

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDRES DOMINGUEZ

An Oral History Conducted by

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Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Project

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

Claytee D. White
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PREFACE



To sit with Andres Dominguez in his barbershop is to sense both the love he holds for his grandfather Julian Madrid and the passion Andres brings to the art of barbering. Andres enthusiastically remembers hanging out with his maternal grandmother as a youngster in Julian's El Cortez Barber Shop. From 1974 to 2005, Madrid operated the El Cortez Barber Shop.

Flash forward to January 18, 2019 and you find grandson Andres as the proprietor of Speakeasy Barber Shop, tucked on the mezzanine level of the El Cortez Casino and Hotel. The décor reveals a masculine elegance combining artefacts from the grandfather's original barber shop with Andres' personal flair for the modern. He tells the story of a lucky twist of fate that magically introduced him to Kenny Epstein, owner of the El Cortez, resulting in this opportunity.

Andres talks of growing up on Las Vegas's east side, his educational path, and the family's strong Mexican roots. The family history moves from Mexico to New Mexico and eventually to Nevada, where Andres was born in 1992 to Nicole Madrid and Junior Dominguez.

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February 11, 2019

in Las Vegas, Nevada

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My name is Marcela Rodriguez-Campo. Today is February 11th and I am with...

Laurents Banuelos-Benitez.

Barbara Tabach.

Andres Dominguez.

We are at the Speakeasy Barbershop LV in Las Vegas. Do you want to go ahead and spell your name for us so we make sure we get it correct?

Absolutely. Andres, A-N-D-R-E-S. Dominguez, D-O-M-I-N-G-U-E-Z.

Since we're already here, can you tell us a little bit about your barbershop?

Yes, absolutely. We officially opened up to the public last month, so January 8th, 2019; that's when doors were unlocked and opened. A little bit about the barbershop that we do now, it's a true unique timeless experience where you come if you want a true traditional style of service.

We do haircuts, scalp therapy treatment, head massage, hot towel head wraps; that's just for the haircut. And then the shampoo, condition, blow dry and a style comes with every service or haircut that you choose; it doesn't matter. Then going into the shaves, we do hot towel straight razor shaves, and there is a lot that we have to offer that other places say they do, but just don't truly prepare the face like we do here.

If you want that quick in-and-out barbershop, this isn't the place for you. This is the place for people who really want to sit down and take in the environment and treat themselves and kind of take a step back in time. I love to compare it to men at work have a role to play and they're getting paid to play that role, so they have to get the job done. If you're a family man and you're married and your wife needs something done, well, then you do that for the wife. And if the kids come to you with an issue, well, you're dad; you need to step up to the plate and take care of what you need to care of. But when you're here in this barbershop, you get off of your

feet and you completely relax and just vent about whatever it is that may be on your mind. Not only am I barber, I'm kind of like a counselor. That's just what we have to offer here.

Honestly, I can sit here and hammer to you guys all day. You truly won't understand until you come down and get the service for yourself. A lot of guys don't like to pamper themselves. We're in that age where you've got to be a macho man and, no, whatever; you don't do all the extra. But there are guys that love it. Once you do it one time, you're hooked. You'll never want to shave yourself again in your life; you'll want to come to the barbershop. That's really what we do here now. That is what we have set up.

But about the barbershop, as far as the history, is that what you...?

I just wanted to know what it is because I've never been to a barbershop before. I got curly hair. I've never been before. But it seems like from what you've told us already, there is a story within a story within a story.

Yes, there are definitely different layers to what we have going on. I knew from a very, very early age or early on when I started my barber career, as far as going to barber school. In the very beginning...My uncle is a barber at Eastside Cutters, so he was one of the co-owners on Bonanza and Eastern, Eastside Cutters. It is a community barbershop. Everybody goes there, the working class. They go with their kids every two weeks or so. It's a great shop, but you get just a haircut and that's it. I knew I wanted to go a little more luxury. After that I went over to The Art of Shaving in Caesars Palace for a little while and really just soaked up everything like a sponge.

I had a five-year plan to open up my own barbershop that happened in just under three years. Just from me soaking up the information, opportunities kind of presenting itself, and me pushing forward and knocking on those doors, it just happened to lay out, and so here we are today in Speakeasy Barbershop LV inside the El Cortez, 600 East Fremont.

Yes, I took what I loved from The Art of Shaving and that luxury side of barbering and I took what I loved from what I got from Eastside Cutters and I merged them together and I left behind what I didn't like, and this is what came out of it. We've had nothing but positive feedback since we've opened these doors. People told me, "It's going to be a really, really slow start," so I was prepared for that, absolutely. I was prepared to sit here and just look at myself in the mirror and say, "Dang, we've got to get these guys in here and figure out what we need to do." The ball started to roll and the right people were starting to recognize, and we've had nothing but amazing feedback from all the clients that have been here both local and visiting.

When was this barbershop born because your grandfather used to own this barbershop?

Yes. My grandfather was a barber. He got here, to the El Cortez, in 1974. Before me, it was just called the El Cortez Barbershop. Grandpa was a barber at a barbershop called Wonder World Barbershop here in Las Vegas, Nevada. A friend of his was a barber in one of the casinos on the Strip, and I don't want to say because I'm not exactly sure which one. It slips my memory at the moment. He was talking to my grandfather. They were really good friends. He said, "Hey, I can get you a meeting with a gentleman and maybe you can get into the barbershop or open a barbershop at the El Cortez." So he's like, "Okay." So that guy just so happened to be Jackie Gaughan and a gentleman named Tiger, from the story that I'm told.

My grandfather and Jackie Gaughan had no paper contract, had no sit-down, had no nothing. They talked about what he wanted to do. They liked what he wanted to do. It was nothing more than a handshake and a look in the eye and Jackie Gaughan told my grandfather, "Go make a million." My grandfather was here for thirty-two years, from 1974 to 2005.

I know it started downstairs originally. It started downstairs, then, from what I am told, in the eighties they wanted to turn that into a sportsbook area, so they said, “Hey, we’re going to move you upstairs.” My grandfather said, “No problem.” They moved him upstairs.

From the story that I have, Mrs. Gaughan, Jackie Gaughan’s wife, when they were building the new part of the El Cortez, the towers, they stayed on the penthouse up top. Well, the story that I have received is that she didn’t want to walk across the casino floor anymore to get to the beauty salon because they were side by side up here on the second floor of this side, the casino. When that happened they moved the beauty salon to the new part of El Cortez, so she just had to come straight down the elevator and right there was the beauty salon.

When that happened in the early nineties, my uncle, who was a barber here with my grandfather in that time, wanted to move down here to this corner, which is right here on the corner of Fremont and Sixth. From what I’m told, they said, “Well, why do you want to do that? And you’ve got to go talk to Mr. Nolan.” They did. Everything got approved, obviously, because here we are today.

My true, true memory—that’s all stories told to me. I wasn’t even born yet—my true memories start about ’95, maybe a little bit later, because I’m just old enough to really see what’s going on and now I’m starting to get to that age where I need haircuts, four or five years old, whatever. Maybe ’96 or seven, right there in that area, I remember coming up here. Grandpa would pay me, my grandfather Julian would pay me two dollars to cut my hair. I was a great businessman from the jump. No. It was just a great thing for me.

Mom would leave me... To me it felt like all day hanging out with Grandpa and I was so excited. But looking back at it and actually talking to my mom, she is like, “You weren’t there all day. Stop telling people you were. People think I just dumped you over there.” And I laugh

and say, “I was there all day.” She is like, “No, you weren’t. You were there for a few hours, like at the end of his day.”

Grandpa would cut my hair. He used to have a vending machine along the wall here and he would open it up. I remember unlocking it and opening it. He would let me get whatever I wanted. I would always get a candy bar and a Yoo-hoo, always. That was my go-to is candy bars and Yoo-hoos. My job for the rest of the day or however long I was here with him was to sweep the floor up as he cut hair. But at that age, I am so young, did I really clean it? I probably couldn’t even hold the dang broom that well. I really wasn’t cleaning up much. But I remember at that time it was just hanging out with Grandpa; there was nothing there. But looking back at it now and thinking about it, that is truly where the love of barbering for me started because I was in that environment. I remember a gentleman coming in here with suits on, reading the paper, and guys just talking and shooting the shit. Even though at that young age I didn’t know what the heck they were talking about, but I knew and I could see just that wink between men. It was awesome.

At the end of the day when everybody was go, Grandpa Julian would check my work. He was like, “Let me check your work.” Which really meant he would clean the damn barbershop because I wasn’t cleaning too well. He would sweep up and clean everything. We would go out to dinner, him and I, and then he would take me back home. I was the firstborn grandchild, so with that being said, I was super spoiled.

