So there was no hope for me to come back, and my brother says, "You know, things look good here." Well, in ninety days I couldn't tell, I just couldn't tell. So I says, "Okay. We go back." And then I took my wife and Frank, Jr. The other boys hadn't been born. Went back and went to work. We never talked what he was going to pay me or nothing. So we stayed there. Well, in about ninety days more, another three months, I began to open my eyes. I told Amos, "Say, this place is no good. This is no good for us." I says, "You might like it because he pays you, but I don't even know whether he

is paying me or not. He has got me like a slave." So I am ready to go back. So I told him, "I am ready to go back." He said, "Well, we go back in . . . got a little work to do in the next two weeks, we'll go. I will take you back." That same old story, 'two weeks,' 'two weeks' and did you know that I had . . . I just had a tourist card. I told this to a newspaper one time, and you know what he wrote in the story? He said that I was a reverse wetback. Anyhow it lacked one day being six months when my tourist card was going to run out. And about ten days before he said, "Don't you want to go to Laredo or Monterrey and let's renew that tourist card?" I says, "Hell, no. I don't want to. I have had enough of it. I am going to go back."

Jenkins: Was this your brother's farm or someone's farm he was working on?

Cuellar: That he was working for.

Jenkins: I see.

Cuellar: My brother was just working there. Okay, so one day before the six months he said, "Okay, we will go back." He said, "You will have to go on the train. I don't have time to take you back." You know how much he gave me? He gave me fifty dollars for six months of work, and turned me loose way over yonder. When I bought the tickets to back to Kaufman, when I got there

I had spent all the money he gave me. Then the darn place was still closed, the coal mine was still closed.

Jenkins: You went back to Kaufman or Malakoff?

Cuellar: I went to Kaufman because Malakoff was closed. Then I told my mother, I said, "Look, I am going to have to store my equipment." I wasn't . . . it wasn't much, but it was something. I says, "I have got a friend here in Kaufman. He says that he will bring it for me, store it for me, and he is not going to charge too much to store it. My mother says, "Why do you want to do that? What do you want to store it for? He is going to charge you something." She says, "Why don't you loan it to me and let me play with it? If you want to go look for a job, go ahead, but the place is still yours." So I said, "You know, that is a good idea." She went and got a building there in Kaufman, this is the second time, see, because we pulled out of Kaufman. So she says, "Get me this building." And we talked to the man and he charged us very little rent. Thirty dollars a month. So I went and got her the fixtures and put them up for her and then my wife says, "Well, I will go to my mother and live in Kingsville, Texas." And I says, "I am going to Dallas and look for a job. As soon as I get a job I will send for you." So that is the way we did it. Okay, my mother took the chance and opened up, and I came to Dallas looking

for a job. Every day in the morning I would get up. I didn't have any money. I stayed with my sister, one of my sisters lived here, and her husband had just a little job and they had a little house. It was in the summertime. I used to sleep in the porch, and every morning I'd get up and look for a job. I got down to eight dollars. That's all the money I had between me and myself. Boy, you know, when you get whipped like that, it's just like . . . have you ever whipped a dog and the dog would just don't do nothing. So that was the way I was. So I looked. I wasn't looking for one particular kind of job. I wanted any kind of a job that I could earn something. Well, about three weeks after that I run into a friend. He was working in a dress factory. He says, "I can get you a job there but it don't pay very much." I says, "I don't care how little, just so it is something." He said, "I am going to take you and the man is going to ask you," it was a dress factory on Poydras Street. He says, "Tell him you don't have any experience in this kind of work, but tell him you have worked in a tailor shop, and that will make him. . . " He says, "There is quite a bit of difference." So the man come and says, "Have you had any experience?" I said, "No." I said, "I worked in a tailor shop, but not this kind of business." So he told the other boy, he says, "Okay. He

is your responsibility. If you want to use him go ahead and put him to work, but he better do some good work."

So, "Okay, I'll take care of him." He put me to work pressing silk dresses. I never had an iron in my hand before. We pressed them and put them in the rack, and at four-thirty the inspector would come over and check all the dresses, and the ones that he didn't like he would shove them back; the ones that were done wrong. You know, he felt sorry for me, and you know how much he paid? Nine cents a dress. He shoved them all back but two. I made eighteen cents. Gosh. But I was so happy because I had a job. Well, I keep on. I got where I could make . . . about a week later I got where I would make about a dollar and a half a day. And on Friday evening, they close the plant at 4:30, I would get on the street car on Second Avenue right to the end of the line. I get off of the street car and I hitchhike to Kaufman. And I would go home every Saturday and Sunday evening. I would hitchhike back. Get to Second Avenue, the street car. Well, I did that for about . . . it must have been about four or five weeks. Couldn't do no good. So just about that time, the cotton picking time was coming, you know harvesting time, and they yielded . . . the yield was pretty good. And a lot of Mexicans from the valley come over for the cotton picking. Boy, business started picking up.

Because my mother before that, she wasn't breaking even.

Jenkins: All this time you were in Dallas your mother was operating the restaurant.

Cuellar: Yes. Operating the restaurant. So about five or six weeks after I was still working at this dress factory, one Friday evening when I went home, my mother was so disappointed. I said, "What's wrong?" She says, "Well, your brothers they eat around here all the time, but don't pay nothing for to eat." She says, "On Fridays and Saturdays when business is good they got that darn orchestra, they go and play for three dollars," and she says, "They don't help me. And business is picking up." She says, "Why don't you come back?" I says, "I am here. I'm here right now." She says, "Put on an apron." She says, "I'll tell you what let's do. I got about thirty-five dollars worth of inventory. The first thirty-five dollars we take in you pay me half, and we are going to go fifty-fifty." She says, "We go fifty-fifty. It is your equipment." I says, "I will go to work." I started that night--Friday night.

Jenkins: Now that was what year?

Cuellar: That must have been about '31 or '32.

Jenkins: So you got back into the business.

Cuellar: Got back in the business. And, you know, that was the turning point. I got in there and in about two weeks later

the cotton picking time was getting more and more, and boy on Saturday we were snowed under business. And went on, and it wasn't but four or five weeks when a man from Terrell that knew me came to me and says, "Frank, I've got a good deal for you." "What kind of a deal have you got?" He says, "Well, you know, you went to Terrell and you went broke because times were bad, and you had the wrong location." He says, "Now I've got a location right on the main drag." It was a restaurant that was there about twenty years and they moved. He says, "People, that place is established." He says, "You go in there and you clean up." He sold me on the idea. I said, "I think you got something." Okay, I didn't have enough money. I was already accumulating a little money, but didn't have enough to make the move. So I told one of my brothers, Alfred, because he was single and he liked the work. I says, "Alfred, have you got any money?" He says, "Well, I got a little. How much you need?" I says, "It's going to take us about three hundred dollars." I says, "If you got a hundred dollars, you can go in with me and we'll take that place in Terrell. We've got the equipment." And my mother says, "If you move I'll buy some equipment." So we made a deal. And I told Alfred, I says, "Look, you and I and my wife are going to work and we are going to go three ways. You get one part, I get one and my wife gets one. You are going to have a third."

He says, "That's good." So we moved and opened up, and boy, we start making some money.

Jenkins: And did you also . . . did your mother keep the one in Kaufman?

Cuellar: And my mother she says, "All I want, you'll have to help me go buy some more equipment. And we keep on."

Jenkins: But separate ownership?

Cuellar: Separate ownership. That was hers. And so we moved to Terrell and she moved in there and she started doing some good. Okay. Boy we started making money. Then Mack, my other brother, he came over to visit me. You know on the farm when it rains--they still had the farm, little farm--and when it rains they can't work in the farm. So one day it rained hard, and he came over to visit me in Terrell, and we had some marble machines that really were popular in those days, they played them. And they had to rob them every day because people would break into them and take the money. So they robbed them every night, every day. So he came over that morning and the man that was robbing the machine put about that many nickels, we had about three machines, put that many nickels on the table. He counted it and sacked it up, split it in two. "Frank, here is your part. Here is my part." Mack was looking at me. He says, "Frank, is that your money?" I says, "You're damn right that is my money." He

says, "I am quitting the farm today. I quit." He went back and told his brothers, "Let's go. Frank is making money, Frank and Alfred." So they went and put a place . . . they went to look at Tyler, and they couldn't find nothing. And on the way back they came through Wills Point and they run out of gas, and stopped to get some gas over there close to the filling station. And right next to the filling station it was a vacant building. "Say, look at that building for rent." So they asked the filling station, "Whose place is that?" The man said, "It is mine. That is for rent." They made a deal right there.

Jenkins: Ran out of gas and . . .

Cuellar: And they went in business at Wills Point, and my mother says, "Well, . . .

Jenkins: And all three of you were separate though?

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: Separate ownership.

Cuellar: Well, it was two. There was me, and my mother.

Jenkins: Then the third one though . . .

Cuellar: The third one my mother says, "Don't buy the equipment because I want to quit because I am getting too old." And the boys say, "Okay, we take your place and move it to Wills Point." So that made a place in Wills Point and one in Terrell, the one we had. And we went to town; started making money. Okay,

Jenkins: Did you own yours and they owned theirs, or did you own them together?

Cuellar: No. The one I had, Alfred owned it as a partner, one-third. And the other two that got together there was Mack, Gilbert, and Willie.

Jenkins: They owned theirs.

Cuellar: They owned theirs. That's right. I was married but Alfred was single. A single man they run around, and those boys over there in Wills Point start . . . they were all single. They start having a good time with the girls. And Alfred he used to go every night, every night. And one day he says, "Frank, you want to buy me out?" I says, "Yes." "I want to join my brothers, okay?" I pay him off he goes down there. He want a good time. So they started on it, and they were doing good. So that was about 1934, '35, and in about 1936 they opened up another place in Tyler. Got together with another brother-in-law and opened up one in Tyler. So we had Terrell, Wills Point and Tyler.

Jenkins: You weren't involved in those.

Cuellar: No. I had mine and they had theirs. Then in '38, Mack and Gilbert got together with another brother-in-law and says, "Let's go look around. They invited me to go look. We took off from Wills Point. We went to Texarkana, from Texarkana we went to Little Rock, from Little Rock we went to Memphis, and from Memphis back to Fort Smith, Arkansas, and from Fort Smith to Tulsa, and from Tulsa to Oklahoma

City looking for a location. When we hit Oklahoma City, "This is it. This is a good place." So Gilbert and Mack, together with my brother-in-law named Luis, they joined and put in in Oklahoma City.

Jenkins: Did you put in with them there?

Cuellar: No. But in '37, now this happened in '38, but a year before in 1937 I was making good, real good in Terrell. But then I said, "Man, if I can do this good, I can go to a bigger town and I will clean up." So I was thinking about going to Ft. Worth, but then I had a friend . . . and oh, just about that time my brother finally give up Mexico, and he come back. And then I already had a little money because I was making money in Terrell. I help him and he got together with another boy, and I loaned him the money and he put up in Longview. We had a place in Terrell, Wills Point, Tyler, Longview, and the one in Oklahoma City. But in '37 I decided I was going to Ft. Worth, but then I . . . this fellow that I help with my brother in Longview, he says, "Don't go to Ft. Worth. I got a better town." He says, "Shreveport." So I went to Shreveport, and man, the minute I saw it I got in love with it. And so in '37 about the middle of the year, I moved from Terrell, just completely moved my equipment, I went to Shreveport, and boy, I really started making some money then. And my two brothers in '38 moved to Oklahoma City and started making some money. You

know, when I moved to Shreveport I was making so much money I thought I was robbing the people. Boy, I open and business was so great.

Jenkins: Do you remember what kind of money you were making?

Cuellar: Yes, sir.

Jenkins: During . . . say in Terrell, Kaufman, Shreveport. What are some of the kind . . .

Cuellar: When I left Terrell, I think I was having sales about a hundred dollars a day, on weekends two hundred dollars.

Jenkins: And in the thirties that was good business.

Cuellar: You're darn right that was good money. Okay. But when I moved to Shreveport, then I tripled it. And I used to come by and stop in Wills Point, and I used to tell the boys, "I am knocking them cold. I am making so much money." What I borrowed, I borrowed a little money. I says, "In the next sixty days I am going to be out of debt. And a month after that make so much. Within a year I am going to have so much money in the bank." And they just think I was crazy. They didn't know what I was talking about. But it doubled more than what I predicted. And this was really good.

Jenkins: Let me pick up another. What did you call the Terrell restaurant?

Cuellar: Before, when I came to Terrell the second time, the first time was Cuellar's, but the second time, after we start

making some money, we just had Cuellar's Cafe. We wanted to put a good sign, and we went to buy a neon sign, and we found a second hand one named "Plaza." We will just take the name "Plaza." And we bought it and we put it, and it was Plaza Cafe. So then we really went places. Okay. So in '38, that's when my brothers went to Oklahoma City, and they did the very same thing. They just start making big money.

Jenkins: What did they call their cafe?

Cuellar: They call it 'El Charro. Okay. Two years later, 1940, we all had money then.

Jenkins: Three locations in 1940.

Cuellar: Well, we had Wills Point, Tyler, Oh, the Longview place . . .

The Longview place, they were doing real good. My brother with that man I helped them, they opened the second place in Kilgore. And the man that my brother was with, oh, he was a wonderful guy. He knew the business. But he had one fault--he drink. And one night he got drunk, sat up all night drunk, and in the morning around five o'clock he was going to Kilgore, and he hit a big truck and killed him right then. So that ruined my brother. He immediately had to close the Kilgore place, and then he wasn't doing too well. And I said, "I will help you Amos." And he moved to Tulsa, just about that time he moved to Tulsa, and he

already had a little money and I helped him a little bit more, and he put up in Tulsa. But he owned by himself. Okay, 1940 everything was going good.

Jenkins: What was the name of your Shreveport place?

Cuellar: It was still Plaza.

Jenkins: Oh. You just moved the Plaza. . .

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: But did you take your sign with you?

Cuellar: Yes, I took my sign with me.

Jenkins: Okay.

Cuellar: Okay. Then in 1940 after two years, we moved in '38, Gilbert and Mack said, "We want to come back to Texas." And my brother-in-law says, "I'll buy you all out." So they sold out to him, and they had enough money to come back to Texas. And they still didn't know, they didn't have a really decision made whether to go in Dallas or somewhere else. So they went to Ft. Worth to look around, and coming back they stopped and visit a friend. A Frenchman had a place right here in the edge of Dallas, and that man told them, he says, "What are you doing? What are you doing in Ft. Worth?" He says, "Dallas is better. You go in business in Dallas and you make it." They said, "Well, too much competition." He says, "Oh, no. That competition don't mean nothing." So that man changed their minds. So they went to Dallas and

they went to look around, and right there on Oaklawn Avenue, you know where the B & B Cafe is. Right next door to it was a place owned by Leo Corrigan, and it was a furniture store. They were going to sell out. . . have a closing out sale. And so they went in there and asked the man who owned this. "Leo Corrigan." So they went to see Leo Corrigan. "Yes, he is going to move out in two weeks." They took over the place and put in the place. Now they didn't know what to call it. "Cuellar's Cafe." We said "Plaza Cafe", we said "El Charro Cafe." So they didn't know what to do. And so they said, "Well, what are we going to do?" And so then we had all these names, and my brother-in-law says, "yes, you can call it El Charro." "No, let's hunt. Let's put a bunch of names." And they voted on and that bunch had El Chico. And El Chico got the most votes.

Jenkins: Where did El Chico . . . who thought El Chico? Do you remember?

Cuellar: Oh, they had so many places in Texas; El Charro, El Charrito, El Chocho, and when they come to El Chico they said, "That's a good name."

Jenkins: You don't remember who put down El Chico then?

Cuellar: No, I don't remember. It could have been my sister, I don't know. But anyhow they opened the place and that's where the El Chico--the first El Chico--got started.

Jenkins: On what street now?

Cuellar: On Oaklawn Avenue

Jenkins: In what year?

Cuellar: In 1940.

Jenkins: Is that where all the brothers finally got together?

Cuellar: No. Not yet where we got together.

Jenkins: It was the first El Chico?

Cuellar: But that was the first El Chico. Okay. Operated just a little while. Boy it was making money. My brother-in-law was making all kinds of money, I was doing the same thing. And then just about that time, I says, "I am going to open up a second place." My brother-in-law says, "Well, we going to open the second place." And the boys says, "Well, we going to open a second place." We opened three restaurants within . . . well, one week after next. We opened one in . . . my brother-in-law opened first and then my brothers opened in Dallas, and I opened the next one. And boy we started making money.

Jenkins: Now were they all three El Chico at that time?

Cuellar: No. No, just one El Chico . . . we went on and going back and forth we said, "Well, if we are doing this well separately, we can do better together." So my brother-in-law says, "No, I'm going to invest in Oklahoma City. I want to get out of here." So I told them, I says, "I'll invest anywhere."

So we come up with the idea of going to Ft. Worth. It was 1945, about five years after they put the first one. So we opened, we got together, we passed the hat around. "Put me down with twenty percent," "put me down with ten percent," "five percent," and we even let the outsiders, our cousins and nephews and everything, put in.