BARBARA: *Where would he take you to dinner?*

No idea. Just probably random little places. That part really didn’t stick out to me so much, like we went to this one restaurant or this McDonald’s, no. It wasn’t so much that. I just always

remember him always taking me out to eat and then he would take me home after. But it was our thing that we did once every three weeks or so.

Where did you live? What neighborhood?

I grew up on the east side of Las Vegas. Where I grew up...My mom and dad split up when I was very, very young, but it was funny because they both lived very close to each other still. My main area was right there on Bonanza and Marion. On the east side of Marion, my mom lived right there, and on the west side of Marion, my dad lived in that neighborhood. I went to Elbert Edwards. I went to Dell H. Robison Middle School. After that I left for a little while to New Mexico, moved back after three years, and then I ended up going to Las Vegas High School, graduated from there.

Then I went to college for a little while because my dad wanted me to. I really did that thing where you kind of fall into doing what your parents want you to do just to make them happy. I remember actually saying, "I want to be a barber." And my dad was like, "No. You're my firstborn son. You're going to college. We're going to make it happen. You're going to be the first one in our family to get a degree." I was seventeen years old when I graduated in 2010, so I shut up and just did what Dad said. I had so much pressure on me as far as the family.

I have younger brothers and sisters. My mom has my sister, Celeste, and my two brothers, Roberto and Christian. My dad has my two sisters, Vanessa and Isabelle. I am the oldest, so they're all looking up to me. I shut up and I do what my parents wanted me to do.

At that time I was a wrestler in high school, so I was in great shape. I was doing jiu-jitsu. The only reason I throw that little piece in there about being in great shape is because when I went to college, I just went to CSN. It wasn't a big university, just a community college. It was like go to class or go hang out with all these girls who just invited me to go to the lake. I was a

horrible student. My heart just wasn't in it. I was a young seventeen-year-old kid that just did not like school. It just wasn't for me. And when I did try and I'd try to focus on books and study and study and study, whenever the professors would make the tests bigger than the actual during the year or semester or whatever grade, those would kill me every time, which only frustrated me more, which only made me rebel against college even more. I was not the school guy. Tests would kill me.

I pulled away from that. Finally I told my dad, "Look, I'm wasting your money and I'm wasting time. I'm just going to get a job." I got a couple of dead-end jobs, just doing retail stores and shops and just different stuff throughout the valley. Then I get a job in the school district at the food service warehouse. I was running forklift operations and I was doing pallet jacks and all these machines in the warehouse and that was okay for like a year or so. That was only part-time, though, as far as on the books go, and then I did half school district, half Manpower, which is a temp agency, because they liked how I worked, but they didn't have a full-time position, so that was the get-around to do it. It was okay. I made a lot of great connections there, people that I still talk to to this day. It was okay.

Then an opening for a full-time position in gardening opened up. My dad, already being in the school district, taught me what I needed to know. Then I went and applied and I was able to get by. I got hired. Six months into doing that, a day before my probation was up, believe it or not—rewind a little bit. A gentleman at one of the high schools I was gardening at came up to me very aggressively thinking I was this young, just Hispanic kid who was going to shut his mouth or whatever. Not my personality. He walks up to me and the first thing he does is just talk straight Spanish to me, assuming that I don't know English because I'm a gardener. I stop and I look at him and I said, "You're talking to me?" And he is like, "Yes, yes."

He had this bully reputation at this school. I won't say what school or who he was, but he had a bully reputation where people kind of bowed down to this guy. I am nineteen years old or so, twenty years old; right in the range. I'm like, you ain't talking to me crazy. We have a discussion. Fast forward a couple of weeks. He did everything he could to try to get me in trouble because he knew that I was still on my probation. Every time he tried to get me in trouble, I would have to call a union rep and ESEA and everybody and we would beat him because everything I did was by the book or in the right. He would just think he knew and he really didn't know.

We moved forward until the day that I did get caught. What happened was it was summertime, school was out, no students, nobody. A cousin of mine says, "Hey, I just had a job interview, but my dad can't come pick me up yet. Can you pick me up on your lunch break?" I said, "Absolutely." I went on my lunch break, I picked him up, and I brought him back to the school with me to give his dad time to come pick him up. Well, they saw him hanging out with me and because I had a non-school district employee with me in one of the portable things, that's the reason they let me go. My dad was so upset about it. I remember it was the day before my six-month probation was done, so all they needed to do was say, "Hey, we no longer need you." It was just that simple. My dad was more torn up.

Could we pause a little bit? You started talking about your Hispanic identity. Your grandfather is from New Mexico, right?

My grandfather is from New Mexico from a small town named Chama. It is super little. Chama, New Mexico, all norther New Mexico where all the four corners. I have family from Chama, Coyote, Farmington, Albuquerque; all those towns.

Could you tell me more about your family? How long has your family been in the U.S.?

Well, this is the thing. People from New Mexico will never admit that they're Mexican. They don't say that they're Mexican. They actually say that they're Spanish. If you actually call somebody out in New Mexico Mexican who doesn't identify as that they get super offended. "We're Spanish." Right down to my family. Grandpa didn't care; he said he was Mexican. But others in my family directly linked to me, aunts and uncles, if I told them, "No, you're Mexican. New Mexico used to be part of Mexico," and go through this whole argument with them, they would give me so much pushback.

I say I'm Mexican because I am. My grandmother on my dad's side was from Mexico. From my understanding, she was from Mexico and my grandfather on my dad's side, Floyd, he was from California. He passed away when my dad was only three years old. My dad didn't know him and I obviously don't know him. I only got bits and pieces of that side of my family as well. My history is a huge puzzle even to me, to be one hundred percent honest with you.

As far as on my mom's side, saying how far back were they in the States, I really don't know because as far back as I know they are all from New Mexico and I don't know how far back that goes. I can only speak up until my great-grandmother who I was fortunate enough to actually know and be a part of her life up until the point where she finally did get to the age where she was really sick and everything else. That is as far back as I can speak on. Before that I really don't know. My grandmother's parents are from New Mexico as well, but before them, like their parents and grandparents, I don't know.

You talked about your grandfather identifying as Mexican. Did you grow up with Mexican traditions?

Yes, absolutely. There is always two parts to my story because it's my mom and my dad and they weren't together, but they were both heavily involved. My issue was I wasn't not loved; I

was loved a lot. Does that make sense? I don't fall into that circle of mom didn't want me or dad didn't want me. Actually, the majority of the fights was because they both wanted me. A lot of my history is on both sides.

To answer that question, as far as Dad's side goes, Grandma was Mexican. She would yell at me in Spanish and I would respond in English. It was just the thing. Believe it or not, when I was a kid, I didn't want to learn Spanish. I actually was like, "No, no, no, no, I don't want to know it. Just talk to me..." I would understand it because Grandma only spoke to me—well, not only—but Grandma spoke to me a lot, my Grandmother Martha, she spoke to me a lot in Spanish and I would respond in English. But she was fluent in English, too, so she would talk to me in English, but she would talk to me in Spanish to force me to understand it, but I would respond in English. I can understand Spanish a lot better than I can actually speak it even to this day. People who are either from Mexico or have a deeper tie with the language, when I speak to them, it never fails, they always tell me: "You know what? You don't speak it right, but we know exactly what you're trying to say. You're saying it good enough to where we can have a conversation, but you're messing some things up to where we realize it's not your first language." My following joke every time behind that is, "As long as it can me a *burrito de carne asada* and a Tecate, it's okay." Just to add a little funny joke behind that.

I actually get a lot of compliments from older generations saying how our generation, we're fading out in the Spanish language. They complement me, "Yes, even though you're not speaking it perfectly, you have no problem engaging in Spanish." And I'm a talker, as you guys can tell. When Laurents called me for the interview, I'm like, "Absolutely, let's do it." I love to talk and I can shoot it with anybody from all ages, from the oldest guy down to the young guy, which is something that people gravitate to and catch that about me without me even trying to do

that. That's just my personality whether it's English, Spanish. My newest, because I do have a lot of tourist clients who come in that are staying in the rooms and they come get a haircut, I am like charades, but I'll still talk to them. They expect just to sit there and give me an idea of what they want and people don't try to talk to them. Not me. I'm trying to figure it out. I even downloaded the translator on my phone, so I'll type something in English and...Again, the translator is still a machine. It is still technology. It's not going to be perfect and relay it the way I wanted to say it, but they can read it and be like, oh. It's pretty cool. I've had clients where we literally sit there and in between cutting their hair, we have a full conversation through texts of translating it for us.

One of my funniest stories: a guy—I forget what language he was speaking—we had a conversation that way. Because I did that and it made him feel so welcome, even though it took extra time and extra step and extra effort, he brought three of his buddies to me before he left for them to get services with me just because I made him feel that comfortable. That's what I love about being a barber is not only do I hear a lot of stories and get to make you look good—because I truly believe without a good haircut and good shoes, your whole outfit is off. But more than that is just connecting with human beings on a human level. I think one of our biggest issues that's happening right now in the world is when we don't understand something, we deem it bad. If we don't understand a culture, if we don't understand why they do something a certain way, automatic, oh no, that's crazy; they're weird. I'm the complete opposite. I will try everything twice, as far as food goes and stuff like that. People laugh at me all the time and say, “Why twice? If you tried it once and you hate it, why would you try it a second time?” Because somebody else might cook the same exact meal differently and it might taste different. I think that's our biggest issue amongst each other and I feel like our generation—I'm twenty-six years

old. I'm very young, but I was always raised with older people, so I feel like my conversations and things that interest me are a lot different than the people my age. Looking back at just our age and our generation, I think that one of the biggest things we miss out on is just we're ignorant to others around us instead of trying to understand each other. It's different; we cut it out and it's done.

Could you tell me more about why you didn't want to learn Spanish?

I don't know. It wasn't something that I was forced. My Grandmother Martha, I call her Nana. My Nana forced it on me a little bit because she knew it was good for me. I have no real reason. I went to school; it was all English. My dad spoke perfect English. He was born in California. My dad was from here. I didn't want to learn it just because I was being young and dumb.

I'll actually tell you a really cool story of why I actually started to learn Spanish. My grandpa and my grandma lived in North Las Vega on Civic Center and Cheyanne area on a street called Dogwood. I went to an elementary school for a little while called Marion Cahlan. At that time of us—well, you too—of us being in school, we truly got to see that era and that time frame of only English being in establishments to starting to shift to where Spanish started to take over. I don't know why I was in the office; I think I walked into school late and when you're late you have to check in. I walked into school late, I think, and there was a lady there talking to the lady at the front desk trying to tell her that her daughter's name is such-and-such and she needs to pull her out of school early, in Spanish. The lady at the desk did not understand what she was saying. I could see that the lady was very, very, very frustrated. I saw this lady was struggling. At this point I knew enough Spanish because Grandma would talk to me in Spanish so much, my Nana.

I went over, me being nosy and the talkative kid that I am to this day, I went over and I said: "*¿Cómo te puedo ayudar?*" [How can I help you?] And she told me and I translated for

her. It was like a weight just lifted off of her. I was a young kid. It wasn't that big of an impact. Now that I think about it, I'm like, that's really cool. I felt amazing being able to help this woman who was struggling to do something as simple as get her child out of school early and explain, I'm her mother; this is my daughter. I did that and after that I felt so good. I remember going home and I talked about it forever. That was my dad's side.

On my mom's side, my mother ended up getting married when I was young to a gentleman from Mexico. When I say from Mexico, I mean legit from Mexico, only knew Spanish.

Do you know what part?

No, but I can get it for you guys. Only knew Spanish. Actually, the story that I hear is that he and my mother actually met at a dance, so they didn't even talk for the first couple of hours; all they did was dance. Then when they finally went to have a conversation, my mom didn't know Spanish, really, and he didn't know English. I don't know how, but they still ended up talking. I guess my mom would carry a little English-Spanish dictionary because they weren't as blessed as we are today to have it on their phone as an app. Growing up, he would say simple words, like napkin, cup; stuff like that. I was so young when they met that I was in that early stage of napkin, cup; stuff like that. When I say bottle or cup, I would say it in English and he would say it in Spanish and we almost helped each other. Then it kind of twisted into this whole thing that I had with my Nana where he would talk to me in Spanish and I would respond in English, but we understood each other perfectly. Even then I still didn't want to really learn it, so that was even before I was in elementary school, honestly.

Fast forward, this happened in elementary school. Fast forward, now I'm engaging more and trying to learn it, but I struggle with it because I know street Spanish. If you speak any

language, which obviously you're going to, there are always two forms. There is going to be the right way you speak it and then the way everybody in the world speaks it. It was the same thing. There was actually a couple of times where I was talking to people and they take a step back because things I would say, I wouldn't mean for it to sound a certain way, but I only knew street Spanish. I only knew slang Spanish. I only knew certain things. I would say it meaning one thing, and they would take it in as what it really meant, and so that was a little learning curve for me, too, because these guys were straight—he was from Mexico, him. He came over here. I learned his side of the pueblo Spanish. That was pretty cool, too. Now I learned a little better what to and not to say in certain ways.

Do you know what brought your Grandpa Julian from New Mexico to Las Vegas?

I don't know why they picked Las Vegas. I do know he graduated high school and he went into the army. He was 101st Airborne, what they call, Screaming Eagle. He was the guy that jumped out of airplanes with parachutes and stuff like that. I think it was 101st, if I'm not mistaken. Even that he never really even talked about. I'll get into that too, though. He got out of the army after he served his time, went back to Chama—actually, Los Ojos, which is another small town next to Chama, asked for my grandmother's hand in marriage because she wanted to move. I guess my grandma's dad said the only way she's leaving with you is if you guys get married. They were young. They were eighteen, nineteen years old. They were super young. I don't know exactly how that age group goes. But they had known each other since my grandma was—I think that my grandma was seventeen when they got married because my grandfather was older. I think my grandfather was either nineteen or early twenties. I don't know the exact numbers. I can also get that information for you, too, if you need it.

Anyway, he said, "Deal." They got married and then they moved out here to Las Vegas. Why Las Vegas? I never really dug. I just knew we were in Las Vegas.

Could you share a little bit more about his military service?

Just on his personality. He was the kind of guy where he didn't really talk a lot. He had three tattoos on his arm: One on the top left, one on his forearm, and then one on the right side. He never talked about them. I would ask, "What did you do in the army? What did you do this? What did you do that?" He would act like he didn't hear me. I'm like, I know you hear me; I'm right next to you. He wouldn't respond to the day he passed away.

Actually, growing up, he would get mad at me because he saw my fascination with tattoos and he would tell me, "I never want to see you mark your body like that." And blah, blah, blah. After he passed away my uncle told me why. Because at that age being a young Latino guy having tattoos, people automatically associated that when he left he went to prison. He didn't. He went to serve. His tattoos were actually the eagle and other stuff involved with military, but people didn't see that. They saw a young Latino guy with tattoos and automatically assumed that he got them in prison. That's what my uncle told me, so that's not from my grandfather's mouth directly. I love tattoos still to this day. He passed away and then I got my first tattoo. He wasn't alive when I got my first tattoo, so he never saw that.

But I was just speaking on the part that even something like that he wasn't a talker. He didn't go and tell stories. I think that's why in the era that he was here as a barber it worked out so great because when he was here in 1974, I remember seeing guys coming in here in suits. In your mind, you automatically go to lawyers, attorneys, professionals. In that era they may not have been, especially having connections with Jackie Gaughan and I heard this gentleman Tiger was definitely known. Where we're at right now in this casino on this side is the original part.

All the mob guys stayed in these hotels. Rumor has it—and I don't have no way to verify or check this out—but rumor has it that one of the mob's guy's office was the one across from us here. This hotel room was one of the mob guy's offices. Also, one of the body guards had a room at the other end. This was the area where stuff was happening. People who knew my grandfather who are that age and generation that I've come across have even said, "We know that your grandpa was never in the mob, but he was highly respected by those who were." I don't know what that means. I don't know exactly how deep that goes or what that means. I can only assume that they respected him so much because they could come here and speak freely and not worry about Grandpa turning around and telling stories. That's what I can take from it. Now, if that's true, I don't know, but it definitely matches up with Grandpa's personality.

And it agrees with that Las Vegas code that existed and especially in the community here in this area, this neighborhood.

Exactly. Even though it wasn't said directly, it just makes sense to me. I don't know.

Did you ever meet Jackie Gaughan?

No.

How about Michael Gaughan?

I don't believe so, no. I've just heard stories. The person who would have met them was more so my mom. My mom has stories of when she was a little girl. She used to sit in here with Grandpa. She said, "Man, I would be bored out of my mind." At that point you're just sitting with your dad. It's not fun. It's not cool.

A story that she told me, though, that kind of really stuck out to me was she would be bored and at the other end of the casino was Thrifty's Ice Cream or some kind of ice cream store at that time. She would say, "Dad, can I go get an ice cream?" And he would be like, "Nicole,

you're going to go straight there and straight back. Do not stop and do not talk to anybody." She was young. "Okay." She would go, walk down the stairs, head that way. She said, "At the time I never knew why he did this, but it always happened and I didn't think of it until when I just got older." The bellman up front had a straight shot to the staircase. He would look over, see my mom, and say, "Nicole, where are you going?" She said, "I'm getting an ice cream." "Well, come on, sweetheart. Can I come with you?" And walk with her and then get her ice cream and walk her all the way back to the stairs and then up. Then she would tell Grandpa, "Yes, such-and-such..." Because she knew him by name because at this point she was coming often enough. "Such-and-such walked me to get me an ice cream." Her dad would say, "I told you not to talk to nobody." "Well, he talked to me." What was happening was Grandpa was calling down and saying, "Hey, my baby girl is going down there. Can you please keep an eye?" So she felt like a big girl, but every step she took was being watched by the casino family.