Jenkins: Was it a corporation then or partnership?

Cuellar: It was a partnership, no corporation. But we went by percentage. I take twenty. I wind up with thirty-five percent.

Jenkins: It was individuals investing. You didn't go to banks at that point and borrow?

Cuellar: No. Okay. We opened that place. That was the first venture together that the Cuellar brothers all pitch, plus all my nephews and my uncle and everybody pitch in. So we opened up. Went big.

Jenkins: Now this location was where?

Cuellar: Ft. Worth.

Jenkins: This is the first really joint venture.

Cuellar: Yes. That's right. But I still had my places by myself.

Jenkins: And they had theirs.

Cuellar: Had theirs by themselves except this El Chico No. 3. Because the boys already had the second place, you see. They had one they called El Chico No. 2 and theirs was No. 3. I opened

up the second one I called El Patio, El Patio Cafe. My brother-in-law opened up one Charrito.

Jenkins: Now the Ft. Worth one, was that an El Chico?

Cuellar: Yes. El Chico No. 3. Because they opened No. 1 and they opened theirs by themselves, and No. 2 and then the No. 3 is where we all come in. That was 1947. In 1948, as we were talking on the way, then we got together again. Everybody, "How much you want?" Well, "I take this and I take that." I always took a big hunk because I financed them. And we called it El Chico No. 4. And that's when they told me that I had to come over and open up the place for them. That they would give me six months to build it, start it, and teach a manager to train him to become manager, and I was going to go back. Before I came I had my idea of opening up a canning company, and they had the same idea. They had the same thoughts that they was going to open up . . . so then we said, while I was here, "why don't we get together." We get together we are going to have to move from Shreveport to Dallas. And then we started saying, "Okay, if we are going to get together, let's change all the names of the places to El Chico." So I say, "Okay, when is this going to take place?" It is going to take place the seventh day of June, 1949. And that's when we moved here. I moved seven days before the opening of this El Chico right here on Lovers Lane. I don't know whether you have been there or not.

Jenkins: We were there just this afternoon. That was one . . . that is one of the oldest ones then?

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: Oh, I didn't realize that. And that's when you moved into this home?

Cuellar: Yes. That place was opened the seventh of June, and I moved the first of June. I moved a week before.

Jenkins: Into this home.

Cuellar: Yes, because I wanted to be here before the opening. So on that day, June the 7th, all the places were joined together. We had a CPA figure out everything, and I had so much of the company, and all was planned by percentages.

Jenkins: Did it then become a corporation?

Cuellar: Yes, we formed a corporation.

Jenkins: At that point.

Cuellar: We form a corporation, and on top of that we open up a canning company. Called it El Chico Canning Company.

Jenkins: Where was that now?

Cuellar: That was on Leslie Street. And boy then we went to town. We really went to town, and from then on, boy, we started opening here, there, everywhere. I think that's a good place to stop.

Jenkins: A very good place to stop.

Business Oral History Collection

Frank Cuellar, Sr.

Interviewer: Dr. Floyd Jenkins

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: August 9, 1978

Dr. Jenkins: Continuing the interview August 9, 1978, still in the home of Frank Cuellar.

Frank Cuellar: Right after all that happened it looked like that we started a new company. We were just . . . everybody was so enthused about moving, moving fast. And from then on we start opening places just everywhere. And of course, you know we already had quite a bit of experience in the restaurants, but we didn't have no experience with the canning. And that's where our problems start, with the canning company. We didn't know how to operate, we didn't know how to sell. We put out good food but I learned this much in the food business. The problem is not in producing. The problem is selling. If you have got enough money, you can put any kind of factory and you think you're doing all right, and you start producing. But then the public don't--if the item don't move, you're in trouble. And that's what happened with our canning company. We knew we had the best foods, but the general public didn't know it. And we go out there and sell to some of these big super markets, and

they say, "Yes. El Chico Restaurants are pretty well known but not in cans." He says, "If we buy some of your stuff and it doesn't move, we got to have our shelves. If we put an item there it has got to move and if it doesn't move we just take it out." And that's the problem we had. It was no problem, too much, of selling the first time, but the second time that's when it was rough.

Jenkins: It wasn't moving off the shelves.

Cuellar: No. Because people didn't know.

Jenkins: What kind of advertising campaign did you put on?

Cuellar: Well, in those days we didn't have much advertising. We didn't have much money. All the cafes, you know, they contribute so much percentage, but that money went for the restaurant. The canning company didn't produce any profits. And there we didn't have any money for advertising.

Jenkins: Now was the canning operation a part of the same corporation.

Cuellar: Yes. It was the same, but even though the Cuellar brothers owned everything at that time, we had a few people from outside, some of our relatives that had stock in it. The restaurant that does so much sales, and they paid, in those days they used to pay three and four percent of the sales. And they expected that much advertising for themselves. And when we took some of that money and put it for the canning they didn't like it. They say, "You are robbing me. You are taking the money I'm contributing for advertising, you are using it for the canning."

Jenkins: These were the managers of . . .

Cuellar: The managers, right. So anyhow we lost money. Gosh, we lost money every month. Every month.

Jenkins: For how long?

Cuellar: A long time. We went always hoping that things would change. Well, we went like that for three years. In 1953 then we got an idea just like we did the other time about the canning. We got an idea that frozen food was coming up. And we started the frozen food was going to be a great deal. So then we started with our frozen. And people, you know, the people when they see you doing something, some of them can see, they go along with you . . . what I was going to say is a lot of them . . . very few of them can see what you are trying to do. And so practically 85% or 90% of the people say, "You are doing it wrong." It scares you. Says "You're not going to sell frozen food and you are competing with yourself." Instead of going to eat at the restaurants, they just go to the store and buy a frozen dinner."

Jenkins: Now what kind of people were telling you this?

Cuellar: The public, the general public, that knew us. And some of the good business people like bankers and things like that. We always like to talk with people and get their reaction. So they--about fifty-five or ninety percent say, "You're doing it wrong." So we say, "Well, if we are, we are the ones that are going to apply for it. But we still think we got a good idea

some day." And so we continued losing money. Every once in a while we had a month that we broke even, maybe made a little money, couple a thousand dollars or something, but then losses of five, six thousand dollars a month.

Jenkins: Now you were losing both on the canning and the frozen foods?

Cuellar: Both. That's right. Okay.

Jenkins: Now let me. . .you went into the canning in 1950. You went into the frozen foods in '53?

Cuellar: 1953.

Jenkins: For three years you still continued to lose?

Cuellar: Continued losing money, and, of course, we go to the bank and borrowed some money. But the reason why we made it was because we had the restaurants that were. . . We didn't discontinue the expansion of the restaurants, we keep on adding more restaurants and even though that we were losing five or six thousand dollars a month on the frozen, we just poured money from the restaurants into it and just keep on feeding money there.

Jenkins: You continued then to expand your restaurants as fast as you ever had.

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: Even during the loss.

Cuellar: Right. So some of the bankers, they discouraged us. They used to say "You know the restaurant business, but you don't

know the canning and the frozen, and therefore, you are never going to make some money." And that didn't make us feel good at all. And at one time we got to the point that we said "Well, if we can't make money, let's quit. Let's quit the frozen and the canning." But then we put the pencil to it. We had also the commissary connected with it, and we had so many employees. And we said "Well, if we shut down the cans and the frozen, we still got to have people to operate the commissary department." And we say "When we do that, it is not going to keep us from losing money because this canning and the frozen foods is carrying some of the overhead. And when we shut down we are going to miss all of that." And so really, when you put the pencil to it, it would be worse to close it than to keep it going.

Jenkins: Let me ask about the commissary now. Now the commissary was attached to what? The cannery?

Cuellar: It was attached. . . everything in the same building, except the way we separate it we had a study of cost. The ingredients, and the labor, and the overhead, and everything. When we produce a case of tortillas for the restaurants, our CPA figured out how much of it was for overhead expense. You know, your lights, your insurance, and then your ingredients and everything. So really the frozen and the cans

was contributing quite a bit of that expense, and we were losing money, but when if we was to cut it completely out, that wasn't going to get us out of trouble. We would still be in trouble.

Jenkins: Now what you are calling the commissary then was the production of food for the restaurants?

Cuellar: Right. Right. And, of course, you know the food that we made for the restaurants was completely different from the one for the cans and the other.

Jenkins: Let's talk about that for a little bit. One of the questions that I had planned to ask was, in what form does the food get to the restaurants?

Cuellar: Okay. The food that we prepared for the restaurants was only our tortillas. Our tamales, they wasn't frozen they was just under refrigeration. We made them and . . .

Jenkins: Fresh.

Cuellar: Fresh, and sent them to the restaurants.

Jenkins: Within a day.

Cuellar: Within a day. Okay. The sauces . . . for instance, sauce for chili con queso, we prepare sauce. And all we do, when you have that sauce you add the cheese and it comes out fresh. So this sauce, we used to put it in gallon containers or five gallon containers, fresh . . .

Jenkins: At the commissary?

Cuellar: At the commissary, and we sent it to the restaurants. So then they take out some of that sauce, so many pounds of sauce, and so many pounds of cheese and just get it hot and they made it as they needed it.

Jenkins: So you have never used the canned food in the restaurants?

Cuellar: Nothing went in canned food to the restaurants. Everything was fresh. The canned was for the super markets, and, of course . . .

Jenkins: Is that true today? Still?

Cuellar: Yes. Still the same. So we went on like that, and we say "Well, it's just like having a son, it's yours, it's your baby. Nothing you can do with it you just have to live with it." And we went on like that, I guess about, let's see fifty . . . maybe around sixty-five. That's nearly fifteen years. Just about that time is when we began to convince the people in this market that El Chico Foods was better than the other ones, and then they start buying. It took a long time to catch on.

Jenkins: So you really were losing money most of those fifteen years?

Cuellar: Right. Every now and then we had a month that we made a little money, but . . . when we had one good month we had four or five bad ones. So just about that time, about 1965, things began to catch on. And then we started making some money, and we made good money.

Jenkins: On the canning and the . . .

Cuellar: On the canning and the frozen. But also the frozen industry began to grow so much, that not only our products in cans, but all the people, the super markets they keep on adding more frozen cabinets and cutting down on the cans. And so you know today you would be surprised people don't buy cans much.

Jenkins: So you are saying that about '65 is when the public in general started accepting frozen foods.

Cuellar: Right. Accepting frozen food more and more. So things began to change. Even though the canning business was slowing down more and more, but our frozen starts growing more and more and more. So we start making some money. And naturally we kind of slow down on the cans. We start cutting some items. We didn't have over . . . at one time we had about eleven items.

Jenkins: Let's go back then and do that. Let's go back and kind of list the things that you were doing in the canning business and the frozen food. Let's start with canning.

Cuellar: Well, in the cans like I said, we did at one time . . . well, at one time we had 100% cans. Then when we start with our frozen, start slowing down to 75% cans and 25% frozen, and then 50-50 and got down to 25 and 75, 25% cans and 75% frozen.

Jenkins: What were the things that you were canning?

Cuellar: In the canning department we were canning tamales, we were canning enchiladas, rice, beans, hot sauce, tortillas. We

had quite a bit of . . . at one time we had about eleven items.

Jenkins: Now were you making all of that in that plant?

Cuellar: Everything in that commissary.

Jenkins: You didn't bring anything in in cans?

Cuellar: The only items that we had canned for us was the taco sauce and the green chiles, it's an item called green chiles, on account we wasn't able to buy the raw materials here. You know, New Mexico and California are noted for peppers. In New Mexico they raise a lot of peppers. And so we had a company in El Paso. They were right there, ten miles to the fields where they raise . . . oh, they raise so many peppers. And so we had a contract with them to make our taco sauce and our roasted peeled peppers.

Jenkins: Did they put your brand on it?

Cuellar: Oh, yes, under our label.

Jenkins: What was the company?

Cuellar: The company was Ashley.

Jenkins: Do they still?

Cuellar: Well, Ashley at one time they tried to sell out to us. We did business with Ashley and we did business with Old El Paso. They sold us some products and we turned around and sold them some products. We sold them more than what we bought from them. For instance, we used to can tamales,

we used to can menudo. I don't know whether you know what menudo is. We used to can menudo for them. We used to sell them car loads of menudo.

Jenkins: With their brand on it.

Cuellar: With their brand.

Jenkins: I see.

Cuellar: We made it under what they called private labels, and they did the same thing in exchange. They made hot sauce and those peppers, roasted and peeled peppers.

Jenkins: Do you still have that kind of arrangement?

Cuellar: We still have some. Not too much. We kind of learned how to prepare some of the stuff. We been buying some stuff and still got a lot of business. Now I am going to jump a big jump here, that not too long ago we discontinued the cans completely, 100%. That happened just about a month ago.

Jenkins: No more canning.

Cuellar: No more cans. Because the canning industry is really going down. Frozen foods are taking over for two reasons. You know, a lot of people don't know too much about frozen. They think fresh is better than frozen, and I don't agree with them. Frozen is better than fresh for one reason, and I will explain it. You know when you go to the store and you want to buy some fresh beans, green beans or green peas, you don't know whether those things are fresh or not. They

might have been fresh a month ago when they picked them, and keep them in . . . you know where they sell the produce, sprinkle water and all of that. After two or three weeks they are not fresh anymore.

Jenkins: The only reason they call them fresh is that they are not canned or frozen.

Cuellar: Because they are not canned or frozen but they are not fresh.

Jenkins: I see.

Cuellar: Okay. The frozen food companies, and I am speaking of the good brands. There are a lot of good ones and a lot of bad ones. But some of the good brands. Like they are going to can fresh beans, they pick them from the field, they get them in there in less than three or four hours, they go into the freezer, and freezing will not produce miracles. If you put food in the freezer and it is good, and you keep it a year or six months, it is going to be the same in six months. Now if it is bad when they put it in there, it is going to be bad when it comes out. It doesn't produce no miracles. Okay.

Jenkins: Have you watched this operation?

Cuellar: Oh, yes. I have been to those places where they . . .

Jenkins: Where they really do get it in there that fast?

Cuellar: Where they really do that. You bet you. So that's the advantage of the frozen to the fresh. They say fresh. You

couldn't get me to go buy a pound of green beans or something. No, because they are not fresh. Another thing too. The company, I am speaking of the good companies, that buy this stuff to freeze it, they watch the quality since they buy it, since they pick it, and bring it. It's got to be their quality. If it is a good company, they got to make it good. Like, for instance, Birdseye, that brand, and Big Giant and some of those big companies, if it is no good they are not going to pack it.

Jenkins: When you are watching your frozen foods, do you have people out there doing the same thing?

Cuellar: I am going to come now to . . . not vegetables but the other kind of food. Let's take for instance, an order of enchiladas and tacos, this chili con queso. When you make those enchiladas and chili con queso and your rice and beans, twenty-five minutes after you bring it out of the fire is the best. But if you bake that thing at 11 o'clock that we serve for lunch, at two o'clock that food is not fresh anymore. It is not as good as it was at 11 o'clock, and I have learned this by experience, whether it is a Mexican restaurant or an American restaurant. You go at 12 o'clock and get a lunch, you get a pretty good lunch, but if you happen to be late and you go down there at 2 o'clock that food is going to be stale a little bit, because it has been on the steam table for

two hours. Okay. The frozen food that we prepare. We cook it. We shoot it through the lines in ten minutes. After it comes out of the fire it goes in the freezer, and it stays like that until the day you get it out of your freezer and warm it. It is going to be just as fresh, and I'll talk to anybody on that line because I know it.

Jenkins: Now do you ever send your frozen food to your restaurants?

Cuellar: The only thing we send frozen to the restaurant today is the tamales. Like tortillas, we don't freeze them. They get there, they use them right quick.

Jenkins: What do . . . how much cooking do you do at the restaurants?

Cuellar: Oh, practically everything. Let's talk about one item that I can explain to you real well. Let's say that . . . let's talk about rice. Rice is got several ingredients, five or six ingredients. The proportions got to be just right. If you put too much salt, it is going to be salty. If you put very little salt, it is not going to taste good. It has got to be measured just right. Okay. So the rice we fix, the ingredients, nothing but the ingredients, no rice in it, those go in the dry powder form. And we put so many ounces in a container. And we put in the directions, "put so many pounds of rice to fry . . ."

Jenkins: This has already been cooked?

Cuellar: No. It comes out of a sack. The rice . . . we send them

the rice . . .

Jenkins: Uncooked rice.

Cuellar: Uncooked rice. Come out of a sack. And we send them the rice and we send them the ingredients separate and we put in the directions, "so many pounds of rice, so much shortening, put to fry until it gets brown. When it gets brown you pour this whole portion of the ingredients and so much water to it." Anybody that can read can do it. And you cook for so many minutes. And your rice is going to be perfect. And a man here in Dallas can do that, or it can be in Atlanta, Georgia, or it could be in New Orleans, anywhere.

Jenkins: You find the same El Chico food then.

Cuellar: The same. That's the way we control the quality. If we had good expert chefs to do this, you can get ten chefs and each one of them is going to do it different. And we don't want it different, we want it . . . that's the secret we have in preparing our food. We sent them all the ingredients already measure, and they can't miss. Okay. Let's talk about enchiladas. You know enchiladas takes tortillas, takes onions, takes cheese, takes meat, takes the enchilada sauce. All right, and some shortening. We send them everything. We send them the shortening in five gallon containers. We send them the sauce in containers, fresh under refrigeration. We send them the tortillas, fresh tortillas. We send them the cheese

separately. They got to grate it themselves. We send them the onions. So they get all these things out there in the restaurant, and they got the shortening. First you put it in the sauce then you fry it so that you catch all the flavor. Then you got your chopped onion and your cheese, grated cheese, and your meat. The meat was . . . we send them the meat already prepared.

Jenkins: Already cooked?

Cuellar: Already cooked. But fresh, not frozen. Fresh. So then they got to put it together, and those enchiladas are just as fresh as they can be, because they are made right there.

Jenkins: Now everything that they get in the form of food comes from your commissary.

Cuellar: It's got to come from our commissary.

Jenkins: Onions and everything.

Cuellar: Everything. And there is two reasons why. One reason is because when you buy one sack of onions, fifty pound sack, it costs you pretty high, but when you buy two or three hundred sacks you get a pretty . . . and you buy direct from the . . . cuts some of that middle man. All right. The same way with the rest of the stuff. Everything . . . the ingredients that we use, everything that we buy, we buy eight-ten thousand tons of spices at one time.

Jenkins: From where?

Cuellar: Some come from California, some from New Mexico, some from

Colorado. For instance you take our beans. We buy carloads and carloads of beans.

Jenkins: Pinto beans.

Cuellar: Pinto beans. Come from Colorado. You take our cheese. Our cheese comes from Wisconsin from somewhere. Carloads. Okay, so buying all these things together it's much cheaper than if we had a restaurant in Shreveport going down there to the store to buy all these things. It costs them too much.

Jenkins: For instance, the cheese. Do you buy all of your cheese from one company?

Cuellar: We buy from different companies. They bid on it.

Jenkins: How many different kinds of cheese?

Cuellar: Oh, well, for the enchiladas we use cheddar cheese. And we got two experts to buy this cheese. You know the same brand of cheese when it doesn't have any age, it doesn't taste too good. If it is too old, it is no good either. So what we do, we buy our cheese and we sample it first, and when we find the right kind and maybe one company got so much, the other company-good companies that we already know . . . we buy from two or three main companies like Kraft, like some of these Armour and Company, they sell a lot of cheese. So we watch those prices. Some of them might come two or three cents cheaper this week. And when you are buying thirty-five, forty thousand pounds, two or three cent a pound amounts

to a whole lot of money. So that's the way we handle that.

Jenkins: Now the people who are sampling this, are they your employees who go up to Wisconsin?

Cuellar: No. No.

Jenkins: Or do you have people up there?

Cuellar: We have people right here.

Jenkins: They ship you samples.

Cuellar: Yes. The broker here. The broker here brings us samples. And he have some here and some here and we pass tastes and some of it is too green.

Jenkins: Now you said you bought cheddar . . .

Cuellar: Cheddar cheese for the enchiladas.

Jenkins: And what else?

Cuellar: And for nachos and to go over the enchiladas.

Jenkins: And another kind of cheese for . . .

Cuellar: Now we buy something else for chili con queso. It is a different kind. You can't use cheddar cheese in chili con queso.

Jenkins: Generally what kind is it?

Cuellar: That chili con queso, they got one they call it "process cheese". I think it is Velveeta brand. We use more Velveeta brand than any other kind. It is made by Kraft. And all the companies have that kind of process cheese. The reason why, there is some difference in it . . . If you put cheddar cheese

in chili con queso, it clabbers. It doesn't cook well. It is good for to use it raw, but when you make chili con queso, the other one works much . . . oh it is so fine. That's things we have learned in many many years.

Jenkins: Did you have to change the quality or the formula of your foods when you switched over from canning to freezing . . .

Cuellar: No. No.

Jenkins: Or did you pretty well just freeze what you had at the time?

Cuellar: The quality of the ingredients were the same except one of them was canned. Canned food is all right, except that the can gives a little flavor, canned flavor. That's the only thing.

Jenkins: What I am getting at . . . while, for instance, you were both canning and freezing, the stuff came out of the same oven. Some of it went to canning, some of it went to freezing. Exactly the same things.

Cuellar: Right.

Jenkins: Okay. That's what I was getting at.

Cuellar: Well, let's take meat. You know, the meat that goes in the can you just cook it enough . . . you don't cook it, you get it hot. You've got to watch temperature. It has got to go in the can at a certain temperature in order for, when the sealer comes and put the top on it it forms a vacuum and if it don't form a vacuum it's not going to be good. So it's

got to be a certain degree of heat so it can form that vacuum. Of course there is some machines, vacuum pack machines, that pull the air out of there, and you can do it that way too.

Jenkins: Let's go back. You were explaining that gradually you got out of the canning business until now you do no canning at all? Everything is . . .

Cuellar: I don't know what items we have. Just a few items that we are not even going to fool with them. We are going to get them under that private label. Somebody is going to can it for us. We don't want to fool with it. It is not enough. It is not enough for us . . .

Jenkins: You are still going to have some El Chico brand but you don't want to be doing the canning.

Cuellar: No.

Jenkins: You are going to get out of the canning?

Cuellar: Yes. Because, two reasons. It is not enough for us to fool with it and take up all the space, and we need the space for our other operations.

Jenkins: Well why do you want to continue the name in the canned goods then?

Cuellar: It is for some items that people want. And if they want it . . . and we can make almost about the same profit.

Jenkins: Without doing it yourself.

Cuellar: That's right.

Jenkins: What are some of the items?

Cuellar: Well like these peppers that I was talking about. We don't fool enough with them and . . .

Jenkins: But there is still a demand?

Cuellar: There is still a demand for them.

Jenkins: You don't freeze that kind of thing anyway, do you?

Cuellar: No. No. So for that reason we just thought we'd discontinue it and we buy what little we use. Because we need the space. We have made lots of improvements in our plant.

Jenkins: Well, let's see what some of the items are then that you just don't freeze and that must be canned. The sauces would still be canned.

Cuellar: The stuff that we send to the restaurants as I said a while ago, none of them are canned, and some of them are frozen, very few are frozen like the tamales.

Jenkins: But my question is this. For instance, the chiles you wouldn't freeze them anyway.

Cuellar: No. No, they . . .

Jenkins: The sauces you can't freeze . . . Are there some other items that you continue to can simply because they aren't freezable things?

Cuellar: No. There's no items. Some of those items they just . . . I guess they could be frozen but it is just not a demand for retail.

Jenkins: I see.

Cuellar: That's the reason. The retail . . . Now the wholesalers, yeh, they would buy them. Now let's talk a little bit about dehydrated.

Jenkins: Okay.

Cuellar: Did you know dehydrated is . . .

Jenkins: Coming on, is it?

Cuellar: It's good. It is not bad.

Jenkins: I know it's good, and it is a coming thing, is it?

Cuellar: Well, of course, dehydrated foods they think is new today, but it has been here maybe a thousand years. Take for instance in China, duck . . . you've seen that? That is nothing but dehydrated. They take that thing and let it dry . . .

Jenkins: Is that the pressed duck? Is that what you are talking about?

Cuellar: Yeh.

Jenkins: Oh, I see.

Cuellar: It was a duck. They just put it in there and let it dry. The moisture has gone away and you can put it in . . . you can put it in your trunk. Dry, dry as a piece of paper.

Jenkins: Like the jerky they used to make.

Cuellar: Right. Then you pour the water, and that moisture gets back in there, and it is a pretty good product. Okay. The garlic, they got dehydrated garlic, they got dehydrated tomatoes, they got dehydrated peppers, green peppers.

Jenkins: Are you getting into that?

Cuellar: We're not, we buy them for spices.

Jenkins: For the restaurants?

Cuellar: For the restaurants. We buy some of those. For instance, garlic. Man, we use thousands and thousands pounds of garlic. We don't have time to clean it. They got big machinery and the garlic comes in granules and it comes in . . . they call it salt, they call it powder, and it is good. When you add the water back to it, you got plain old garlic again. So dehydrated foods, there is nothing wrong with them. It is good.

Jenkins: And you use a lot of that in your restaurants?

Cuellar: Well, we use garlic. We use garlic and peppers, because you can't buy peppers in the winter months, the bell peppers. You can buy them dehydrated. And when you put the water on that, they are just like fresh. My mother used to . . . you know roasting ears? You know that if you cook them and hang them and let them dry, completely dry, maybe two or three months in the winter months when there was no corn, she used to put it back in the water and boil it, and it came back.

Jenkins: Cooked it before she dried it?

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: Rather than leaving it in the field to dry.

Cuellar: Well, roasting ears, she got them and she cooked them.

Jenkins: Not like leaving it in the field for horse feed and letting it dry.

Cuellar: Then you got dry corn.

Jenkins: Right.

Cuellar: You got dry corn, but then you cook them, and you hang them and let them dry two or three months. Put it back in the pot and put some water, and it is dehydrated food. That's all it is.

Jenkins: And it was already cooked and so it didn't take long for it to cook.

Cuellar: It cooked like roasting ears.

Jenkins: Let's see about what year we are up to now.

Cuellar: Oh, well, . . .

Jenkins: When you dropped canning is right now so we need to go back a little farther than that.

Cuellar: As I said we went on and, what I am trying to tell you is this. That if it hadn't been for our restaurants, we would have never . . . we would have been broke in the first two or three years, and these bankers . . . I remember one banker, she says "You know your restaurant business, but you don't know a dern thing about canning and frozen." And she says "Those people . . . there's a lot of big companies that go broke, and you are going to go broke." And we said "We don't think we are." Okay. Because we knew what we were doing. We knew that we were feeding some of this money we made in the restaurants just to keep it with the hope that some day it would change, and, by golly, it did change. It did change, and

boy, that frozen department . . .

Jenkins: How close did the canning and freezing part of it ever get to making the amount of money that the restaurants made?

Cuellar: Well, I am going to say like I said it twenty-five years ago. I used to tell my brothers, I says "One of these days, we just think that the restaurants can make us more money than the other one, but if we ever perfect this other stuff, I think we could make more money with the frozen than we can with the restaurants. For this reason. Let's take a restaurant, one regular restaurant. I am not taking the one that makes a lot of money or the one that don't make much money. I want to take one in the middle. Let's say you got a restaurant that does about sixty thousand dollars a month worth of business. A restaurant that size it will make you some money. It will make you probably six, seven thousand dollars profit. Okay. How many people you got working in there? You have about thirty-five people working. You have around, I would estimate about three or four hundred thousand dollar investment. Okay. The frozen food you got about a hundred people working in there, maybe less, seventy-five people. And you can produce, boy, you can produce a lot of food. And the amount of money you going to make, it'll beat the restaurant. In other words, if you put a million dollars here investment for restaurants and put a million dollars here for the frozen, this one will

make you a better percentage than this one, because over there you can't serve but about well, say a thousand persons per day. In the food business, in the other one, you can produce for five hundred thousand people. So, and you got it all in one where you can watch it. If you are going to be . . . if you are going to do twenty-five million dollars worth of business with the restaurants, you got a lot of employees, a lot of headaches, and all other, and the food business, it is all right here compact. If you do that, twenty-five million dollars so easy.

Jenkins: Did the time come then when the manufacturing part of it made more than the restaurants?

Cuellar: No. No, because we haven't expanded the company enough. In other words, today we've got millions and millions of dollars invested in the restaurants and we don't have that much in the food.

Jenkins: But for the investment you are making more . . .

Cuellar: We make more money. Another thing too, we sell through brokers and they are already set up. Let's say when we come out with a new item like we have now coming out with pizza . . .

Jenkins: We want to hear the story of the pizza too.

Cuellar: Well, that's coming on a little later. But when you come out with a new item, you got your brokers set up, you got

your lines already set up. Man, you just add on to it, and let's say you make two or three thousand cases a day, you are making money. So, I think we got two big opportunities to make money. One is the restaurant. Nothing wrong with it. If it hadn't been for the restaurants the plant wouldn't be in there today. But also, some day and I am going to jump a little fast, I go by my statements and I just wrote my statement yesterday. And . . . we were at one time you know, it is a company that gives you a report on all the companies. You know where we were? We were, hit the bottom. It's a company that give you statements of all the companies in the United States. It seems to me like . . . S.M.I. or something. I can't remember it. It's three letters. Anyhow, they give you the list and we always watch them. We hit the bottom. Later on we got to be number thirteen. Number twelve. I read a report yesterday where we are right now the second largest in the United States, or in the world because they don't go no higher.

Jenkins: Now second largest doing what? In the restaurant business?

Cuellar: No, in the Mexican food.

Jenkins: Manufacturing of . . .

Cuellar: Frozen Mexican food. We are right next to the top, and give us a few more months and we will be at the top.

Jenkins: Now let's go back . . . You said when you first started getting

those reports, which was about when?

Cuellar: Oh, I would say about 1960, about ten years after we got in the business. Our salesmen they get those reports. "Patio is doing so much. Banquet is doing so much," and all the companies . . . they are pretty accurate too. We used to be way down in the bottom.

Jenkins: And now you're . . .

Cuellar: Second in Mexican food.

Jenkins: Second only to what company? Do you remember?

Cuellar: Oh, yes, I know. No, I don't mind. Patio is still. But . . .

Jenkins: You are creeping up on them.

Cuellar: At one time they didn't even pay no attention to El Chico. I betcha he is sure watching close. And did you know the founder, me and him are real good friends.

Jenkins: Now where was El . . . Patio?

Cuellar: Patio? San Antonio. He made a statement one time. We went to a convention in Florida, and naturally, every time, talking among a lot of people he used to put the arm around me. He says "This is my great friend, Frank Cuellar, my great friend." And I says "I bet you got a dagger behind my back." Okay. But that's the way we work. We always work together with the other people . . . I got on a plane from Florida coming back and he came and sit right next to me. And he made a remark that I would give a hundred to have a recording so I could

have record it when he . . .

Jenkins: When was this now?

Cuellar: Oh, this must have been about 1964 or '65. He made this remark. He says "Frank, if I had the food that El Chico has, I wouldn't have nothing to worry about. I would be the top man, because you make the best food." And he was talking about himself too. So if I had of recorded it I would have given it to the buyers. 'Look what Patio man said.'

Jenkins: Who founded Patio?

Cuellar: The founder was named . . . Stumberg.

Jenkins: I guess he has passed on now, hasn't he?

Cuellar: No. He is still . . .

Jenkins: Still around.

Cuellar: Oh course, they sold out. They sold out to . . . Reynolds Tobacco Company. And he is still in it, but we sure give them a fit. You just watch what is going to happen here. I bet you that in the next six months, we are going to be tops. So, let's go back to this banker that tell us we were doing. We talked to them. He said "By golly, you fooled us. You knew what you were doing." I says "Well, if it hadn't been for the El Chicos that we were working two lines together, and before we started on this second one we had this already on safe grounds and making a lot of money. That's the reason we gambled on this here." And I says "Could be one of these days this is

going to make us more money than the restaurants."

Jenkins: Now the two lines were the restaurants and the manufacturing?

Cuellar: Yes. I think it can be done. Now that we have changed hands, they know, they know what they know.

Jenkins: But you've up to this point, this one location is all you have ever had for the manufacturing operation?

Cuellar: Well, we did have a little . . . about 1960, we open up . . . a . . . well this wasn't open, we didn't produce anything, we just had a kind of warehouse in Houston, but we close it up. We did open up, about 1960, we open up a commissary to produce only tortillas and candy in Oklahoma City.

Jenkins: And that is still in operation?

Cuellar: Still in operation and we are thinking about enlarging and making it bigger. We planning . . .

Jenkins: It is El Chico?

Cuellar: Yes, El Chico. El Chico Commissary in Oklahoma City. So the . . . all these years it hasn't been . . . it hasn't been smooth. A lot of people think that everything has been running real . . . No, we had some real tough times. I would like to mention the tight spots that we went through. And this must have been a way back in about 1955, when we started monkeying with this commissary. We were losing money and losing money. And the restaurants were making money, but overall it wasn't enough, it wasn't enough money. And we had to borrow money from the

bank. Well, we started doing business with the banks since way back yonder. I remember where I couldn't borrow, I couldn't borrow five hundred dollars from a bank. I remember Shreveport, when I was in business there about 1938, I remember I wanted to buy a refrigerator, and it was about fifteen hundred dollars. And the company that sold it to me says "We charge for carrying charges so much. You can save by going to the bank and borrowing the money to pay us, and they charge less. We charge more." So I says "Well, I will go by the bank." I went and wanted to borrow fifteen hundred dollars . . .

Jenkins: In Shreveport:

Cuellar: In Shreveport. And the banker just pushed it around and said "No. I can't let you have it." So it took a long time for us to build our reputation where we could borrow money. The restaurant industry always had a bad reputation with the banks. When a restaurant man went to borrow money, they wouldn't lend it to them. The restaurant people - no good. They are here today and gone tomorrow. And we used to tell them "Well, we are not that type. We are here to stay." But anyhow, after 1949 when I moved here . . . about 1955 we started borrowing money. And I remember one time when the Empire Bank, we started borrowing money and we got up to a hundred and I think it was a hundred and nineteen thousand

dollars, when the guy called us. He says "I just can't go any higher. We are going to have to cut you out. I am not asking you to pay me now because I know you are going to pay me." He says "But I cannot loan you no more."