That's brilliant. That's a great Las Vegas story, too. That's great. We don't get to hear those kinds of perspectives very often.

There is also another story she would tell me. I don't remember if she knows the gentleman's name. But she said he would always come in sharp every time, to the tee. Never knew what he did. Never asked. Never questioned. But every time he came up here and my mom was here, she said that he would go downstairs and get a little bag full of quarters and say, "Here you go, baby girl," and give her quarters. At that time it was all quarter machines. I don't if he worked here. I don't know who he was. But she distinctly remembers that and so those two stories are what sticks to her.

As a matter of fact, when Mom came up here to see when I started redoing everything in here, we walked the casino floor and she just busted out, tears in her eyes, just because she was

like, “I remember...” Just remembering her dad and remembering the stories and walking these same grounds.

When my mom got old enough, she was the change girl here. When she became of age, she was the change girl downstairs. I just found out with all this happening that my aunt, who was Paul Madrid’s wife, Laura Madrid, used to work here as well and run the keno section back when keno was still big here. At one point my family was all here, part of the El Cortez family, and they all have their stories.

We could interview everyone in your family. This is great.

Just to come full circle and how we got to me getting here, fast forward. Grandpa retires in 2005. My uncle was here early on with Grandpa from ’93 to about—

Your uncle’s name is?

Paul Madrid. I think from ’93 to ’96 or seven. Then my uncle left here because he bought in and now he is co-owner of Eastside Cutters, so that’s when that transition happened. He left Grandpa here cutting by himself until about 2005. He retired and sold the business to Ernesto who is also from New Mexico. That was their link. They knew each other. They were buddies. Ernesto came and took it over for about nineteen years and then retires; I’m not sure why. A gentleman went to Eastside Cutters because Ernesto sent him over there, saying, “Go see these guys. I’m retired.”

When he retired, Uncle tells me. I say, “Okay. Can you please get Ernesto’s number?” At this point I don’t know if he’s fully out or if he’s still here, but just cleaning out now. I don’t know. I’m like, “Can you please get his number?” He does a couple of phone calls. We can’t find Ernesto’s number. My stomach is just turning now at this point because I’m a guy that when opportunity is there, I push, push, push, push; I can’t sit back. My uncle is the complete opposite. He is so calm and relaxed and reserved for everything. He reminds me a lot of my grandpa in

that sense. I'm like, "You know what? I'm just going down there. I'm just going down there and we're going to see what happens."

Now, it was such a big thing that I can tell you what I was wearing. I was wearing my Golden Knights backwards hat. I was wearing a T-shirt, just a regular black T-shirt, dark denim jeans, and my black-white engraved Jordans. That was in November of 2018. I came in here a young punk, backwards hat. Now, mind you, I've already worked at Art of Shaving. I've already worked at Eastside Cutters. I know how to dress for certain things and whatever, but it was my day off. I was just like, I'm going to go.

I get down here with nothing more than the intention of getting a number off of the door. I said, "What I'm going to do is call that number. Share that I'm interested in the space and then go from there." Well, I get up here and I see the place is completely gutted and there is no number on the door. So I'm like, man, what the heck am I going to do here? I said, "Okay, I'm going to go talk to security." I don't know who to talk to. That is just the first thing that popped into my head. I'm like, they can at least point me in the right direction.

I went downstairs by the craps tables and the blackjack tables and there is a security stand. I said, "Hey, I'm interested in the barbershop upstairs. Who do I need to talk to?" They said, "Oh, well, not us. Let me get you my supervisor." I said, "Absolutely. Thank you."

I wait for him. He shows up. "How can I help you?" I tell him. "No, not us. Go to the lobby." Okay.

I go to the lobby. "This is what I'm looking for." "No, not us. Talk to our manager." I get pushed to this gentleman named Tim Wajoski. He is, I believe, the slot manager for the floor. He is above the floor. He is like, "Come into my office." We sit down. Mind you, just him taking time out of his day to talk to me, I was already like, heck yes, I'm on the right track. The least I

could do was remove my backwards hat. I remove my hat. My hair is looking crazy. I sit down with him. He says, “How can I help you today?” Super friendly and open, “How can I help you today?” I said, “Well, I’m looking to get information on that barbershop upstairs.” He says, “You are? Well, how come?” I said, “Well, I’m a barber, so I’m interested in it.” And he is like, “Well, why are you interested in that barbershop?” And I said, “I’m a registered barber here in Nevada for the last three years. I’m cutting out of here and here. My grandfather used to run that barbershop.” He says, “He did? Who is your grandpa?” I said, “Julian Madrid.” He said, “Who?” I said, “Julian Madrid.” He said, “Julian, huh? Hold on one second.”

He stops our conversation and picks up the phone. In the conversation that he had on the phone he said, “Hey, do you remember Julian? Yes, yes, yes, the barber.” So I know whoever is on the other end knows because he said, “Yes, yes, yes, the barber.” So the other guy must have already remembered. “I have a kid here”—like that—“I have a young kid here claiming to be Julian’s grandson.” I’m thinking to myself, what do you mean claiming? That’s my grandfather. Who is going to come in here and claim that? He is like, “Yes, yes, yes. Yes. Uh-huh. All right. All right. Bye.” And he hangs up.

He looks over at me and says, “What’s your name, guy?” I said, “Andres,” which I already told him, but now he’s listening. “What’s your name, guy?” He says, “Well, come on. We’re going to meet the boss.” I said, “Okay.”

I’m thinking I’ve already gone through four different stops. The boss is probably the next manager right above him. He says, “Come on.” He takes me to the spiral staircase. He says, “Walk up this staircase. When you get to the top, go to your left. The first door on your left-hand side, you’re going to walk in.” I said, “All right.”

Me, with full confidence because this is who I am, personality, I walk in. I keep my hat off. I don't put it back on. It's the least I can do. I'm wearing a black T-shirt, dark denim jeans and Jordans and a flat bill hat.

A gentleman comes out. He has his hair combed back just like my grandpa used to. He has the style just like my grandpa did. He doesn't look like my grandpa, but just the style. He says, "Hello." I said, "Hello. How are you doing, sir?" He said, "Who are you?" Just like that. I said, "Well, sir, my name is Andres Dominguez. I'm the grandson of Julian Madrid. Julian was the barb—" And he cuts me off. He says, "Young man, you don't need to tell me who Julian was. I know Julian." And I said, "You do?" He said, "Yes. You don't need to explain to me. I know who Julian is." I said, "Oh, so you knew my grandpa." Which naturally whenever I meet somebody who knew my grandfather, it brings a little joy to me and I want to hear more stories. He says, "Yes, I got here..." If I'm not mistaken, he told me he arrived in this circle about '75. He doesn't tell me his name, though. He just tells me that Grandpa used to cut his hair for a very, very long time. I'm like, "Wow, that's really cool to here."

Another gentleman comes walking out the back and says, "Hey, I overheard you. You're Julian's grandson? Nice to meet you." I said, "How are you doing, sir?" And I told him my name. He is like, "Man, that's really cool. Your grandfather used to cut my hair. I remember Julian. He was a really good guy. Is he still around?" I said, "No, he passed away in 2010." He said, "I was wondering why we haven't heard from him." They remembered.

The very first guy that I met—I'm going to tell you names, but not yet—the very first guy that I met picks up the phone and says, "Hey, we're going to have a meeting here. Can you please get here as soon as you can?"

The third gentleman comes walking in, suited up, and definitely is in the role and image of a professional. This guy doesn't know my grandfather, but he meets me. The guy looks at me and says, "Are you ready to have this meeting?"

Mind you—let me take you back because I don't want you to miss the point—I wasn't ready. I came to get a phone number off of the door. When this happened I'm thinking in my head, man, this is somebody because he just picked up the phone and guys came in within what seemed like under five minutes.

Come to find out, the guy who I originally met who cut me off and said, "You don't need to explain to me who Julian is; I know Julian," was Kenny Epstein, the now owner of El Cortez. When he said, "You're going to meet the boss," he meant you're meeting *the* boss.

I knew who you were describing because that's the way he talks to everybody.

Absolutely. We sit down and they say, "All right, you're interested in the barbershop, huh?" He said, "So you're a barber?" I said, "Yes, sir, I've been a barber the last going on three years. I'm over here at my uncle's..."

We go into this office, which you might have been up there. Have you been in the executive suites?

I have been there, yes.