Jenkins: That was in about '49?

Cuellar: No that was about in 1955.

Jenkins: '55. And you had about . . .

Cuellar: Oh, we already had quite a few restaurants, but . . .

Jenkins: The debt was primarily from the canning operation.

Cuellar: The canning company was taking all of our expense. So, boy, we had a meeting, me and the brothers. "Golly, what are we going to do? We can't make it. If the bank cut us off, we can't operate. Well, that is going to be bad." So then I went to the bank and I saw the head man in there, the second man, you know, . . . the top man never deals with you. He is afraid. He always send the second man to give you . . . let him cool you off or give you the dirty word or something. So he send me his second man, and I told this guy I says "It seems to me like it's a way that you can do it that we can keep on going like we have." He says "Well, I am going to tell you how it can be done, but you are not going to like it." I says "Well, tell me." You see before this, in 1949 I started accumulating a little money myself, and I started buying properties. Like, for instance, when we bought No. 3 in Fort Worth and No. 4, in about two or three years some of the boys,

we owned them together, said "We don't need the property, the real estate. Let's sell it and take that money and put some more restaurants." And I says "No, I don't want to do that." They said "Well, if you don't want to do it, you go ahead and buy them." I says "Well, I will buy them." So I bought all the restaurants from the partners, the real estate, not the whole thing, just the real estate. So I bought No. 3, No. 4, and I had enough money to pay out cash. So this banker, when he told me, he says "I know a way that you can do it, but you are not going to like it." So I says "Well, tell me anyway." He says "If you give us mortgage on your property, El Chico doesn't own it, you own it. If you give me a mortgage on your places, we will keep going." I says "Well, that's pretty rough." I says "Well, let me think about it." At that time we had a CPA with us that, we knew him since he was a kid. He was just like a brother to us. So I told him I says "Boy, that's the only solution. I have to give them mortgage." He says "Frank, you must be crazy. If you are going to give mortgage to El Chico. You own those places yourself. You own them and you don't owe anything on them, and now you are going to mortgage them to save El Chico? Let El Chico go to hell." He says "I don't care." I said "No. I got too much money invested." And I says "I am just going to have to . . . I am going to have to do that." And I told the brothers I says,

"I'll put up my real estate." So I went ahead and they opened the doors again. Now that was rough. We couldn't sleep at night when they cut you off like that. Well, that was one deal. And since I did that the next day they start paying me and I went and paid the bank. They paid me the loan. The payments they pay me and I went and paid the bank. The bank had a mortgage on my property.

Jenkins: Now you . . . you didn't own all of the El Chico properties, but some of them.

Cuellar: Just three places, the two in Fort Worth and the one in Shreveport.

Jenkins: Well now, the rest of them, did the corporation own the property of the rest?

Cuellar: No. No. They leased. Okay. So then they went on until things got a little better and they paid me every cent. And I used to tell the CPA I says "Was I right or wrong?" He says "No, you was right."

Jenkins: How long did that take?

Cuellar: It took several years. It took about three or four years. Okay. That was one bad . . . that was one thing that we really . . . You know you get sometimes to the end of the road and you don't know which . . . you don't know what to do next. So the next time, and we were still growing more and more and more, we got where we started borrowing more

money and the Empire was too small. You know all banks they got a . . . they got a limit. They can loan you so much.

Jenkins: Where is the Empire? I have seen the Empire.

Cuellar: They dissolved. They merged with the NBC, so no more Empire Bank.

Jenkins: Was that a downtown bank?

Cuellar: Yeh. Down on Main Street. Okay. So, after he couldn't take care of us, we went to the First National Bank. They said "We will loan you some money."

Jenkins: This was about what year now?

Cuellar: Maybe about 19-- , between '55 and 58, somewhere around there. So we went to the First National and they started loaning us some money. We got up to two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. When we got up to two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, then we were still opening restaurants we could see more future, but we needed the money. And we told the bank "We need more money." "Well, how much do you need?" "Well, we need a million dollars." "No sir. No, we can't go it." They turned us down, and there we were. We had the opportunity but we couldn't go because we didn't have the finance. Finally, here comes the Republic looking for business. "You'll get it." I says "We'll switch. We'll switch banks if you will loan us some money." "Well, how much do you need?" "We need a million dollars." "We'll give it to you."

Jenkins: Who were you dealing with then? Do you remember ?

Cuellar: I was dealing with a guy named - he is still there - Drain, his last name is Drain.

Jenkins: Had you been dealing with Thomson at the First?

Cuellar: No. No, we were dealing with Wooten. Do you remember Wooten, Ben Wooten?

Jenkins: Wooten? Oh, yes.

Cuellar: That's the guy we were dealing with. Ben Wooten. He turned us down. He just couldn't go. Okay. So we moved. Let us have one million dollars. Boy, we went in high. Spending more and more and more.

Jenkins: Now at this time you started expanding more restaurants.

Cuellar: More restaurants. And the plant in 1955 was still losing money. That place lost money for twenty years, from 1950 to 1970.

Jenkins: So at the time you borrowed the million dollars, you had about how many restaurants?

Cuellar: Oh, I would say we had about thirty.

Jenkins: And you started expanding even faster, then?

Cuellar: Yes. We started expanding more and more. And they changed our banker. They give us another banker and his name was Ray Pulley. He was good. We put him in our board because they wanted to be in the board. They wanted to know what was going on. So we went fine. We went on good. Then in . . . it must have been about 1968, somewhere around there, we were on Leslie. When we started in 1950 on Leslie we had a little building

50' x 125'.

Jenkins: Manufacturing?

Cuellar: Yeah. That's where we opened our plant in 1950. We out grewed it and we rented another building, same size right next to it, 50' x 125'. And we out grewed that and we couldn't get no other building but behind us in the next street Leslie. We were back to back but we had the railroad between us. We found a place, and we rented it. Another 50' x 125'. That's three buildings, and then we took the next one over there on Howell and that made us four buildings, and later we rented another building. We had five buildings.

Jenkins: Plants.

Cuellar: Yeah.

Jenkins: All in the same location.

Cuellar: But not in the same building. So then about 1967, '68 is when we decided to make the move. And that's when we moved over there. We bought thirty acres. We paid \$4,500 per acre. Today it is worth a dollar a foot. That's 43,000. That's about \$39,000 an acre and it's 30 x 38,000.

Jenkins: Now there was hardly anything out there I guess when you started.

Cuellar: There was only one plant, that pickle plant. Morton's Potato Chips?

Jenkins: Oh, yeah.

Cuellar: He put a pickle plant up there.

Jenkins: You built the present plant in what year?

Cuellar: It must have been somewhere about '67, '68. It took us a long time to build it.

Jenkins: And abandoned, then, all of the other.

Cuellar: Right. We moved and put everything under one roof. Okay.

But at that time we were already with Republic. And we were growing, and we say we can't do it. It's just like a baseball team, you know. Once you get good and big you start throwing out the bad players and replacing them with better ones. And that's exactly what we did. We start getting rid of - we didn't get rid of them but we put somebody on top of them. Replaced them with better people, better CPA's, better lawyers, better everything. So we started growing, and we got most of the guys from . . . we lost our CPA that I told you we raised. He quit. And when he quit we tried another guy and he didn't do no good. We tried another one, the third one, and Arthur Young was doing our yearly annual report. They say "Well, you're having a hard time. You need help down here to run this thing. Why don't we get you one of our men? We guarantee you our man can run it." "Well, bring him on." So he brought one guy. Boy, he was good. He was good. So then he brought another one of his men, and we start reinforcing our line. But every good man has got something wrong. You know the Cuellar brothers, they been noted for being good people and get along

with people. And nobody going to say that the Cuellar brothers did something. But the employers, they come in like this one we hired, came in old broken down cars, and in two or three years they were driving Cadillacs. That go on an, "I want more money and I want more money, more money." Before you know it they are making thirty, thirty-five thousand dollars a year. Okay. And they knew figures, they knew how to do the work, but when it come talking to another person, they didn't use our language. They use a different attitude. They think they were too good. "I can't talk to that guy. I am higher than him." That's no good. The Cuellar brothers never were that way. And we have been told by a lot of people say "You know the Cuellar brothers, we knew them when they were picking cotton. We knew them when they were poor. We knew them later on when they had eight or ten restaurants and now they are big and they are still just the same. They talk the same, they go and shake hands with a dishwasher, and all that." So this guy that worked for us, he wasn't like that. He go in there and, "you want to see me you got to have an appointment. If you don't have an appointment I won't talk to you". The Cuellar brothers says "Let him in I will talk to him. I will talk to anybody." So we started having that friction a little bit. Well, we had our board and we had this banker in there and this fellow that was working for us, the CPA, we put him on the board. Well, one day the banker and him . . .

Jenkins: Were you present at the meeting when he insulted him?

Cuellar: No. No, they did that in private, see. So he says "We don't want to have nothing to do with El Chico." We say "Well look. That guy, we can fire that guy." He says "This is where we quit." Boy, that was rough. That was really rough. Where were we going to get a million and a quarter? We called that guy and told him "You caused us all this trouble." "Oh," he says "Don't worry." At that time he had already been given the title of finance department. He knew where to get the money. "Well," he says "Don't worry about it. I'll get the money. I'll go to New York and get some money." He was a good CPA. He worked for Arthur Young. He went on and couldn't get it and tried another place. And he went to Chicago and couldn't get no money. How do you think we felt? Boy, I am telling you it was rough. "What in the hell are we going to do?" Well, you knew Mr. Morton? He was the founder of Morton's Food. He made millions on top of millions.

Jenkins: Is he still around?

Cuellar: No. He died. But he used to claim that when we started in Kaufman in 1928, he had a little room and he was selling spices. He says "I packed the chili powder and the paprika and everything, and I sold you the first package of chili powder. I packed it myself and delivered it myself and collected myself." That used to be his statement. Then he got to be a big shot.

I think he sold for twenty some-odd million dollars. Anyhow, we were great, great friends and . . .

Jenkins: Now did you say he sold to you in Kaufman or he started in Kaufman?

Cuellar: No, he started in Dallas. He was selling potato chips. That was his business, potato chips. But, then he started selling spices.

Jenkins: And you bought from him in Kaufman.

Cuellar: And he claimed that I bought the first pound of chili powder from him. He says "I packed it and delivered and collected it for myself." And about that time when he made that statement he was already a millionaire. So we put him in our board. He was a good man. I don't know whether I am taking too much time.

Jenkins: Not for me. It is up to you.

Cuellar: Okay. So one day he got in trouble with Frito-Lay. And since we were good friends, he called me up. He says "Frank, to be a good man costs a lot." And I didn't know what he was driving at. I says "What do you mean Mr. Morton?" He says "Well, you're a good man," he says "and it is going to cost you." "What do you want?" He says "I am in trouble." He says "I got a suit from Frito-Lay." He says "The case is going to come up in Denver, Colorado." He says "You're the only man I need. I need for you to be a witness against them." He says "You can do it because

you know the Mexican food and I want you to do me that favor."

I says "For you I will do anything." So did you know that they moved the case from Denver and move it to Kansas City and I was just waiting and it never did come up.

Jenkins: What was the issue? Do you know?

Cuellar: The infringing in something. Do you remember he come out with potato chips and call them Chipo's? They call it Chipo's and the other named Fritos. And they said that Fritos and Chipo's was too close.

Jenkins: Morton's came out with Chipo's.

Cuellar: Yes. He come out with Chipo's. Okay. Before the case come up, people come up here and knock at my door. Asking by law, asking because I was going to be his witness to come, and wanted some statements from me and I didn't feel good at all. I called Mr. Morton. I says "They have been calling me, calling at my office and then come up here and talk to my wife, and everything. They wanted questions about me, personal questions." He says "I'll put a stop to that." So he did. He stopped it. But anyhow I am telling you this story because it is going to come up to what I want to say. So I did him that favor. When this banker got mad, and Mr. Morton was already in our board, when this guy says "I want my money. This is it. I don't want to have nothing to do with El Chico no more." Boy, the first man I called was Mr. Morton. I says "What's that?" I says "To be a good man costs."

He says "Yeah, that's right," I says "I need your help now. We're in big trouble. "What's the trouble?" I says "Ray Pulley is mad. Patterson made him mad and now he is mad at the whole business, and he wants his money." "Oh, no. He can't do that." I says "He's doing it." He says "Well, let me sleep over it, and see what I can do." So the next day he called me. He says "Frank, I got a plan. We are going to try it. If it don't work we will try something else." Because one million and a quarter didn't mean nothing to him. I guess he had it in the back of his mind that he may loan us the money. He say "You call Ray Pulley and tell him that you understand that he is hurt and all of that, and go easy with him. And tell him that you want a twenty minute interview with him. To give you that appointment." He says "Make him give it to you." He says "When you go down there it is going to be your job to plan what to tell him and everything. If you have to kneel down kneel down." He says "But tell him that you don't want to be thrown out without a little time. To give you ninety days" He says "I think in ninety days we get the money, somewhere." Oh, and this came about when I went to see Morton was because the CPA he said he was going to get the money, and he try here and he try there and he couldn't get it. Finally he put his hands up and he says "You'd better try to get some money because I can't. I can't find it." That's when I come up with Morton. Okay.

So the next day when he called me has says "You figure out what you are going to tell him. Tell him to give you ninety days but don't you walk out of that bank without permission from him to give you ninety days." So man, I went to work and I went up there, the minute I walked in I looked at my clock, my watch, because I didn't have but twenty minutes. I started off with him and I says "Look, Ray, I know you are hurt and" I says "I know how you feel." I says "I been insulted myself." I says "But I want you to know that the Cuellar brothers are not that type of people." I says "You going to pay attention to this guy? He ain't nobody." So I says "All I am asking you is for ninety days. I am going to see if I can" Well, to make the story short, we talked back and forth. I convince him. He says "Okay." I look at my watch. Two hours. But I opened the door with ninety days. We are still there. They never closed the door. So that goes in my story.

Jenkins: Did he stay on your board?

Cuellar: Yes. He stayed on our board.

Jenkins: What happened to the CPA?

Cuellar: He had to go over there and apologize to him.

Jenkins: But he stayed with you and learned a little something about dealing with people.

Cuellar: He sure did. Well anyhow, those things happened in our company and that is not easy. Boy, when you are backed up

against the wall you don't know what to do. But that is part of the way you do business. Now here we are. I think right after that we got all the money we needed, and finally Pulley left the bank and they put another man. And every time they put some new one we make friends with him, and boy we can get anything we want from the Republic. Now since we went through this merger, Campbell-Taggart is hooked up with the First National Bank.

Jenkins: Let's go back and work up to this merger and then I am going to look to the future. But let's get into the pizza business and whatever happened up until the merger.

Cuellar: Well, right after that we started to open more restaurants and more and more and more. And just before the merger, about 1975 we had quite a bit of change in our plant. We were running pretty fair, but we had a young lawyer who was our lawyer with the company. He worked for us for about a year, and we were having problems. In business you have problems all the time. You never run smooth. That's part of your job. So one day the lawyer said "You know, I can take that place and really go to town with it." Well, we believed him. "Okay. If you can make it. We are going to let you try." Well, I've always said that a lawyer is a good . . . he knows his law, but he is a poor business man. They don't know business too much. So that is what happened with this guy. He just messed up everything.

Jenkins: What did you make him, president, or what?

Cuellar: We made him vice-president in charge of the operation. He didn't fool no more with the law, with being a lawyer. No, he put in his time in that. And, boy, he messed things up. He changed this and changed that. I remember we bought a machine we paid thirty-two thousand dollars. It never did work and we've got it outside.

Jenkins: What kind of machine? To do what?

Cuellar: To operate, to make tacos. To make taco shells. Thirty-two thousand dollars. Threw it in the back. It was no good. So he stayed for a while and he couldn't make it. But sometimes bad things is for the good. Since we change him, and he failed we didn't go back to what we used to have. We said "Well, we make the change and this man didn't work. Let's try another one." So then at that time we had two good men. One of them was with the sales and the other one with the books. So the one with the sales, he came from Campbell's Soup, a good man. And the other one, he came from W. R. Grace, a big company, a big company. He came from them. W.R. Grace bought Morton's, and he couldn't make no money and they had this guy in there and they change everything and this guy was out of a job. His name was Mickey Rose. So we put him to work. So when this lawyer played out, we said "Well, what are we going to do? We don't want to go back to where we left. We are in

the mood of making changes. Let's keep on." So we didn't know which of the two. They were both good. We didn't know which one to keep. You have to make one, you can't keep them even. One of them has to be on top of the other. So we choose Mickey Rose. A little bitty guy. Jewish. Boy, he was plenty good. And we start going, and after a while we told him "Look, you plenty good but you are going to have to give the guy named Martin," he was still with us, the one that had the sales, "let's turn him loose. Let him be his own boss and let him go, because he always says 'I can do it. Let me worry about myself.'" So we decided to let him do it. We told Mickey, "You handle this other part and let Martin have his own."

Jenkins: The sales?

Cuellar: The sales. Boy, sales went up like this.

Jenkins: Are you talking about manufacturing . . . the plant.

Cuellar: Yeah. The frozen. Boy, it . . . that time when we used to lose five, six thousand, eight thousand a month. This guy got where it started making . . . first he start breaking even, then he made about five thousand, ten thousand, twenty thousand, thirty thousand. I saw him making fifty thousand a month.

Jenkins: Now what year did he start that?

Cuellar: Well, this must have been about . . . I had it in my mind a

while ago. It must have been about 1975.

Jenkins: Are you saying then up until that time you really hadn't made a whole lot of money?

Cuellar: Never. Nothing. I told you a while ago I think for twenty years we lost money.

Jenkins: You really did? For twenty years you actually lost money?

Cuellar: And we didn't close it up because we didn't know how. We couldn't figure out how to close it. You remember I told you a while ago that one time we got to the point that we close it down, and I was the one that told them all I says "Look, put the pencil to it. It is losing money but it is picking up this and this and this of the overhead. When you close it, who is going to pick it? The restaurants are going to, and you ain't going to get well. It still is going to be losing."

Jenkins: So it was '75 until it really took off and started making money. And it was primarily when Martin . . .

Cuellar: Martin. That guy Martin.

Jenkins: Is that his first name or his last name?

Cuellar: That's his last name. So, boy, . . .

Jenkins: What did he do?

Cuellar: He started making some deals on frozen dinners, and he made some deals that we didn't like them.

Jenkins: What kind?

Cuellar: Oh, giving coupons away. Giving this . . . and saying maybe we going to lose money. No, I says "It'll come back." And he made it turn around.

Jenkins: This was primarily promotion to the retail customer then.

Cuellar: Right. Right. He just come out with promotions every month, different ones of this and that and . . .

Jenkins: Made the public conscious of it.

Cuellar: Right. He started opening up new territories and he closed some territories. Some territories he closed them. He says "That's no good. Let's do it this way." Well, so it went on and he just made all kinds of money. Gosh, we couldn't believe it. And naturally this Rose, he also got in there and helped a little bit with production. We made some changes in the production, because when your business goes up your production has got to go up. It is just like a pitcher pitching the ball real hard and the catcher don't catch it, it is too bad. You've got to play together.

Jenkins: So the man that you had originally put in charge of all of it took over the plant operation?

Cuellar: Right. And, of course, just about that time we . . . just about the same time we got a new man. This lawyer hired another guy. But he came in as a . . . What do you call it . . . the guy that analyzes the food . . . it's a kind of a . . .

Jenkins: A nutritionist?

Cuellar: Yeah. He sees that everything is right, and he came from Kraft. And . . .

Jenkins: But you hired him ?

Cuellar: We hired him. And when we knew that he was pretty good, we got him to help this boy run the production. His name is Anderson, Chuck Anderson.

Jenkins: From Kraft.

Cuellar: He came from Kraft. Did you know . . . We stated doing real good. The production . . . they used to produce five hundred cases a day, eight hundred, a thousand, fifteen hundred, two thousand, three thousand. They got where they produced four thousand cases a day of one item, not counting the other items.

Jenkins: What item was that?

Cuellar: The Mexican dinner. The frozen dinner. So this guy learned, he pushed, he fixed the production department and started making enough too for the salesmen to sell it. That's why it was so big, and started making money because the guy sold it and the other guy made it. Okay. This fellow Mickey Rose, he was real good, because he worked hard. Oh, he worked hard.

I could see that he was working hard. And you know what happened? Not too long ago? One evening I was there, and I happened to go . . . you know how our hall is up there . . . I saw him walking. He was walking kind of funny. I says "That guy is tired out, real tired." It was on Thursday. The next day they put in a call and said Mickey had a stroke. Heart attack. He was in bad health. It happened at the doctor's office. He went to see the doctor for a check-up, and you know how they put them to do exercise? The thing hit him, and he says they took him immediately to the hospital, which was about two blocks from the hospital. About an hour later they call again. He died.

Jenkins: That was in '76 or something like that?

Cuellar: No, this has been about a year ago. It was 1977, because I remember when I went to the funeral in Fort Worth, some of the Campbell-Taggart people were already there. It was after September. It hadn't been very long.

Jenkins: You were almost to the merger point at that . . .

Cuellar: Our merger went into effect the 29th of September, and he died a little after that. Maybe October. But anyhow we sure miss him.

Jenkins: Let's go back to about '53 then and talk about some things.

Cuellar: Okay. Well . . . about 1953, since we were starting expanding more and more in the restaurants and when we started the canning business in 1950 we started with a label. And after we . . .

about a year later, 1951, somewhere around there, we started growing more and our lawyer said "You know, we are going to have to register this name, because now in the restaurants and now we coming out in the cans and boy they are going to see that name everywhere and we better register it."

Jenkins: You never had registered it.

Cuellar: Never registered it. So had it in 1940. You know we started in 1940 with El Chico name and we went for about eleven or twelve years or thirteen years without registering. We had a registration in Texas, but the lawyers says "That don't mean nothing." He says "You want a United States register." So when we put the application in, register, you know in Washington, boy, in a little while here come some letters from a guy in New York. He had a place, a little old hole-in-the-wall called El Chico Nightclub or Caberet. And he was more of an entertainer than it was food. Of course, he sold food to his people, but his main business was the entertainment. And so when he saw this in the . . . his lawyer saw this in the Gazette in Washington for registrations, he studied about it and he went and start digging and say "Here, man, look at this guys in Texas. They've got restaurants in Dallas, Shreveport, and this and that." What they were really after, the lawyer told him "You can get some money out of these guys."

Jenkins: Now where was he located with his nightclub?

Cuellar: He was located in New York at the . . . what do they call that location in New York? It's kind of poor people.

Jenkins: Greenwich Village?

Cuellar: Greenwich Village. That's where he was. On Grove Street. Anyhow, boy, each one of the Cuellar brothers got a letter from this guy. Registered letter. "Infringing in my name and you got to stop using the name El Chico." We says "The heck with you. Why will we stop, we haven't violated any laws or anything." And so we had our lawyer and, we had two sets of lawyers here in Dallas. Coke and Coke was one of them and then this other one. We started studying the situation. We told him nothing doing. This is our name, and we had it in 1940. We got state registrations in Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana where we operate, and we are not violating no law. We never heard of you before. So it started getting big and big and big until he told us they were going to take it to court. And, boy, that was . . . it took around six, seven months before it came up in the Federal Court here. Right there at that Post Office downtown? Judge Atwell was the judge at that time. He was an old man.

Jenkins: I remember him.

Cuellar: Okay. He was noted, that any case came before his court, he'd throw some of it out in an hour, thirty minutes. Something like that. You know how long ours went? Three days. That litigation cost us about thirty-five thousand dollars or more, and

a lot of headaches. Oh, we went out and took deposition in Shreveport, in Oklahoma City, in Fort Worth, Dallas, and finally just before . . . before we took it to court, they talked about settling out of the court. And they sent me, and the lawyer. I was running my power of attorney. They gave me, my brothers gave me the power of attorney to do anything I wanted to do up there. Anyhow, when we went to New York to settle, he wanted blood. We couldn't get together. So we had a . . . his lawyer was a big man, a Jewish guy, tough. Tough as a boot. We had our lawyers here and the other one. We had two sets of lawyers, and we had a lawyer from Washington, a very smart man named Brown. So, of course, when you are in court you get tired and you get mad, you know. I remember when he turned us down and he was dirty talking, he wanted blood. I told him I say "We just take it to court." He says "You don't want to settle? We are making you a good proposition, a good fair proposition which you are not entitled to, and if you don't like it we will just go to court." And I says "Whenever we bring it to court, we are going to whip your ears." I was mad, and he was too. He says "Well, we will take it to court." We brought it up here three days. Okay. You know what happened, do you know what the decision of the Judge?

Jenkins: Now this was a Federal Court?

Cuellar: Federal Court. He says "Well, the Cuellar brothers can keep

the name of all the El Chico restaurants, but at the plant, the cans, you cannot use that name no longer." That was hell. Immediately we got to stop sales of the cans. And we were losing money with the dern cans. There we go make some new labels. Call it Cuellar's Canning Company. And we had to do that immediately. After three days of court. I've got the deposition somewhere. Then the lawyer says "We are going to appeal the case. We are going to take it to the Court of Appeals in New Orleans." They have three judges up there. I didn't get to go. I was on stand-by. Our lawyers said "You stand-by. If we need you, you better come right quick." Took it to the Court of Appeals in New Orleans and we won. We won a hundred percent. Got our name back. When the guy come up here I say "You remember, remember when we were in New York and try to settle with you, and you didn't want to and I told you we was going to whip your ears?" That's what happened.

Jenkins: So he didn't get anything then?

Cuellar: Oh, he didn't get nothing, but he made us spend thirty-five thousand dollars. He spent some money, too.

Jenkins: Had you been shipping out with Cuellar Brothers label?

Cuellar: Yeah. There we go back again with the El Chico labels.

Jenkins: Well, did that give you any trouble in marketing?

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: Only to the retail?

Cuellar: It give us some trouble. People say "What are they doing there."

Jenkins: Well, did your sales drop off at that time?

Cuellar: Yes. You see the canning company had all kinds of troubles. But we got it cleared. And now the only trouble that we been having now is stopping other people. Man, there is El Chicos everywhere. Yeah. A lot of trouble. Every time you hear one, you've got to stop them.

Jenkins: So you stay busy constantly . . .

Cuellar: Yes. We keep our lawyers busy all the time.

Jenkins: Stopping other El Chicos.

Cuellar: Yeah. All kinds of, not only restaurants, but garages and this and that. El Chico. So that was a deal that I will never forget if I live for a hundred and fifty years. Been in Federal Court for three days. Golly.

Jenkins: Well were there any other big events like that that we want to record before we get to the merger?

Cuellar: Well, no. After that we keep on going more strong. A lot of people I don't care where we go, they still remember that big fight we had with that guy. And do you know that he went broke?

Cuellar: He went broke and does not even exist no more. He was a Spaniard, the guy that owned it. His name was _____. We used to say Spain and Mexico had a fight one time and the Mexican won, so we did it again.

Jenkins: Well, let's move up toward the merger then. Can you talk about the things that led you to decide to merge?

Cuellar: Well, as we went on all these years expanding, the trend here about the last five or six years, the trend of business is to start merging, merging. Everybody merged. And we used to think "By golly, maybe it would be a great thing for us to merge with a good company." And the reason we start thinking like that was on account of letters. We used to get letters from big companies. Like, do you know this Green Giant? Oh, they tried real hard to . . . This other one, Heinz, Heinz Ketchup, they tried to merge with us. And so we started working. We got one company that, boy, for a while we thought that . . . two good companies. There was so many good companies approaching us for a merger. And we said we been in the restaurant business for so many years we know, that the big companies are getting into the food business. And we used to say that by golly we get hold of a strong arm, then we can turn around and fight other people. And we got so dern many letters inquiring whether we would like to merge. We had some meetings and we said "What kind of companies would we consider a good deal for us?" We said the first thing we want, we want to merge with somebody that we can swap stock so that we don't have . . . it will be tax free. And somebody like one company, a very, very good company, and they want to buy out with cash. In fact, and of course I can call this name because it was in the

papers all over. Everybody knows about it. You know Mr. Herman Lay? He was with the Frito-Lay and with the Pepsi-Co. He wanted to buy us out with cash. Well, we didn't like that deal of cash, cause it all goes in tax. We said we want a good company and we would prefer a food company, and as close as we can to Dallas. And we had one company in Houston, very good company. For awhile we thought we was going to merge with them, but we just couldn't get together. And then another one in Chicago. Good company. Very nice people. They were in the sugar business. And here comes, right here in our backyard, Campbell-Taggart. They say "We want to talk to you."

Jenkins: Is this their home office?

Cuellar: Yeah. Home office. On Lemon Avenue. And so they put the proposition to us and, boy. We knew the people before, but we didn't know that they were interested in a merger. And so everything we talked was in favor. We liked them and they liked us. And then we started working on the trade, how we was going to trade. And we got together on the price, and, by golly, we merged.

Jenkins: What date?

Cuellar: I think it went into effect on the 29th of September, 1977. That's the day it went into effect. And we knew all about them and they knew all about us. You know it was just like getting married. You got to do both sides. So I think we made a great decision. That's one move that we made in all of our fifty

years, that was the biggest move that we ever made. We made some big moves, but that was the biggest one. So they give us a kind of a idea of what they were planning to do if we merged. To expand, which was our language. We always wanted to expand. We wanted to grow. The Cuellar brothers, we all had the ambition of getting big. And the reason why we didn't as I told you before was, financing was our biggest problem. No matter how big you are, there is always need more for more money and more money. And so their thinking was about merging and expand. And in our plant, oh, we had, our thinking with new items. But everytime that you come out with an item, it costs you a lot of money. Man, sometimes you talk, as I said awhile ago, one time we tried to invest a machine and spent over thirty thousand dollars. So when we merged, immediately they start working, and the expansion is just getting in high speed.

Jenkins: Now at the time of the merger, just before you merged, how many restaurants did you have?

Cuellar: Oh, I don't remember right now about how many. But I would say since the merger we have opened about I'd say ten, fifteen. Maybe around seventy. We had about seventy restaurants.

Jenkins: Before the merger.

Cuellar: Before the merger.

Jenkins: And you've opened how many since the merger? Ten or so you say?

Cuellar: Well, about ninety-five I believe right now,
Maybe we had about seventy-five. We opened . . . I noticed
in June we opened four.

Jenkins: Now the merger became effective in . . .

Cuellar: September 29th, 1977.

Jenkins: And in less than a year they have already expanded around
fifteen, you are guessing.

Cuellar: Fifteen restaurants.

Jenkins: How about the manufacturing?

Cuellar: The manufacturing? They come out with pizza.

Jenkins: Tell us the pizza story.

Cuellar: Oh, the pizza, I think, is going to be a great, great deal
because we work some samples of pizza, several samples, and we
picked out the one we thought . . . We got about three, four
different pizzas. Not just one. Three or four different
ones.

Jenkins: Who came up the idea of pizza?

Cuellar: Oh, well, Campbell-Taggart immediately, in conversations, we
talked about what we wanted. And we had a lot of ideas, but
they thought that . . . you see . . . we had been making
burritos and we had been selling flour tortillas, we had that
in line and was going to do it but didn't have the time and
money. Because that line, to make burritos and tortillas . . .
we were making burritos but we were buying the tortillas. We
got flour tortillas . . . we've had the corn tortillas since

'53, but the flour tortillas we just started here about five or six years ago. And we bought them from other companies, because we didn't have the room, we didn't have the machinery to make them. And to make burritos you got to have tortillas. So immediately when Campbell-Taggart got it they said "Well, we can get started right quick." And the same machines that make the pizzas, you know the flour, is the same machines to make tortillas. So that was a good combination.

Jenkins: You didn't have to re-equip, then.

Cuellar: No. That was a good combination of making pizza, and while you had the machinery you could make flour tortillas, then you could make the burritos and a few other items. So immediately they went to work. But, boy, they needed a lot of room. And they changed everything, I'll tell you. You go back in the plant right now and you look like you're in a different plant. And when they tested the market, pizzas went real big. They are putting some more equipment for the pizzas-for the freezing department. Because our freezers, they got all they can take. They can't take anymore. In fact, I think we are talking about adding another freezing machine to make the frozen dinners, because the frozen line is the coming thing.

Jenkins: Now you make the pizzas complete right there in the plant.

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: Cook them, freeze them, all the ingredients right there.

Cuellar: Yes. From scratch.

Jenkins: You told us a story about registering the pizza label which I would like to record.

Cuellar: Well, you know, it pays to . . . the Cuellar brothers, as I said awhile ago, it is so easy to be good. When you are good, everybody is going to like you, and a lot of people might do something for you. And if you are going to be rough with people . . . you can't go and catch a horse by hitting them first. You've got to kind of smooth him out on the nose first, and then catch him. So the Cuellar brothers, and especially myself, that is the way we been treating the people, being nice. You just can't be too nice to anybody, especially business people. And with all our registrations of all the labels, frozen, and the cans and everything, since we are government inspected there is a lot of red tape. And the inspectors come from Washington, some are the local people here, and then they have people from the state. But every now and then you get a group from Washington. They inspect all the plants and see if everything is good. So I always got along with the inspectors. And especially when the local inspector tells me "Well, I've got some visitors here from Washington." Man I give them the red carpet treatment. It don't cost nothing to be nice. And you know you can't take them out to dinner, you can't buy them anything. It is against the law. All you got to do is smile and be good to them. Anyhow, some time ago I had

a group of inspectors, and it was some women in it. And they came over and, naturally, I arranged a visit to me, and I went around just as nice. I am always nice to anybody. So we took them through the plant, then sit down and drink coffee. I really got acquainted with them, especially the ladies. Very nice. They're nice people. So that happened some time ago. But here when they come out with the pizza, they was going to register it. I didn't have no more to do. At one time I used to handle all of that department of the labels. So now somebody else. And this fellow, Chuck Anderson, he was the one working on the labels. So when they got ready to register the pizza, he had trouble with the local inspector. He said "You can't register that. For this and this reason." Showed him the book. He says "Well, I am just going to have to go to Washington," and he went up there to see the head man, and told them . . . I forget what happened. He wasn't in or something. Anyhow, he couldn't get it done. And he said "Well, ain't you got a higher up?" "Oh, yes. Somebody else hired me." "Well, I'll go to him." Went up there and same story. "You can't register that."