When you walk in it is like walking into an old mob movie because it is, honestly, a long open room that breaks off into two more rooms that those two rooms are connected and nothing is up to date. Nothing is up to date. When you first walk in and look to the right, there is a display case filled with all memorabilia of El Cortez, Jackie Gaughan, so that's really cool. But nothing fancy. Nothing you would think you would see in an executive office of a main casino. That alone, I was like, man.

But anyway, in my head now I'm like, man, this is somebody because he came quickly and blah, blah, blah. I said, "I apologize how I'm dressed. I was in no way, shape or form even thinking or imagining that I would be sitting at a table with you gentlemen today. What it was, was Mr. Epstein, the owner, Mr. Woody, the CFO or COO, and then Mr. Nolan. It's the owner, the manager right beneath, so the CFO. CEO is owner. CFO and the COO. Either way. I have all their titles if you want them. I still have business cards. I'm sitting at a round table with these three top dogs of El Cortez in Jordans, dark denim jeans and a black T-shirt and crazy hair.

They say, "Well, what is it that you want to do here?" For a couple of years now, I've been writing down in a notebook my five-year plan, I'm going to open a barbershop; I'm going to name it this. I had a list of at least twenty-seven names. This is the clientele I would market to, this is how I would run it, and this is how I would make everything happen. That just got fast forwarded by two and a half years, three years. It's all I have to run off of, so I pitch my loose-leaf notebook idea to where every day I got home if I thought of something, I would write in this notebook.

I pitched it and it went from really, really good to kind of not good. The reason I say that is because Mr. Epstein got the meeting together, but he walked out of the room. He didn't sit at the round table. He stayed for a short while and went and did his own thing. So now I'm in front of Mr. Nolan and Mr. Woody. We're having a conversation. Then there was a barbershop over on Carson, there is one half a mile east on Fremont called Downtown Vintage; they are there. They say, "Well, we're surrounded by a couple of barbershops. We're actually thinking about shutting down this barbershop and not reopening it. Why should we?" And I said, "Well, besides the fact that my grandfather was the barber there and that would crush me because it would mean a lot to me to get his old space back, this is why I think you guys should keep it open." And I just

went...Every butterfly in my stomach left and I just spoke on what I truly believed in. They said, “Okay, well, we know a guy that goes to the barbershop on the next street over. We’re going to give him a call. Is that okay?” I said, “Absolutely.”

He calls him on the phone. I have no idea who we’re calling. He calls him on the phone and says, “Hey, you go to this barbershop over here, don’t you?” He says, “Yes, I do.” “How much do they charge for a cut?” He says it. “Okay, how many barbers are in there?” He tell them. “Is it usually packed?” “Yes, it is.” “Okay. Do they do shaves there?” “Yes, they do.” “How much do they charge?” “Okay, thanks.”

He’s like, “Wait, wait, wait, Andres, do you have any questions for him?” I said, “Yes, let me ask you a couple of questions. One, with this haircut what do you get?” He says, “What do you mean, what do you get?” I said, “What do you get with a haircut?” He says, “You get a haircut.” “And then you’re out the door?” “Then you’re out the door.” I said, “All right. What about a shave? When you get a shave, where do they shave you?” “Uh, right there.” I said, “All right, so you’re around all the other barbers.” “Yes.” “All right, thank you.” They hang up.

Mr. Nolan and Mr. Woody start conversing with each other. I don’t know if this is me just being worried in my own head or what, but just from the sound of it they were leaning more towards no because this shop is an eight-man barbershop, very busy, established already, and it’s one street over. What would be the benefits of having one here?

In my head I get into an argument with myself. Do I jump in and interrupt these executives that are speaking to each other, or do I shut up and possible lose my chance? I though, I’m either going to offend somebody or it’s going to pay out really well, my only two options at the end of the day. Now, I know it sounds crazy, but this is what I’m thinking in my head as I’m

processing because when I talk to people, I'm always trying to think of the next step so that I always have an answer for them, not a lie, but just being able to answer a question.

So I do it. I say, "Gentlemen, excuse me. I don't mean to interrupt you guys. I know you guys are in full conversation right now. But it sounds to me you guys are leaning more towards no. These are the differences between me and the other barbershop, before you guys make your choice." And they said, "Okay." They both stopped talking and they both now have eyeballs on me. I said, "What do you guys do when you get a haircut?" They just kind of look at me and they look at each other, what do you mean? I said, "When you're getting a haircut, you're conversing with your barber. You want to feel like that's one-on-one time. It's just about you. You're laughing. You're joking. You're bullshitting. You're a guy getting off of your feet and out of your roles." Kind of like what I told you guys earlier. They are like, "Yes." I said, "Okay. What do you do when you're getting a hot towel shave? And I know it's been a long time because you guys yourselves already told me it's been awhile. What do you do when you get a hot towel shave?" And they were like, "Well, not talking because there is a blade to our throat." I said, "Exactly. So let me tell you. The difference between what I'm going to make here and what's happening one street over, when they are getting haircuts and you're getting your shave, eight other barbers with eight other clients with the waiting room in the same exact room are all talking around you. Are you truly getting the full experience of relaxing and enjoying that moment?" I said, "You don't. And when you get a haircut, they are rushing you out the door because they have fifteen other guys sitting at that bench." I don't know if they can hold fifteen. I just threw a number out there. "Other guys sitting at that bench waiting to get in the chair. So they are going to get you and push you out." I said, "I don't want to build a community barbershop. I remember coming in here and I remember a time where my grandfather, Julian,

had nothing but suits coming into this location, nothing but men who wanted a place to go to truly be men and get a service and really relax, and that's not what that establishment is giving you." I said, "As far as the one down the street, they don't have nine barbers, but they have five; same thing. I'm going to do a two-man shop. I'm going to have a two-man waiting area and I'm going to encourage people to go downstairs, have drinks, leave their phone number with me, and I will call them when their time is up. When you sit in my chair, it's all going to be about that individual."

They looked at each other and Mr. Woody said, "You have your ID on you?" It threw me off because now I'm in business, entrepreneur, in my head expressing full emotion, which I feel like I'm hiding that I'm nervous as hell. They might have been able to read me like a book. He said, "Do you have your ID on you?" I said, "Yes, I do." He says, "We're going to do a background check on you. Is that going to be an issue?" I said, "Not at all." He said, "You'll hear from us early next week."

The next week comes. Nothing happens. He give me, "No later than this day." Now, I'm like, oh man, what's going on? I'm a small fry. They're busy. They're executives. I get it. They're going to take another day or two. Nothing comes in.

I wait the weekend and I call the following week. I call Mr. Woody. There is no answer. I call Mr. Nolan and he answers. I said, "Mr. Nolan, how are you doing, sir? This is Andres Dominguez, the barber. We had a meeting." "Oh, yes, yes, yes. How's it going?" We start talking. I said, "I was supposed to hear back from you guys last week. I understand you guys are busy and I don't want to be too pushy, but I do want to follow up." He was like, "You're not being pushy at all. As a matter of fact, I love that you're taking the initiative to follow up with us. This is what happened. Mr. Woody went on vacation for a few days. They were supposed to

cc me in the emails; they did not. Somebody in the other office, not here, but whoever did the background check, they didn't cc Mr. Nolan, so he didn't know what was happening, and they couldn't get into Mr. Woody's emails." He was like, "He comes back tonight, actually, so you'll hear from him by tomorrow. I'll touch base with him." "Awesome. Thank you."

Then me being me, I want to be funny all the time. I said, "I just want to make sure you don't forget about a young guy like me, a nobody." He's like, "No, no, no, no, we got you." He starts laughing.

Sure enough, Mr. Woody calls me the next day. He says, "Hey, your background check came back. There's a couple of issues and we're going to take an executive vote on it." And I said, "Okay." Just hearing a couple of issues scared the heck out of me. I said, "Okay. When should I contact you?" He said, "Tomorrow by one o'clock." I said, "Perfect. You'll hear from me."

Now I'm freaking out. I'm like, I've never been arrested. I've never been in trouble. What's happening? The only thing I could think of—and I never asked. I never asked. But the only thing I could think of—and my aunt was like, "Well, maybe it's this."—is because I was so new and breaking into a commercial contract, I don't have any history or credit as a commercial owner, so I think that was the issue is my age. When I walked in all they, first impressions, saw was a young kid in Jordans, twenty-six years old with nothing more than a dream who thinks he can run a business. They don't truly know me. They don't truly know how ambitious and how aggressive I am when it comes to business. I think that was what they wanted to take a vote on was, do we give this kid a chance?

Luckily for me, the coin went to the right side of the room and here we are today.

Did you have to get a line of credit with somebody or did they kind of give you credit?

Not a line of credit. It was not really a credit. It was just I have no credit history.

You needed to fix it up and buy equipment and stuff, didn't you?

I was living with the Joneses a couple of years ago. I had a house. It was a three-bedroom house. I was renting it, spending this money. I'm not going to go too deep into that. Fast forward, I was following Gary Vee and a couple of other people on YouTube and said, why do the younger generation and the American dream? You're putting yourself in debt or barely making it, living check to check, to have an image to give off to somebody. I just so happened to have this message going on when a friend of mine says, "Hey, I'm looking for a roommate. Do you know anyone?" I completely let the house go. I went from spending over a thousand something to only spending way less than half of what I was spending. In that time of me just working so much, I didn't have time to spend money, so I saved money, between working Eastside Cutters, learning that, now jumping into Art of Shaving, being there for almost a year, stashing money away.

El Cortez didn't give me any TI money, tenant improvement money. They said, "You're getting the building as is." Fortunately, because of what happened a year and a half ago and me not being a knucklehead, I had the money in the bank to back up my own dream. I completely tapped out my bank account getting this.

But you self-financed it.

I self-financed everything with amazing things falling into place that are just bizarre. The reason I say that...The El Cortez was willing to help me with my logo and use their marketing team and their designers, so they provided that for free. That right there was a huge chunk taken off because I had a professional designer design my logo for free because it fell under El Cortez.

Second, I had an idea and a theme of how I wanted my shop to be. I have a friend—well, it's my sister's mom, actually. She has a very successful designing company. She's way out of

my price range. She is doing high-end well-known in stuff in Vegas and across...Heather Allen Concepts. They are doing stuff for, I believe, Louis Vuitton, Gucci. They did the Mob Museum. They are not dealing with small fries like myself. But because she's my sister's mom, she says, "Call me for anything you need and I will give you pointers." They're not going to do it for me, but they'll give me pointers. I said, "Awesome. That's all I need."

I'm sending her a bunch of pictures, a bunch of pictures. I come up on that offer so much and she sees that I'm not joking around. She said, "Hey, I have a week off." It was right before Christmas. It was in December. She says, "I have a week off. I'm going to come in and we're going to talk." I said, "Okay." She comes in and says, "What is it you want?" Now it's not over the phone. Now it's in person.

Mind you, she's known me since I was—I actually introduced her and my dad, funny story. I was driving my little electric car and she was the neighbor. I would drive next to her house singing with my little portable radio. She was like, "Oh my god, you're so cute." And I started talking to her. That's how her and my dad started talking. She has known me my whole life.

She says, "Look, we're going to help you. We won't charge you what we charge. We're going to help you. Let us get our numbers together. We'll go from there." She comes to me with a number. I say, "Dang." That right there put me over the limit. I'm like, that's it; capped; I'm going to do it, but that's it; we're broke; we're eating Ramen noodles for months.

She comes in and she helps. We knock this out in about a week as far as all the design and everything else. At the end of it, she says, "Andres, I'm super proud of you and I love the ambition you have and the drive that you have. I talked to my business partner. We did this completely for you. Surprise. We wish you nothing but the best."

That helped me tremendously. Things like that falling into place, people just helping. A village truly came together and helped me get this barbershop. Yes, I financially backed up a lot of things and I threw all the money into it. But those are two major parts of a business: A logo, which is not cheap, and having an actual true designer come in and set it up professionally. I actually argued with her about the chairs that we're sitting in right now. She was like, "You're not visualizing it like I am. Leave me alone." And I'm so glad I did because I love the way everything came out.

Who picked them?

She did.

Good choice.

Yes. She did. The only thing I really picked myself in here is going to be these tables. I picked the tables and then this was already here. We actually just scratched it up and then repainted it and got it back to life. But everything else, as far as these leather bag drops and stuff, because she is a designer, she has a garage full of leftover or old material from other places and she just... We literally went in her garage and it was like a yard sale. She was like, "We're taking this. We're taking this. We're bringing this." I'm like, "Where is this all going?" She said, "I don't know." And I said, "What do you mean you don't know?" She's like, "I don't know. We'll figure it out when we're there." Actually, if you see my coatrack that I have over there isn't a traditional coatrack; it's actually old crystal door knobs that are drilled in and we use that as our coatrack.

LAURENTS: *I do have a question. I remember when I saw the article in the R-J [Las Vegas Review Journal]; (the reporter) touched on the cash register that's over in the corner.*

I did. It was a gem. It was a hidden secret that not many knew about, but now the R-J released everybody heard about it. Those are two pieces, the cash register and that red barbershop sign right above that door, those are two pieces that come directly from my grandfather's barbershop when he was here. That alone is really awesome. My grandmother had that barbershop [sign] stashed away somewhere in a shed. The cash register was from my uncle, the barber, Paul Madrid. He had that at his house at his bar. When he found out I was getting this location, he said, "Take it home," and he gave it to me. Now I have it set up over there. The cool thing about that is it is fully functioning. It's all old-school, so you've got to push or whatever. I don't mess with it at all. I actually want to get a display case for it. Really cool thing about it, though, is if you open it up, inside there is a two-dollar bill, some change, and three bullets.

BARBARA: *And they were originally there?*

As far as I know, yes.

Do you have photographs of your grandfather being a barber?

We don't. I know. And I've dug and I've dug and I've dug, and the answer I get from every single person is, "In that time we didn't have cameras on our cell phones, and if we didn't go for a purpose to take a picture, we weren't taking pictures. And if we did, it might not have even been developed. It was a process to get pictures back then, not like today where it's like, oh that's cool, click on your phone and then all over social media or easy to print out." At that time my mom was just coming to see Dad. It wasn't, we're going to take a photo; it was nothing like that. Unfortunately, no. I have photos of Grandpa, just not photos of Grandpa cutting.

We'll have to look through the El Cortez's archives to see if there's any.

I'll tell you what, if you—I've tried to—

Did you go through Special Collections and look at the photos?

Didn't even know about it. I just went on Google and typed in "El Cortez Barbershop" and a bunch of stuff.

Like this image that's on the wall of the El Cortez hotel, the front. That's Fremont Street, right?

Yes. That view right there is actually if you're standing on Fremont at Sixth Street looking up; that's what you're going to see. The designer, Heather, and Vincent, they lit up—you see those two windows on the right side of the building? That's actually the room we're sitting in right now. They lit that up to look like the barbershop was being used in that photo. Then the bottom left, do you see that barber pole? They lit that up as well. There is a barber pole down there, but they lit it up to make it pop.

So this is a contemporary photo. This isn't from archives, either.

I had talked to Adam, who is the marketing guy here. To be honest with you, I don't even know how the heck Heather worded it. I just copied and pasted and asking for high resolution copy...whatever. Then he sent me over photos of the outside. I don't know exactly where it came from. If you find anything, I will fricking hug you so hard.

We'll give it a few minutes and see what we can find. I love hugs, okay. We'll take a peak.

There might be a little nugget there somewhere.

That would be amazing because I would love to put that up in here. And that's always the factor; how come you don't have a photo of your grandpa in here, cutting? I'm like, "Trust me, guys, I've thought of it. I can't find it."

Yes, everything happened. The meeting happened. Waited a couple of weeks. Everything got approved. Went back and forth for a little bit. Came to an agreement. Signed everything in

the beginning of December, so that was all in November, mid to late November. Everything got signed in December, the agreement.

My guys weren't able to get in here to start the floor until the sixteenth. My opening shoot date was for the first, so I'm already freaking out. My dad and I and a cousin, but mainly my dad and I ripped everything out of this barbershop from the ground up with the exception of the mirrors that you see. That is the same mirrors. But everything else we ripped up, it came up. When you first walked in—and I know it's audio—that is what you walked into, looking in that direction over there.

LAURENTS: *That's how it originally looked.*

That's how Ernesto had it for the last nineteen years, yes.

BARBARA: *You should send us that photo. We'll put that in the book eventually that we'll put together.*

This is the waiting area that you're sitting in today.

What a difference.

LAURENTS: *Originally, before this was a barbershop, were they used as hotel rooms?*

Absolutely. That's why we have the walk-in closet. That's why we have the bathroom. This pony wall was put up back in the nineties. When they moved over here, my uncle, Paul Madrid, asked the engineers, and they approved it, to go ahead and put the pony wall up. This used to be just a squared room.

Got you. I was curious about that.

This is just amazing to see the evolution of this space and how quickly you've done it.

Yes. Honestly, I can't say thank you enough to the village that helped. I couldn't one hundred percent could not have done it without the people that really supported me. My dad was here

some nights until one in the morning tearing stuff up and getting stuff prepped. As you could, there is no elevator on this side of the hotel. This part of the casino is a historic building now and there is no elevator. I actually, with a trashcan with wheels, had to walk it all the way into the parking garage and then carry everything up the nine stairs to get out to unload it into my truck to take it to the dump because they don't even have a big dump trash here. They only have those impactor ones that kind of squish stuff. But the stuff that I was ripping out was so big that we couldn't dump it in there. They helped with that.