Jenkins: What was the issue there?

Cuellar: The trouble was . . . I think they wanted to call it Mexican Pizza. And they said "You can't register Mexican Pizza. It's not made in Mexico. It's made in the United States." So then they changed it to Mexican Style Pizza. But anyhow they wouldn't give them the go ahead. So he says "Well, have you got another

higher-up than you." He says "Yeah." "We want to see the top man." He goes down there and I don't think he could . . . he was out of the office or something happened, but there was some ladies there. It happened to be the same ladies that came over to visit our plant. And at first they told him "No deal. You can't go on with it." And brought out about Frank Cuellar, the Chairman of the Board, and the ladies said "You mean Frank Cuellar, Sr., the man we met up there?" "Yes, that's him." He said "Oh, that guy sure was a nice fellow. Man, they don't make them any nicer." Well, to make the story short, on account of the past, that I was nice to them, they give him the deal.

Jenkins: So you got it registered?

Cuellar: Got it registered.

Jenkins: The way you wanted it.

Cuellar: Yeah. So that was quite a deal for him. That guy, Chuck Anderson, when he come back he says "Mister, you saved the day." I says "Why?" Well he told me the story. He says "What you did and talked nice to those people, they didn't forget it, and they went along with us." I says "Well, I am sure glad." I says "It never fails to be nice to people. You never know when you are going to need a person."

Jenkins: That's right. Cast your bread on the waters.

Cuellar: Yeah. I always got along with inspectors. When they say "I want this." "Yes, sir, we will do it." When you show them that you work with them, then they . . . If you be tough, boy, they

throw the book at you.

Jenkins: Now in the food processing business, there is an inspector there all the time?

Cuellar: Yeah. All the time. We can't operate a day without the inspector there all the time. He has got a pocket here full of cards, black card, tags. When he goes in that plant, if he goes before the opening in the morning, and he examines all the . . . all the machinery, and everything, the floor and everything. If he sees a machine that is not clean, he takes one of those tags and puts it on. And that means you can't touch that machine. You've got to get with him and ask him what's wrong with it, and if he says "Well, you didn't wash it. Wash it again." You better do it. If you don't he ain't going . You cannot operate that machine until you fix what's wrong with it, and bring the inspector, and then he takes the tag off.

Jenkins: Do you get many tags?

Cuellar: No, very seldom unless you got a new man that does the work and he overlooks something. Also in the canning department, you know, we have a room called incubation room. When you run, say, any product that contains meat -say chili. Say you run ten thousand cans. The inspector goes and takes one can out of each retort and he puts it there in the incubation room. That incubation room has got a heater in there with a thermostat, and it stays at 100%. He lets that can stay there for forty-eight hours. If that product is not processed right, in forty-eight

hours the can will swell, and if it swells, he's got the figures of that day, he condemns the whole batch that you fixed that day and you can't sell it.

Jenkins: Now that, then, probably isn't shipped out until after forty-eight hours.

Cuellar: You can't ship it out until after forty-eight hours. Until it has been proved that it has been processed right. So, you know, a lot of people don't like inspectors, but I do. Any kind of inspector. I like them kind because they keep you alert. If you can something wrong, and somebody gets poisoned with it, it could cost you a hundred thousand dollars.

Jenkins: Have you ever had anything called back after it had been shipped out?

Cuellar: Well, we had complaints.

Jenkins: I mean but the government has never recalled anything.

Cuellar: Oh, no. No, no. We comply with the government 100%. And if he makes a mistake, why, then it is gone. If it is anything that don't come up to the par they just . . .

Jenkins: But you have never had anything go bad after it is shipped out so that the government had you call these back in.

Cuellar: We been very, very fortunate that we never had any kind of law suits or anything about our food. We have complaints, sometimes. They complain about things being kind of dry, or they think . . . you know some people they open a can of something, and if he's a person that likes salt, he says "This don't

have . . . you don't put enough salt on it." So maybe one of them thinks that "You got too much salt in it." But complaints like that, yeah, we get them all the time.

Jenkins: But as far as you know, nothing that happened that you didn't know was happening, it all met you standards as it left.

Cuellar: Right.

Jenkins: And these would just be individual differences.

Cuellar: We never caused the inspector . . . of course he inspects only the meat products. The other products like rice or beans . . .

Jenkins: Only meat then?

Cuellar: Only meat, that contains meat, a certain percentage. The percentage on meat is very important, too. You know, say tamales? Chili, or whatever you have, you've got to have a certain percentage of meat. If you don't have that, he ain't going to pass it. You just have to be alert all the time. You've got to know what you are doing because you can sure run into a lot of trouble. And it costs you. If you got something that is not right, it's not going to cost nobody but you.

Jenkins: Let's go back now and talk a little bit about the other kinds of business ventures that you have been involved in in your life-time, in addition to the restaurant business.

Cuellar: In about 1938 my business started really going good, and I started accumulating some cash. And I didn't know what to do with it. I knew that if I left it in the bank it would help the banker but it wouldn't help me, and they pay so little. So

I start buying real estate. First I bought a little duplex, and in those years property was pretty cheap. So I bought one and then . . .

Jenkins: This was in what town?

Cuellar: That was in Shreveport. About a year later I accumulated a little more money, and then I bought another duplex which was much better. And then I bought a piece of property that had a restaurant. I bought it with two intentions. One was to run the place, but I didn't think too much about making money with the restaurant. I thought that I would turn it over and make some profits. All those years I was making those little investments because of money that I didn't use, and so in about 1945, somewhere there, I had the opportunity to buy a good location for a good restaurant. And the property and putting up the building and fixtures and all, I knew I was going to need lots of money, and as I said before, my credit at the banks, they didn't know me and the banks only help you when you are worth a lot. When you've got a good net worth, they loan you money. But if . . . they don't care how much money you are making. As long as you don't have net worth, they won't help you. So when I had the opportunity to buy a good location, the building, the property, the fixtures, I knew it was going to cost me quite a bit of money, but I had saved up this money that I had invested in this real estate. Well, I said, "I am going to sell out and get some money." So I sold the two

duplexes that I bought, and I sold the piece of property where I had the restaurant, and I doubled my money because at that time, you know, the war and inflation was beginning to start. So anyhow, I made some dern good money outside of the restaurant business. I had enough to put in this new place. So then when I came here, . . .

Jenkins: To Dallas?

Cuellar: To Dallas. I invested a lot of that money in restaurants all the time. Every dern restaurant, I would buy as much as I could. But I wanted to make a little money on some other kind of business. So I made one good deal right here at Frisco. I borrowed the money to make the down payment of a place. It was fifty-one acres. It cost me a thousand and fifty dollars an acre.

Jenkins: When was this?

Cuellar: Oh, this must have been in about 1955, maybe in about 1960. Well, I paid a thousand and fifty dollars and a year later the neighbor, next door neighbor, in the back of me, he says "I got forty-four acres I will sell you."

Jenkins: This is farm land you are talking about?

Cuellar: Farm land. But he wanted fifteen hundred dollars an acre. So, I didn't know . . . I thought it was a lot of money, but I thought by getting them both together I would gain somewhere down the line. So I bought it and I paid fifteen hundred dollars an acre. I bought forty-four acres. So forty-four and fifty-one

make ninety-five acres. And had a nice little house, I built a barn, and I put some cattle, and I had a neighbor plow my little acreage that I had in farming. Raised sorghum, some maize, and we had about ten acres of coastal. My interest was eating me up because I borrowed everything to buy it. I was losing around five, six thousand dollars a year. So I didn't know what to do. Here I am playing around and this play is costing me. I tried everything and couldn't make no money. So here comes a guy who wanted to buy it. I sold it to him for two thousand and five hundred dollars an acre.

Jenkins: The whole ninety-five acres?

Cuellar: The whole ninety-five. He made a note of two hundred and six thousand dollars, without any principal. He was going to pay me nothing but interest for ten years. Well to be exact, this is 1978 and it's been nine years ago. Well, that's when it was. '69 and I had it two or three years. Bought it about 1966. And after I make the deal, the interest was going to be between sixteen and seventeen thousand dollars a year worth of interest. And I was losing about six or seven thousand dollars a year so I made the thing turn around. And that's what I have been making for nine years. About seventeen thousand dollars a year. And right after I sold it, I told my sons "You know I stuck that guy. He gave me a good price." He took it, he was some of this bunch from Neiman-Marcus, he took it and he turned around and sold it for . . . I think it was five thousand

dollars an acre. You know what I told my sons? "This guy stuck me. He stole it from me."

Jenkins: What did they want it for to pay that much money?

Cuellar: They could see farther than I could. They knew that it was going to go up. Okay. So they turned around and sold it for that much money, for a big price. And the guy that bought it he turned around and sold it again. And today, I understand, they are asking ten thousand dollars an acre. And I sold it for twenty-five hundred. Okay. So next year, I think it is going to be next year, we are going to start collecting, for ten years, two hundred and six thousand dollars in ten equal payments. That would be how much? About twenty thousand dollars a year plus sixteen thousand worth of interest. I am just trying to show you that I made some money on the side.

Jenkins: You sure did.

Cuellar: The restaurant business is good but you get outside, you can make some money. Some real money. Okay. So this other place that we own in McKinney, we really goofed that time. Paid two hundred and fifty dollars and sold it for eight hundred. Now the thing is eight, nine thousand dollars, ten thousand. So I wish we hadn't sold it. And I just like to play around with something besides our restaurants. Now here about two years ago, maybe not quite two years, I run into a fellow . . . you know I told you about the place we bought in Glen Rose.

Jenkins: You told me in the den but we haven't recorded it.

Cuellar: Okay. We bought a place in Glen Rose, five hundred acres, and it had some exotic animals.

Jenkins: Was this the corporation that bought the , . .

Cuellar: My brothers, me and my brothers.

Jenkins: But not the corporation?

Cuellar: No. No, just individuals. Everyone pitch in their part. Same thing happened. We were losing money, but we turned around and sold it, and we made some profit. That was another deal. And now I got this place in Quitman which is . . . I haven't sold it yet, but one of these days I am going to sell it, and I am going to make some profit. But in . . . about two years ago, since I used to go to Quitman, Mineola nearly every week, sometimes every week, I stop in the Dairy Queen over there in Grand Saline and eat. And the guy that had it had sold it, and he sold it to a Mexican guy. And the first time I stopped in there, I got acquainted with him. "What are you doing?" He says "Well, I bought the place." He says "This is my first venture."

Jenkins: How old was he?

Cuellar: Oh, he is pretty young. He must have been at that time, it must have been about two years ago, three years, he looked to be about twenty-six. A real young twenty-seven. He was the supervisor of the Dairy Queen, and he saw what was going on and that's the reason he bought this one. He says "I can make some money." So he says "You can make money with this Dairy Queen." I says "Well, why don't you buy more?" He says "I ain't got no money."

He says "I'll tell you what I'll do." He says "If you want to go in with me, we go fifty-fifty. You finance them and we make the payments out of the profits, and we go fifty-fifty and I run them." He says "And you don't have to worry about the business. You just come and pick up the check." I says "That's a good deal." Well, we bought two, one in Cedar Hill and we built a new one in Crandall. That's two. Then he come up and says, "I got another one in Ennis. Do you want part?" I says "No. I didn't like the deal." I should have bought it because it is a good place, making good money. Then he keep on buying some. He bought one in Wills Point and one in Edgewood and one in Kaufman, that I didn't get in on it. But then we bought three in Terrell. I didn't get but one-third of it. I couldn't buy the half because we let another guy come in. But then we bought two Dairy Queens in . . . I can't remember the name of the town right here close to Dallas. Anyhow, two Dairy Queens and one Radio Shack. Now we just lease them. And we bought one in Rockwall.

Jenkins: Dairy Queen?

Cuellar: Dairy Queen. So I don't do nothing. He runs them and we are going to make some money.

Jenkins: So you are part owner of how many Dairy Queens?

Cuellar: Well, buildings and all, because we don't operate three of them. We don't operate them. We lease them, but we collect big rent. So anyhow . . .

Jenkins: Do you have interest in how many Dairy Queens?

Cuellar: Eight. And our payment . . . we bought them without money. We just . . . the guy that owned them, he was going to lose them. The bank was going to foreclose them, and he says "I would rather give them to you all that to the bank." And we didn't even pay any equity. He lost everything. We took them over and just assumed the notes.

Jenkins: He just got out from under then?

Cuellar: He lost what he had, his equity. He lost it. He gave it to us. Didn't charge us nothing.

Jenkins: You got him out from under the debt.

Cuellar: Yeah. We got them for the debt. Okay. Our payments are four thousand dollars a month. But we collect forty-seven hundred dollars a month. So we are making the payments. I think we are going to pay them off in seven years, and then are going to be worth more than half a million dollars.

Jenkins: There goes another entrepreneur on his way.

Cuellar: Yeah, and what I am trying to do is kind of learn the business. And I have this in the back of my mind. I feel like that once I learn the business, which I already know pretty good, it don't take much to know the operation. One of these days my sons, I might open up a chain of them, but I am not going to call them Dairy Queens. I am going to call them my own name. I am going to pick up some kind of name. And we can really make some money, for one reason. You know, the people who can see way far can

gain by that. If you can't see no farther than right in front of your face, it is no good. To me I've been in business fifty years. I watch depressions, recessions, and all kinds of business, and I watch very carefully what happens. What companies do recessions effect and what companies don't it effect-the recession. We had a recession . . . here not too long ago in our company and we, instead of losing money we gained. We gained sales and profits during the recession. Why? We had to figure out why. And we find out why. Because there's three classes of business, the low, medium, and high. We in the middle. When the recession gets rough, they come down one step. We'll catch them right there. Okay. So right now what I am thinking, these recessions with this inflation that not even Carter can whip, it's a big problem. Who is going to survive. Labor is high. A restaurant that's got thirty, thirty-five employees is going to be rough. But a little fast food operation that don't have but about three or four employees, is going to make it. And that's what I am thinking about. So in the future if I can get started, and I am learning playing with this Dairy Queens. I think it is a good idea.

Jenkins: Are there other things in addition to the Dairy Queens that you have been fooling with?

Cuellar: Yes. I been playing with stock a little bit. I bought some stock in some companies and some of them I've made money and some of them I lost. But now, what I am doing right now, I'm

investing some in the bonds. I think that is a pretty safe way to do it. Since I have my sons . . . well one son that is not with El Chico anymore, I am his landlord and he is my tenant. He wanted to buy a place in Corsicana. And I buy bargains. I like bargains.

Jenkins: This is a business place that you are talking about?

Cuellar: Yes. It was a restaurant. I bought it . . . half price, it was real cheap. And, of course, I charge him cheap rent. So he is operating this one in Corsicana. Then I had another deal that slipped out of my hands the other day. It was a place in Lakewood.

Jenkins: In Dallas?

Cuellar: In Dallas. A place that was closed, and me and the fellow that wanted to sell it to me, we were only about twenty thousand dollars apart. I should have given him the twenty thousand dollars because, I didn't buy it. And the other guy that bought it he is really mopping up. So I made a mistake there.

Jenkins: What kind of thing was that?

Cuellar: It was a restaurant. Okay. I could have bought it for my son. I could have turned around and leased it to him. Then here comes another deal in Oak Cliff, a restaurant that was closed. I feel like I bought it for half price because it is a nice place, easily worth more than seventy-five thousand dollars. I bought it for thirty-five.

Jenkins: And it was closed at the time?

Cuellar: Yeah, it was closed. And my son took over immediately. In fact he is going to open in about two weeks.

Jenkins: What kind of restaurant will this be?

Cuellar: It was a . . . the old place specialized in French foods. In fact the name of it was the French Colony. And he is taking over that.

Jenkins: And he is going to turn it into what?

Cuellar: He is going to . . . you see, I am coming back to see what's in the future. The Mexican food . . . our success had been Mexican food, but things are changing. There is so dern much Mexican food that, boy, I am telling you there is two Mexican restaurants in every block. And I have been watching, I have been watching the other restaurants, and they are doing all right because they don't have much competition. I have been watching several places that are not selling Mexican food and they are really going to town.

Jenkins: Any particular kind? American food or . . .

Cuellar: American food. I've seen some steak houses doing real well. I've seen some chicken places doing real well. I've seen plain old American food that are selling turnip greens, corn bread . . .

Jenkins: Soul food?