I'm big into stuff not being coincidences and stuff actually meaning...whether you call it religious or spiritual or whatever it was. I had a son in 2016. I named him after my grandfather, Julian. There was an accident and he passed away two and a half months later. Now the two people that I have felt the closest to, one being my grandfather and one being my son, died and I kind of went down a spiral for a little bit. With that being said, I tell you that to tell you this. The two guys that came in on the sixteenth to lay the floor, the two guys that walked in and introduced themselves were father and son; their names were Julian and Julian, which I thought was crazy. That alone kind of blew my mind, like, what?

Second, we printed up this image. Everything got put up, whatever. It wasn't until a couple days in the bottom right-hand side on the billboard there's names. My grandmother, my Nana Martha, her name is printed on that right there, which I thought was insane.

One other thing that I can really tie into that—a lot of people don't know—is our barbershop phone number was actually my grandmother's cell phone number when she was alive. What happened was my dad couldn't give it up, so he just put it in a resting state basically, so he owned it, but it wasn't an active number. When I had to get my own number, he was like,

“If you want you can have your grandma’s number.” I reactivated the number and that is the current barbershop phone number for this.

Now I have my grandmother’s name on the wall. My grandmother’s phone number. And then I have Julian and Julian who came and did the floors, father and son, grandfather and, which would have been, grandson on my end, so my grandpa and my son.

That is incredible. You’re definitely a planner and have vision for this space. What is your vision?

The vision for this barbershop is this will always be my home. I will always be a part of this barbershop because without starting in this barbershop before I knew I was actually starting, I wouldn’t be where I am today. No matter what, I will always be here. This will always be home base as far as my plans go for right now. I do plan in five years to open up a second one, a third one and a fourth one, not all in five years, but in a span. I believe that what we’re doing here is traditional old-school barbering and it catches the attention of people who really want to be a part of that and I think it’s something bigger than just this one location. I think this is the drop of water in the waterfall that I’m about to create.

My plan is, yes, to always be here and eventually have another barber here who has a passion behind it just like I do. Of course, the owner is always going to have the deeper passion for something. But if I can find somebody who just loves the skill and the body of barbering as much as I do, then I’m already in the plus. I would love to have this barbershop open seven days a week. At this point it’s only me. I’m here Tuesday through Sunday, nine a.m. to seven p.m. As of right now, it’s just me.

Again, five years a second one. Just to touch on, that’s actually why I didn’t use El Cortez barbershop name and I made my own name and my own logo because I do see myself in

the future creating more and I can't take somebody else's name, so I'm branding Speakeasy Barbershop LV. I am getting to a point where I'm trying to set myself up to where Speakeasy is a well-known name just like Walmart, Kmart, Target, not so much a franchise, but in the mind of a man he knows or has heard of Speakeasy Barbershop, or to a point where when you come to Vegas this is a barbershop you need to be at. That's the future.

LAURENTS: *I was wondering if I can get you to comment on the barber culture here in Las Vegas, the kind of shops that are here, and especially Latinos that cut hair. What is the community like?*

You know what? It's really cliquy right now. It's not what it used to be. It's not where when Grandpa was around they had a barber association, everybody was heavily influenced, everybody was heavily involved and they had their meetings, some meetings held in this barbershop that you're sitting in today. The culture today is everybody wants to be the best barber. Right now in the point that we're sitting, everybody wants to be a celebrity barber. Everybody wants to be the next top known barber. Every time that we as barbers get together, it's only in competition. I've noticed that if you're not part of a certain barbershop, we kind of cut out other barbers; we don't care about what they're doing. We're trying to be the best and the only time we want to see them is when we're competing against each other, which I think is dumb. Because of how much love I have for this, I think that's really dumb. I think we need to be together and unified as having a mutual love for what we do for a living. There are enough heads out in Las Vegas, Nevada for us to not have to battle. You know what I mean?

There are different barbershops for different people. One that I love to say is going to a barbershop is like buying a white T-shirt at the mall. You can get a haircut anywhere. Let's be honest. You can walk outside, go on your maps, and find seven barbershops around me, roughly,

and you can go to any one of those barbershops. But it's about where you go and where you feel comfortable. It's not just the haircut. It's the experience, the conversation. It's that feeling you get in your body. I don't have the same clientele as another twenty-six-year-old barber who wants to be the next hot barber because I'm not worried about designs, I'm not worried about color correction, I'm not worried about that portion of it. I'm not knocking it. It's just not where I focus in.

I feel like we need to reconnect again and realize that at the end of the day we all love to cut hair and whatever part of barbering it is you love, it's still barbering. We need to stop turning against each other and start unifying again, which is some stuff that I'm actually in the works of that I can't go too deep into yet that I was telling you.

Earlier you talked about how your grandpa did not want you to get a tattoo. But you have a tattoo now.

Yes, I'm sleeved.

You have a whole sleeve.

Yes. I have an upper back piece and I have a whole left arm sleeve and more planned.

Your grandpa had very specific opinions about why he didn't want you getting a tattoo.

Well, I didn't hear the opinions from himself. I just heard stories from my uncle once Grandpa passed away. He's like, "This is why..." I think my uncle or my mom. Somebody told me, "This is why Grandpa didn't like tattoos, so he regretted his tattoos after he got them."

Have you experienced that?

That I regret it?

Not that you regret it, but how people perceive you being a Latino with tattoos? Because that on its own is like a subculture.

You know what? Yes and no. I don't care who you are or who you meet, you're always going to have that first impression. Within the first couple of seconds you know, man, this guy is cool or this guy is a douche bag. I think with the way that I carry myself, I truly, truly always try to be in a good mood and converse and stuff like that. I have seen it on people's faces where they see my work, but the moment I start talking to them, it's like they forget that I have work, if that makes sense. They forget that I have tattoos because I'm talking to them in a certain way. I don't feel like I've been cast aside because of it. As a matter of fact, when I came to meet Mr. Epstein—well, I didn't come to meet them, but when it happened I was in a short-sleeve shirt. You're right. I didn't even mention that earlier. I had a short-sleeve T-shirt on, so they saw my tattoos from the beginning.

I don't think it affects me to the point where it hinders me, but I'm also cautious, too, for the most part, of what I do because I know what a professional business attire should look like. You never knew I had tattoos until I just told you and that's because I stopped two and a half inches up off my wrist, so when I have a collar T-shirt on and we're in these meetings, you don't even know that I have a tattoo because it's not exposed on my wrist until I have to actually undo the shirt and then you'll see that I'm done all the way up.

Actually, just because we're touching on it, one of the tattoos is the El Cortez. I have the El Cortez with the dates seven, two, ten, and a barber pole in the cloud. Even though my grandfather hated the tattoos, I still got one dedicated to him. He may call me a jackass and smack me or he may say, "That's kind of cool." I have a whole Vegas theme on my arm and every piece has a piece of my history in it, so Grandfather, Caesars Palace right there because my grandmother, his wife, was a blackjack dealer at Caesars Palace until the day she retired and back when the mob still ran that. She has a lot of fun stories. In our culture, *Día de los Muertos*,

Day of the Dead, so I've got a Las Vegas showgirl with her whole headpiece done, but the Day of the Dead face on her, just tying the two together. *Día de los Muertos*, remembering my grandfather, but also the Vegas showgirl theme.

Then as you go up, everything I have is mob related. I have the Flamingo, the Horseshoe. I have a little mob guy with a fedora. I have the Las Vegas sign here. On the inside of my arm, it says, "It's in the desert where lots of the town's problems are solved." The reason I got that is because the term *eighty-six* now means you're kicked out and can't come back. The term *eighty-six* back then meant you were taken eighty miles out and put six feet under. People don't realize that. Then I have an ace and a jack, which in blackjack makes twenty-one, a winning hand, which is Andres and Julian.

I don't feel like anybody pushes me aside or that I have that stereotype of, oh man, this guy is a bad guy because of his tattoos. To be honest with you, I'm so full of myself that it may very well be there, I just don't see it. I am that guy that you can talk to somebody else about me and they're going to either say, he's very confident, or, he's very cocky. But I'm cocky in the way that I approach things, but I'm humble when I speak to people, and you take it the way you take it.

For people that have never met you before, how would you say you identify yourself? How would you describe yourself? Some of your family says they're Mexican.

Man, I'm Mexican. I'm a hella Mexican.

What does that mean to you?

What does that mean to me? Oh, you're getting deep. Mexican. I'm brown. I am actually the worst one to ask this question to and I'm going to tell you why. To me you're Black, White, Mexican or Asian; there's only four. I am actually the worst when it comes to that. Just Mexican.