Cuellar: Yes. And they . . . people are hungry for that kind of food because they don't have too many places where you can buy it. Okay. This particular place, taking all of this into consider-

ation, my son is going to try this. He is going to sell soups, salads, sandwiches, hamburgers, maybe one steak, and that's it. Oh, he said he might put tacos and nachos, but it is going to be a small menu.

Jenkins: Will he personally operate that?

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: He will be there himself running that.

Cuellar: Well, he'll be there practically every day, but he will have a manager.

In other words he is trying to do what I did in my lifetime. He says he is going to start a chain. And like I said, I'm the landlord and he . . .

Jenkins: Is that his first one now?

Cuellar: No that's his second one. He got one in Corsicana, and this one. Now. He likes Denton. Well, we already bought the location. I think we got a wonderful location right there close to the college. North Texas. And in fact in the back of the two lots is another street, and it is right across the street from the fraternity house. So that ought to be a good spot. And we were waiting on the plans. We just got them this week, and I think we are going to start pretty soon. In the front he is going to put in a Mexican restaurant. So he is getting a pretty good start.

Jenkins: But in the other part he is going to do the same type of thing . . .

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: Soups, sandwiches and so on.

Cuellar: No. This one in Oak Cliff is the only one. He is going to make a test of selling nothing but sandwiches. Now, the one in Denton, the one in the back, he is going to sell hamburgers and sandwiches and nachos and things like that. But in the front he is going to have a separate building with a different manager. He is going to have Mexican food.

Jenkins: So that will be two separate operations.

Cuellar: Two separate operations, and I think he is going to do some good. Now let me tell you, if somebody reads this story they are going to learn . . . They are going to learn all of my secrets. I wouldn't lease a place for nothing, because if you're worth it and you sign a lease for fifteen years, ten years, twenty years and you hit a blank and don't make money, you are stuck. How can you get out? Okay. That's no good. But when you buy a location, you buy the property. If it doesn't click put it on the market and sell it, get out from under it without any trouble.

Jenkins: What if you lease it and you do click, do you have a problem?

Cuellar: Well, if you lease and you make money, if you are making money it is all right. Problems you can whip.

Jenkins: Well, what I was wondering was that at the end of the lease period, may they . . .

Cuellar: Oh . . .

Jenkins: Dig you a little?

Cuellar: You betcha they will. Looking at it from all viewpoints, there is nothing better than owning. . . It's an old saying in Spanish that if you own the mush pot, if you want to stir with the stick it don't make no difference because it is yours, but when it is somebody else's then you can't do what you want to do. And that's the way I feel about properties. So it seems to me like - I'm going to be seventy-five next December 3rd. I was supposed to retire the first of the year. I don't feel like retiring. I might retire from one kind of a job, but I will jump into another one. There is a lot of different businesses that I believe that I could get in. You see, we have another company. It is called Frank Cuellar and Sons, and we deal in real estate. We got two buildings in Fort Worth, we have one in Shreveport which is a real good building, and then I own half of one in Oak Cliff, a big place, El Chico place.

Jenkins: Are all of your sons involved in this?

Cuellar: Yes. Me and my sons. Okay. There is a lot of things that I would like to get in. I guess it is all right to have ambitions, but sometimes you have too many ambitions, and it might break you. I tell my sons that I wish we could open up a real estate department under Frank Cuellar and Sons. Also an insurance company. I like insurance. Of course I don't know nothing about it, but the way I feel like is . . .that going back to what I did with this guy in Dairy Queens . . . I don't have

to touch them. Let somebody else do the work.

Jenkins: But as an investment.

Cuellar: But as an investment. So, if I could buy or start one, an insurance company. Casualty, you know, where we could insure automobiles, and houses, and everything. I have a friend that, she has got a company, she is getting pretty old and she has got a good company, making good money, and she is thinking about retiring. And I tell my sons "That's a good company to buy. It is already established. We just take over and get a good insurance man to run it for us. We ain't got no time to." I've always said this, if a man expects to be wealthy, to be successful with all the work he can do with his hands, he has got a tough job. It is only a few people can succeed with their self if they have a gift from God. Like for instance, Perry Como. God give him the gift of his voice. Liberace, give him the gift of playing the piano. He don't need nobody to work for him. He makes money. But, I ain't got no gift like that. I got to make mine a different way. I got to get somebody to do it for me. Of course, what I furnish is my experience and also my ideas. I believe ideas is what makes you a success. I heard one time a fellow said "What would you rather have, a million dollars or a good idea?" He says "I'll take the idea." He says "With a good idea I'll make the millions." So I feel like that if you have good ideas, you could succeed in most any kind of business. Because if you look at any.

kind of business, you see somebody making a lot of money and you see a lot of them go broke. The same type of business. Why? Because one of them has got a better method than the other one. And so when I say that I like to invest. Whoever is going to run the business for me, even though he is going to run it, but he is going to use my ideas. This boy that I was talking about the Dairy Queens, he's got a lot of faith in me. He says "With my work and with your ideas," he says "We can go to town."

Jenkins: Apparently you have no intention to retire, as most people look upon retiring.

Cuellar: I don't think I will retire. I would like, like I tell my wife, I want to get somebody here to live with us and watch the place and we can do some traveling. Of course, when I go traveling, don't think I got my eyes closed. I'm watching all the time. Business, I get some ideas. You got to have some ideas. A lot of times I come up with something and they say "Did that come out of your head?" I says "Well, a little bit, "but I saw, I had an idea because I saw somebody, and I just feel like if anybody can do it, I can do it. And a lot of times, you know, that's what they preach about the entrepreneurs. They do things that other people say that can't be done. And it can be done.

Jenkins: Let's look at another area where you have been very busy for a long time. Let's look at the way you have been involved in

civic organizations over the years. Know there are many of them-what are some of the highlights . . .

Cuellar: First let me tell you why I got the idea of doing some civic work. I can't remember the year, but it must have been about . . . because we started in business with the cans in 1950, so it must have been about 1952, about two years after we started. We had the idea of giving the poor people on Christmas something. We come up we organize AMIGO club or something like that, and we had some bent cans and things like that we couldn't use. We add some good ones to it and we started giving to the poor people on Christmas. And before you know the companies heard about it and said "Well, I got something I will give you." And before you know we had ten, fifteen, thirty thousand pounds of food to give away. Companies pitch in. And so about the second year, Eric Jonnson heard about it, and he says "I want to come see you." So he came over to see us and we got all our employees to furnish their time free. Things to give away. And we put about ten or fifteen pounds of food in each sack. Man, we worked from, after working hours, about seven o'clock, till we had our dinner, we worked until about ten o'clock, sacking stuff. And Eric Johnson heard about it and he came over and he helped us fill up the sacks.

Jenkins: Was he mayor at the time?

Cuellar: He was the mayor then. And that's how I got acquainted with him. Okay. Just about that same time I met a man one time,

and he said "You know, I know the Cuellar brothers. They are hard working guys. Wonderful people. You've got a wonderful reputation." Oh, he built me up pretty high. He says "But there is only one thing wrong with you." Boy, when he says "something wrong with you" I says "What have I done?" He says "You don't do no civic work." He says "People like people." I say "You are right." Immediately I says "I better get into something." It happened that about this same time . . .

Jenkins: This is about what year?

Cuellar: Well, it must have been about 1952. Somewhere around there.

Jenkins: Before that you really hadn't ever got into anything.

Cuellar: No. Never did nothing. Just worked. And this guy says, "You are busy making money, but you don't do civic work." It hit me between the eyes. So just about that time Eric Jonnson started this Goals for Dallas, and he wrote me a letter and he says "Frank, I want you to join us. We are going to have a conference in Salado and I want you to . . ."

So I just picked up the phone and I told him I says
"Mr. Jonnson, you ain't going to profit by me because
I don't know how to do nothing." He says "Don't give me
that kind of talk." He says "I want you to join and that's
all." He says "I know. I've been studying you." Okay.
He got me in there, and you know when I joined the Goals
for Dallas, it just opened the doors for me. Before you
know here comes this, here comes the other one, wants
you to be on the board of this and that. I put in six
years in the United Fund, which was wonderful. I joined
the Red Cross, which I am still there in the advisory
board. I am in the Salvation Army, which is a wonderful
organization. I belong in some of these hospitals . . .
some kind of organiza-

tion they got to check all the hospitals. I am in that, They put me on the St. Paul Hospital advisory board. I got in the MESBIC for about . . . I was in the board for about four years, five years.

Jenkins: Now MESBIC is Minority Enterprise Small Business Investment Corporation.

Cuellar: For minority enterprise. I got in the Tri-Racial. That's a pretty good organization, too. And this . . . what do they call it . . . prevention of crime. I belonged to that. In fact I joined a new one, too, lately here the Variety Club. I joined, and today I went to a meeting of the YMCA. Trying to collect money. So I don't know how many things that sometimes I just put in all my time in meetings in this and that.

Jenkins: Now that you're . . . we can only say what you have retired from, we can't say that you have retired, but now that you have retired as chairman of the board of El Chico, do you think you are likely to spend any less time on civic work, or . . .

Cuellar: When organization invites me to join them, I make it pretty clear. I tell them who I am, what little I know, and I say "If you think I can contribute something, I am willing to work, but I don't know too much of anything." I say "I want to be frank with you. You might be wasting your space in there for me." And they all say "We have checked you." I kind of think one reason why I get so many invitations is because I am a minority. And, naturally, they like to have minorities take

part in it. I don't know whether I am right or wrong, but I feel like that is one reason. And since I am pretty well known - oh, I know, I know all the big shots here in Dallas. I didn't tell you about when I was in Shreveport. I put in eleven years from 1937-1948. Put eleven years. Just about the time I moved from there I knew all the people in Shreveport, the mayor, the post master, all the big people, I knew them. When I came to Dallas I told my wife I says "This town is too big for me. I'll never get acquainted. I'll never get acquainted like I did in Shreveport." Well, I started a little at a time, and today I know them all. And the ones I don't know they know me. And I don't know why they all ask me to help them and join them. Of course I do my work.

Jenkins: You had mentioned at one time, I think we were out eating at one of the El Chico's, and we had talked about minorities, and you had expressed how you had felt like you were a minority. Do you remember talking to that and would you be willing to speak to that on record?

Cuellar: Yes. Well, I'll tell you, I'm a minority. I have a lot of calls sometimes from the paper, from the radio. They call me . . . interviews on telephone. And I have been asked several times. They say "We want to talk a little bit about minorities, and you are one of them." He says "Lots of minorities they talk about discrimination. What . . . How do you see it?" I says "I am going to tell you the way I've been." I says "I've never been

discriminated. I've been as low as anybody. One time I went broke and didn't have nothing." And I says "I didn't . . . I never can say that somebody discriminated me because I was a minority." And I says "I just don't have that experience." I said "I believe no matter whether you're black, brown, or white, if you don't respect other people don't expect to be respected. If somebody is either dirty or drunk or something is not right, and you go into a place and they throw you out, I think they do the right thing." I says "No matter about the color or nothing." I says "That's the way I feel." I says "Maybe the other minorities might not like my statement, but that's the way I feel."

Jenkins: But in all the years that you've been working and running businesses and borrowing money and doing all manner of things, apparently, you personally, have never felt that this has been any problem to you, has been an obstacle in any way.

Cuellar: There's a lot of problems sometimes, but up to right now . . . in our business, our work is problems. It's a problem every day of your life.

Jenkins: It had nothing to do with your being a minority.

Cuellar: No. No, sir. That can be to anybody. And I just feel like that if you got a good head you can solve any problem that comes up, because when you talk about problems that's . . . I used to operate a restaurant. I used to open in the morning and close at night. But since 1948 I quit opening the doors in the morning and closing them at night. I got somebody else to do it. And

my kind of job has been problems.

Jenkins: So since '48 you have not been in the kitchen much.

Cuellar: No.

Jenkins: You haven't actually managed an individual . . .

Cuellar: Right. Just . . . delegate.

Jenkins: That gives me a chance to go back and kind of do a little summarizing.

Cuellar: Okay.

Jenkins: We're getting fairly close here. You covered a lot of this, but briefly and as best you can from your recollection, I would like for you to kind of spot over the years. For instance in all of these years from the time oh, let's say the brothers officially got together as a corporation, which was about 1940 I think we said as my best recollection. Can you spot over the years how the number of restaurants has grown up until the day of the merger? You started off with three as I recall.

Cuellar: Well, we started with one.

Jenkins: That was . . . only one.

Cuellar: Oh. Oh, you mean when the brothers together . . .

Jenkins: When everybody really got together.

Cuellar: Well, yes. When we used to be separated, I used to have two restaurants. Myself and the boys, two of my brothers, got together and they owned two, and my brother-in-law owned two, and another brother owned one. But about that time, it must have been about '45, if I remember well. '45 is when we decided to join

forces together, not on the old places, but . . .

Jenkins: The whole thing.

Cuellar: What I mean is at that time they say "Frank, you own two, Luis owns two, Mack and Gilbert own two and let's start here."

Jenkins: And you put it all together.

Cuellar: No. First we said let's get together and pitch in to . . . we start with No. 3, El Chico No. 3. That was in Fort Worth.

Jenkins: That's where joint ownership of the whole thing started.

Cuellar: They say . . . one of them say put me down with five percent, another say put me down with ten percent. I wound up with about thirty some-odd percent. And we knew how much money we needed.

Jenkins: You say you have a list of when each store was added over the years.

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: And we will just put that in with the rest of it.

Cuellar: This list is about three, four years old and it shows just what the dates of the openings of all these places. And with that list you will be able to show exactly how many places we had by 1965, '67, '68 and go down the line.

Jenkins: But just to summarize now. When you really put it all together and incorporated, at that time you had three?

Cuellar: When we incorporated together, it was 1949. That's when I moved in this house. That was the time . . .

Jenkins: '49 when you put it all together then.

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: And you had how many restaurants at that time?

Cuellar: Oh, I don't know how many we had because we operated in Shreveport, Dallas, Waco, Longview, Fort Worth. I'll have to look at that list. But that day, when we incorporated together, we had our CPA that did the figuring for us, and we put all the cafes. El Chico No. 1 is worth so much, No. 2 worth so much, and down the line, and the networth of the whole business was so much. Then we figure out on No. 1, Frank Cuellar own ten percent, Gilbert fifteen, and so down the line. Figure out the percentages and then he figure out exactly what I own in the new company. And at that time I used to own about thirty-five percent of the whole business.

Jenkins: And when the merger came about you are guessing there were about seventy El Chicos.

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: Let's look at . . . can you talk about sales figures?

Cuellar: I have a collection of all my annual statements.

Jenkins: So you are going to make available for us as many annual statements as you can.

Cuellar: Yes. Any copy that I have two of, I can spare one.

Jenkins: But just from memory, for instance, do you have any idea, in 1949, about what the sales of El Chico, the annual sales, were?

Cuellar: No. In what year?

Jenkins: Well, I was just thinking for the record. Do you know off-hand about what sales were at the time of the merger?

Cuellar: About . . . it seems to me like it was . . . I hate to tell you wrong.

Jenkins: Let me ask you this question. Over the years about how many employees would you average per restaurant?

Cuellar: Well, I imagine they average around thirty, because some of them might have twenty-five, some of them thirty-five, forty, fifty. We got one restaurant right now that probably has about sixty employees.

Jenkins: Which one is that?

Cuellar: That's in Houston. That's our biggest place we have. We seat about seven hundred and fifty people. Oh, that's a pretty good story. Pretty good . . . I touch a good point there.

Jenkins: The Houston store?

Cuellar: Yeah.

Jenkins: Okay, let's have it.

Cuellar: We lost money on that thing. Five, six, seven thousand dollars on it.

Jenkins: Now that was opened when?

Cuellar: That's been opened about ten years.

Jenkins: Really. And you lost money on it.

Cuellar: And here in the last six months it took a turn. And I think last month it made fourteen thousand dollars in one month. In four weeks.

Jenkins: And it really had mostly been losing money all that time?

Cuellar: Yeah.

Jenkins: Have you ever just abandoned one because it wouldn't make money, or do you stick in there until it starts making money?

Cuellar: Well, that's what I was saying today about my idea of buying restaurants. The reason we couldn't quit was because we had a fifteen year lease.

Jenkins: Have you ever just closed up one of them?

Cuellar: We have closed some of them . . .

Jenkins: Because it wasn't making money?

Cuellar: It was not making money, and those when we finished the lease. Like we have one right here on Preston Royal. We closed it when the fifteen years was up, and we wasn't losing money. We was breaking even. But we needed the crew, and the landlord wanted to jack up the rent. Told him "no." We moved.

Jenkins: Well, do you always wait until your lease runs out before you close it?

Cuellar: Yes. Yes, that's right.

Jenkins: You just hang right in there then.

Cuellar: Yes. That's right.

Jenkins: Now you have mentioned several times about financing, but just kind of one more time. Have you pretty well borrowed from banks all the way through? Have you always had a bank debt?

Cuellar: Since we were able to borrow money . . .

Jenkins: When you got to where you could borrow.

Cuellar: Yeah. For a long time we couldn't borrow it. They just wouldn't loan it to you. But since they loaned us money we started borrowing.

Jenkins: Always had a bank loan then?

Cuellar: Right. And I feel like that it is wise to borrow money. Because if you are going to wait until you make it, it might be too late. So we borrow money. I borrow money right now. Had a fellow ask me the other day. He says, "On account of the merger and your dividends you are going to make a lot of money. What are you going to do with it?" I says, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do with it. I am going to pay my debts as far as it will reach." Because I owe money. This business of waiting until you make it. I explain to a lot of people . . . you are going to have to excuse my language. My comparisons are pretty rough. I tell people I says "Look, when you go hunting do you have your gun loaded or unloaded?" He says "Oh, I got it loaded." "Why?" "When the animal jump, you got to be ready to shoot. If you are going to go unloaded by the time you put the shell in it, it is gone." That's the same way in business. When the opportunity presents itself you got to be able to grab it. If you don't grab it then if a opportunity comes up and say "Well, I don't have the money right now, and I don't want to borrow it even if I can borrow it." You say "I am going to wait." When the time get ready for you to borrow the money, the opportunity is gone. So you just have to grab the opportunitites when they present themselves.

Jenkins: Bank loans is the primary way that you have financed over the years?

Cuellar: We have borrowed from insurance companies too.

Jenkins: Something that you mentioned about, when you personally started problem solving rather than running any individual thing, leads me to another question. What kind of organization structure developed as the years went by? Now the brothers were in together. Did you start off as president? What kind of organization structure did you have?

Cuellar: No. When we started, I remember when I moved to Dallas. In fact I was looking at the cards the other day and I found one. I was vice-president.

Jenkins: Who was president?

Cuellar: I think Mack, my brother. And later on I got to be president. But I have been chairman of the board for twenty-one years.

Jenkins: So you were president for how long? Do you recall?

Cuellar: Not too long. In 1949, how many years is that? Twenty-nine years ago? Okay. I remember right at the beginning. Well, I was vice-president of El Chico, but I was president of the canning company. At one time we had a separate corporation.

Jenkins: For the canning company.

Cuellar: Yes. We were separate corporation. I was president.

Jenkins: Of that and vice-president of . . .

Cuellar: Vice-president of El Chico.

Jenkins: Did you eventually become president of El Chico?

Cuellar: When later on El Chico bought out the commissary. I mean the canning company.

Jenkins: Which was about what year?

Cuellar: Well, if we started in 1950 it must have been around 1952, '53. Somewhere around there. At that time when we got together then I got to be the president.

Jenkins: Of the whole company.

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: And you were president until you became chairman of the board?

Cuellar: Well let's figure out twenty-one years. What year would that be?

Jenkins: Well, twenty years would be '58 and twenty-one would be '57, I guess.

Cuellar: '57.

Jenkins: '57. You became chairman of the board.

Cuellar: Yeah. Chairman of the board. I think one time when we went public. You see we were a corporation for a long time, but we wasn't public.

Jenkins: Strictly in the family.

Cuellar: Right.

Jenkins: About when did you go public?

Cuellar: When we went public . . . ah, that's a hard question. What year was that? But I'll tell you what happened when I went public. When my brothers start talking about going public, I said "I'll go public with one condition." They said "Well, what is it?" "That I have to be chairman of the board and chief executive officer. If I don't get that title, leave me out." They said "Why?" I says "Because I've got more stock than anybody, and I sure don't want somebody here that don't know too much about the business

being chief executive office. I am not going to go for that. If I want to go public and nobody ain't going to have more stock than I have, I want to be sure that I am calling the shots." And so I was chief executive officer for a long time. And the reason why I am not chief executive officer is because I got kind of tired and I wanted to let Gilbert have a chance. And I told them I says "By my contract nobody can take this title away from me, but I want to change it. I want to let Gilbert try it."

Jenkins: And you did this when?

Cuellar: Oh, this must have been about . . . I don't remember when I changed to . . .

Jenkins: Now you are still officially, until your official retirement, chairman of the board.

Cuellar: Yeah.

Jenkins: Gilbert became president then?

Cuellar: No. It must have been about four or five years that I let Gilbert be chief executive officer.

Jenkins: What was his title?

Cuellar: President and chief executive officer. And I still hold my chairman of the board.

Jenkins: Will you do that even after your seventy-fifth birthday?

Cuellar: No. No. My contract is up to the first of the year. Now what they are going to do, nobody knows. I heard somebody say they might keep you all as consultants or something. And I says

"Well, if there is enough money in it I might consider it."

Jenkins: Over the years then this has been a family business.

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: And "the boys" have been the primary stockholders?

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: And officers.

Cuellar: Right.

Jenkins: What offices have the boys held? Before the merger.

Cuellar: Before the merger he was president and chief executive officer.

Jenkins: And you were chairman of the board.

Cuellar: I was chairman of the board.

Jenkins: And the other boys?

Cuellar: Mack has been vice-president. Willie has been executive vice-president. Oh, Mack is assistant chairman of the board. He is my assistant.

Jenkins: Now, when you went public, did the Cuellar family still retain more than fifty percent of the stock?

Cuellar: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Jenkins: So it remained the chief stock holder.

Cuellar: Even during the merger. We had over fifty percent.

Jenkins: So it was a family business throughout. I always like to ask. How it's been as a family business. Some families can go into business and get along well. Some families can go into business together and can't get along very well.

Cuellar: Okay. That's a very good question. We have been a family company

for many years. I was always against it myself. I didn't like . . . I used to tell the brothers, I says "I like for us to work together, but not because we are brothers. We are going to take advantage of that. Our stockholders don't like that." And I says "We should operate our company in a business way and forget about being brother or brother-in-law or something." I says "That's absolutely no good." I didn't like it. I say "Just because he's my son or my nephew, he is going to come whenever he feels like it." I says "That's no good, because it reflects on your other employees." "Look, president's boy he don't come to work until ten o'clock." So they don't like that. We should work. We should work in a business way. And Campbell-Taggart, boy, they are strong for that. They don't want no family style. It is no good.

Jenkins: But as far as the working arrangement over all these years, has there been an advantage to being close family?

Cuellar: Well, I believe because what I said, I want it for the benefit of somebody that reads this. I wouldn't want to guide them wrong. I think it's bad. It's got some advantages and disadvantages. I am going to talk about the advantages. That family style company is good. The people that are not related to you, just friends, they don't want to work extra time sometimes when you need them. They don't want to put their signature on something because they say "This is not mine. Why should I sign a note here. I am not paying for this bunch." Okay. That's bad. The brothers,

our bunch, we all push together. When things was bad we still keep going. Like, for instance, when our plant was losing money we stayed with it, and we always stuck together. I know a lot of companies that are brothers or family like that and they can't make it. They can't get along. The way we work, we had our meetings, and don't think they were all pleasant. Some of them got pretty rough, when we couldn't come to an agreement. But we would never quit a meeting until we had come to an agreement. And when we walked out of that office where we was meeting, sometimes we would, I guess people would call it arguements, but it was discussions. And we would never quit a meeting without making that decision that we had to come to an agreement. Now some other companies I've heard, they don't do that. They get mad and they stay mad. And, naturally, the brothers, some of them put in a little more than the others, but we got along. And I believe that we put an example to the employees and to the others, because you we got lots of kinfolk in our company.

Jenkins: Oh, have you?

Cuellar: Oh, I am telling you. At one time everybody was employed when we had about eight, ten restaurants. We had lots of kinfolk, until we ran out of kinfolks, and then we start outside. Get more people.

Jenkins: It was even run by kinfolk for a long time. Is that right?

Cuellar: That's right. And when they saw the Cuellar brothers try to get along they kind of follow up the same way. But you don't see too many families act like that. I've seen lots of companies

where they split up. They get mad.

Jenkins: And you say even today there are lots of family in the business.

Cuellar: Oh, yes.

Jenkins: Your boys are all in the business.

Cuellar: Well, except one. The one I am already in business with.

Jenkins: So even though at the moment it's owned by someone else, it's still not only run by but operated by a large number of family.

Cuellar: I feel like that after the first of the year, I don't know what the other brothers intend to do, but I know I'm going. I made my decision that I am going to retire from the company because I've got plenty to do outside. And I know of two more that are. You see, I have been kind of an example to my brothers. Since I was the oldest one, they follow up, even though sometimes they don't want to admit it. But they did follow me because I was the first one started in the business, and then the next one come in, and the next, the next, and so they all join in. If I hadn't got into the restaurant business they probably would be working in a garage, or maybe farming today or I don't know what. And when we got in the business, since I was more successful than the rest of them, and I had a brother one time he asked me, He says "I want to know why, why you are ahead of me? We are brothers. We work together. How come you got ahead of me?" I says "I'll tell you the reason. Because I was married, and you was single. And I put in all my time in work and I try to save. I saved my nickels. I didn't waste anything." I says "You were single. You

play around. You didn't put in enough time in the business."

I says "That's why you got behind." But they don't want to agree sometimes. But they ask me, even when I am making investments "How you come out?" "Well, I came out all right." "Send the man to me." If they see me invest in something they think is good.

Jenkins: Let's see. Let's clear up one or two things here. You indicated that at the time of the merger there were about how many people working for El Chico? Let's say in the plant first.

Cuellar: In the plant there were around eighty people.

Jenkins: And in the restaurants?

Cuellar: In the restaurants, before the merger we probably had around, three thousand.

Jenkins: Have you ever had unions?

Cuellar: They just got the union just before the merger.

Jenkins: Just before. But never before that?

Cuellar: Never.

Jenkins: What was your experience with the union then?

Cuellar: Well, I hear so many people talk bad about the union that I was looking for some trouble. I didn't see no trouble much.

Jenkins: What union came in?

Cuellar: Oh, I can't remember. I did know what it was, but I don't remember right now.

Jenkins: But it was very smooth. No problems.

Cuellar: No. Because . . .

Jenkins: No strikes? No pickets?

Cuellar: No. No problem at all.

Jenkins: Did you resist them at all?

Cuellar: Well, you know, they got so dern many regulations, and we had our lawyer and he told us what to do and what not to do. And of course we stuck to what he recommended.

Jenkins: Just didn't have any problems.

Cuellar: No problems. Because . . . it's just like the guy, the mule threw him off. He says "I was going to get off anyway." So, we were intending to go up just before we knew about the union.

Jenkins: You were intending to go up?

Cuellar: To go up on the salaries. We didn't tell them but we had it planned. We were working on a plan. When the union come in and says "You've got to go up so much." It came right level with what we had in mind.

Jenkins: Now what employees unionized? Both the restaurant and the plant?

Cuellar: No. Only the plant and not all the plant, either. They just, like for instance all the shipping department, they didn't want to join the union. And all the guys that were supervisors of certain sections . . .

Jenkins: Who was it primarily, then, that did join?

Cuellar: They were just the common labor.

Jenkins: I see.

Cuellar: That's the only ones.

Jenkins: You never even had a threat of a union in the restaurants then?
Never even heard anything?

Cuellar: Oh, yes. Yes. But they never could line up the employees.
You see, this is what we have been preaching all the time.
Of all the Mexican restaurants, of course that is our main competitors, we pay higher wages than anybody. We always pay our employees better than any one. We were real nice to our employees. We appreciate our employees. Because I realize when I used to wash dishes, I know how hard it was. And I see a dish washer, I feel sorry for him, and I could do anything for him. So if I had been a person that never did work hard, and I see somebody like that I'd say "That guy don't work. That work is not hard." Hell, I realize how hard it is.

Jenkins: What kinds of things, employee benefits do you provide?

Cuellar: Oh, we have a lot of benefits. We have insurance for them and their families.

Jenkins: Hospitalization, you mean?

Cuellar: Hospitalization, group insurance, we not only take care of them but their families too.

Jenkins: Do you have an employee booklet that describes those?

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: Could we have a copy of that for the record. That would be good.

Cuellar: And also we had profit sharing. We had that. No Campbell-Taggart, they don't have that.

Jenkins: Was this for your managers or for everybody?

Cuellar: For everybody. Everybody after three months of work.

Jenkins: Is that in the restaurants?

Cuellar: In the restaurants and the plant. All the same. One thing we didn't have, but we have the profit sharing. We didn't have a pension. No pension.

Cuellar: So Campbell-Taggart have pension plan, but they don't have the profit sharing. So we just settled, that "if you can't give us profit sharing, give the employees a pension." So now they are under that plan. But we have practically all the benefits that anybody gives.

Jenkins: What has been your experience with O.S.H.A.?

Cuellar: We have no trouble. When it comes to any kind of regulations for the city, for the county, state, federal, we obey 100%. Everything they needed at OSHA we fix it up like they want it. No problem.

Jenkins: Have you ever been fined?

Cuellar: Never.

Jenkins: Have you ever been closed down?

Cuellar: Never.

Jenkins: They have pointed out some things that you needed to correct?

Cuellar: Oh, yes.

Jenkins: But you have never really had any problems with them.

Cuellar: No. I'll tell you a tough deal, who is tough to get along with. And we made it okay. It's the Pure Food and Drug. They tough people.

Jenkins: Are they the main ones that you really have to deal with?

Cuellar: You got to be careful. Oh, the other ones they will tell you you are doing this wrong. You better correct it. Pure Food and Drug don't tell you that. They say "You did this. Here is a fine." They are tough to deal with.

Jenkins: No warning.

Cuellar: No warnings at all.

Jenkins: Have you had any citings by them?

Cuellar: Yeah. We've had a few experiences with them, but we fix it up and we never have been fined. Mostly it's your weights. They really strict on their weights. And also rats or any kind of insects. They are bad about that. And like I said they don't warn you. They just fine you.

Jenkins: How about the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission? Have you had any dealings with them?

Cuellar: Every now and then we have somebody complain about it. But we have never been fined, because we not going to . . . fire somebody because we want to give it to somebody else. No.

Jenkins: But you have Mexican American, you have Black, you have White, you have everything.

Cuellar: We have. We got everything. Jews, we have Italians, we have . . .

Jenkins: American Indians?

Cuellar: Indians? We have Indians. We got everything.

Jenkins: What is your general attitude toward government regulations today?

Cuellar: Well, to me, I think some regulations are good, but a lot of the regulations they just look like they go in there and try to create jobs for somebody. That's the way I feel. They got too much . . . you know, you put a pound of food, and when you put all the regulations that you got to do, it is just too damn much. Long time ago we didn't spend much money for lawyers, for CPAs, and all of that. Today in the office, boy, it is more red tape in the office, but we have to live with it. We can't do without it.

Jenkins: There is one last thing that I think you told me, but at the time of the merger now you had restaurants in how many states?

Cuellar: Let's see. Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas . . . Colorado, Missouri, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, and we just got a new one. I think ten states.

Jenkins: Ten states. How many states do you ship frozen foods to?

Cuellar: That's pretty hard to know.

Jenkins: More than ten then?

Cuellar: Oh, yeah. You see . . .

Jenkins: As far as California?

Cuellar: Let me tell you a little story. The Republic Bank had a guy

named Brown, a very good friend of ours. And they sent him to London. And one day he write us a letter saying "I was so surprised." He says "I went to some kind of store." He says "I found El Chico frozen dinners." In London.

Jenkins: In London.

Cuellar: Yeah. You never know.

Jenkins: You really don't know then.

Cuellar: Don't know where it goes to, because a lot of these companies buy it and resell it. And where they send it we don't know.

Jenkins: You're probably at least all over the United States.

Cuellar: Oh, yeah. We never know. We might have some states, but we used to . . . the ones we have on record about twenty-two, twenty-three, but now . . .

Jenkins: But some of the people who buy ship it and you don't know where it goes.

Cuellar: Let me tell you something about the future. You know Campbell-Taggart has got eighty plants all over the United States. And they got the connections. So when our man, before we merged, when our man go down there and try to sell something like in Illinois, well "Who are you?" It is hard to get in. But Campbell-Taggart, he's got his foot inside. He goes in there he says "Look, buy my bread and I got another deal which you can go in." That's the advantage. That's why I say the next six months El Chico is going to be No. 1. Of course this fellow has got the foot in the door to all these places.

Jenkins: At this time, today, has the frozen food business, dollar-wise, reached what the restaurants do?

Cuellar: Oh, no.

Jenkins: It hasn't got that big yet.

Cuellar: But it is growing pretty fast.

Jenkins: I've covered just about every question that I have on here, but the way I like to end this is always to remind you that this is your story. We want to be sure that you get into it everything that you want. So at this time, if you think of anything that you would like to add to this record I would like for you to do so.

Cuellar: Well, here is what I would like to do. When you get this story are you going to type it?

Jenkins: Yes.

Cuellar: I would like to see it before you put it anywhere.

Jenkins: Oh, you do have that privilege. Yes.

Cuellar: Then between now and then I'm going to put a lot of things down. You know this ought to be in it, and I want to give it to you. Now you had some questions there I told you if you make . . . if I can make notations of answers that I didn't have. I can look them up.

Jenkins: Okay. But at this point you don't have anything that you want to add until you do look over the transcript.

Cuellar: Yes.

Jenkins: Well, at this point then we will close the interview until you have a chance to . . . In fact what we will do at that time if you want to is bring the tape recorder back and add anything that you want to add at that time.

Cuellar: You don't want it in writing. You want my voice.

Jenkins: Well, I would like to have both.