It's awesome that I can—I'm very proud of the culture. I'm very proud of where we come from. I can't say that I know everything that happened in Mexico, but here, as far as being in the States and being raised, I was heavily raised in the Hispanic-Latino community. I come from the east side of Las Vegas. I come where I have an '85 Buick Regal sitting in the driveway that I'm restoring right now. My dad would take me to the lowrider shows. Sunday afternoons we had a barbeque grill in the front yard and he'd throw on music, throw on the oldies. We start cooking and our immediate neighbors would see that and go buy some carne, some chicken, some beer. Kids were outside playing in the street. I come from a neighborhood where people say, "You're not scared to live over there?" And I go, "Are you stupid? That's one of the most safe...What are you talking about?"

I hate when I say I love to see other Latinos come up because I don't see it as Latino. I love seeing people win. There are way too many things in life and way too many avenues and journeys that we can take to hate on each other and I feel like we do that a lot. We seriously do. I don't care if you're black, white, and Hispanic—whatever the case may be. Win in your journey and I'm cheering you on. But don't tear somebody else down. That's why it's so hard because I don't see as I'm a Latino or I'm a Mexican that made it. I'm making it in the lane that I want to make it in, but I will encourage anybody not to fall in the hamster wheel of you need to do this or you need to do that or you need to go to college. I feel like that's hard for our younger generation because our parents—and some are going to disagree with me—are so brainwashed because their parents, all they knew, especially as immigrants coming to the United States, all they knew is education is the only way out of poverty. You had to get smart. You had to have an education. You had to have that to make it out of these bad neighborhoods or whatever. That's why I was pushed so hard; *you need to go to college; you need to go to school; you need to go to be*

successful. I feel like that was true for that time. We are now in a day and age where you have a mobile device or you can record an interview or you have this, you have that, you have your phones. You can post it directly to YouTube and build your own audience, and at one point that wasn't there. You had to be at that other end and hope somebody saw a spark in you to make it, so, yes, you needed a piece of paper to put you above the rest. But now, if you're not in one of the top schools, like known colleges, I think it's starting to get watered down a little bit. I know that's a little bit hard for you guys who are in college, and I'm not bashing it. If you guys love college and you love what you're doing, win, go, I encourage. I am not bashing individuals who love education who are in school. I am all for that. It wasn't my lane. I knew it wasn't. I sucked at it. I am more of a hit-the-ground, pound-the-dirt guy, not a hard worker, not a laborer, don't get me a wrong. I'm not a pick-up-a-shovel kind of guy. I used to get yelled out all the time by Grandpa. Find what you love to do and do it. I know it's really easy to say, but now I'm in a position where I'm not just saying it. I am actually living it and doing it, so now it has a little bit more meaning for me.

I follow Gary Vee, like I told you guys earlier. One of his big things is if you hate where you're at in live right now and you work a nine-to-five or whatever it is you work, when you get off of work and do what you've got to do to pay your bills, instead of going home and unwinding and watching Netflix, bust your ass at what you want to do in life until that hobby overpowers what you need to do to put food on your table. That's what I've done. College wasn't for me. I was a horrible student. I wasn't a manual laborer; I was horrible at that. But I knew I always loved barbering. I went to barber school. I fell in love with it even more and now it's only up from here. Things are just lining up for me. I truly believe you receive what you put out there.

For me having the personality that I have, from years and years and years before me even thinking about opening a barbershop, that all came together.

Not only that, let me take you back a little bit further. Tying in with my grandfather, I got to take a little snippet of what old-school Las Vegas used to be like on nothing more than just respect of a name, and I really want that to be hammered in because as much as I love Las Vegas, I was never a part of that era. I don't know if you could speak on this or not or if you remember where just straight respect for somebody can take you a long way. Mr. Epstein, Mr. Woody and Mr. Nolan didn't need to take time out of their day to meet with a young, twenty-six-year-old punk wearing a backwards hat and some Jordans on his feet. But because they respected my grandfather's name, it put me in a position where they were willing to have a conversation with me.

I feel like we need to really hone back in on that and stop being the next reality star and start respecting each other again, whatever race you are. I don't care if you're Mexican, black, white. As a matter of fact, I give my barber instructor such a hard time because he's a black guy. He owns four barbershops. He owns the barber school that I went to. He is more Mexican than anybody I know. He loves the taco guy in the front of the school. You know what I mean? He truly loves that. I respect him so much because he values the same values that I have and it doesn't matter what color you are, it's about the work you're willing to put in.

We, as young twenty-six, twenty-four, twenties generation, need to remember one thing. Nothing is owed to us. One of my biggest things is, oh, when my people suffered; when my people did this; when my people did that. From the day that we were on this earth, our parents did the best that they could to provide for us, but we will never truly understand what our grandparents had to deal with or what our grandparents' parents, whoever came over here had to

deal with, but we are in a position now where now you have the ability and the freedom to make moves. I quote this from Gary Vee: “If anybody that looks like you or has been put in a position or a lifestyle that you’re living and has made it, well then, there’s a blueprint right there that so can you, but get off your ass to do it.” And I take that from him. I kind of live by that too, is just having that drive.

Again, it all ties back in to what you had asked me, what does it mean to me being a young Mexican kid coming up? It’s great, but I don’t see it great because I’m a young Mexican kid. I see it great because I’m a young guy striving to be the best that I can and I’m happy. Not once do I wake up in the morning and say, “Fuck, I have to go to work; damn, I have to go do this; damn, I have to go do that.” It’s part of my routine. I love it so much. You spend more time at work than you do with your own family for a lot of Americans, especially ones who are working two jobs. For what? To die. To put food on the table and just to die, but not truly enjoy life? Everybody’s enjoyment of life is different. You may like to take a vacation for two months a year. What’s wrong with that? Nothing. Who am I to tell you what makes you happy is wrong? Same with you. You might want to just work your face off, and her it’s tiring or to me it’s tiring, but you, that’s where you find your joy. Who am I to tell you working too much is not the right way to relax? Maybe that’s how you relax.

LAURENTS: *I have one last question.*

Ask me five.

It is for you to comment on growing up on the east side. What do you love about the east side of Las Vegas, the culture spots that you used to frequent when you were growing up?

What I love about the east side is going to sound like anybody can answer this question. What I love about the east side is my neighborhood. What I love about the east side is those barbeques,

those Sunday evenings, those Sunday nights. What I love about the east side is when me and my buddies that lived in the area, we would go throw the football. We would go play right there. We would go play over at Edward's. We would play basketball. That's what I love about the east side. It's a huge Latino community on the east side, so naturally it's great. Everybody is alike over there.

What I don't like about the east side is—let me go broader than that. What I don't like about the older generation is that they're trying to tell the younger generation that what they want to do isn't the right way and they have to do it a certain way. I know I keep going back to that, but I feel so strongly about that.

To answer your question, I love the east side because I'm from the east side, period, pointblank.

What places did you used to hang out on the east side, any particular restaurants, parks that used to exist?

I'll give you a real strong particular: The power box in the neighborhood; it was the meet-up spot. We were young. We were running the neighborhood. We were having fun. I was fortunate to be part of that time where we got mad when we had to come inside, not we had got mad that we had to go outside. When we got home we had a little bit of time to do our homework and from that moment of finishing our homework, we were rushing outside. Our meet-up spot was the power box right there on Miratan Street, right across the street from my house. The kids from around the neighborhood would come and we would start to play. To answer your question, what is my go-to spot on the east side? What's my memory go to? It's that power box right there on my street.

This is wonderful. Thank you so much for letting us interview you.

Thank you. I'm truly humbled. Thank you guys for coming and even being interested in my story. I have told this story, as far as the barbershop goes and my grandfather, so many times and never thought much of it. It was just my life. To see people that are actually like, wow, that's pretty cool, it makes me feel awesome, too, and I love the spotlight.

BARBARA: *I do have one question and we'll see where it goes. Choosing the name Speakeasy, why that? Why that title to the barbershop?*

A couple of reasons. Remember earlier on when I told you that I took what I love from The Art of Shaving and that luxury end and I took what I love from Eastside Cutters? One thing that I love about Art of Shaving is that one-on-one quiet room, usually they have blues playing in the background or whatever, soft music. When I thought of Speakeasy, the way I wanted to set it up—what I hated from there, but what I loved—now we're getting deep here, sorry—I loved the one on one, but when you're in the same room together—tie that back into what I told you earlier—while one individual is getting a shave and being quiet, the other individual was getting a haircut and wanting to talk. In my head, the way that I envisioned my first shop to be was you would walk in to nothing more than a small retail section with beard bomb, beard oils, hair products; stuff like that. You would come into a receptionist. She would then handle the books, write it on a ticket, come to the back room, the second room, and give us a ticket, either hang it up on our thing if we're in the middle of a service or at least let us know, hey, there's somebody out there. The barber would come get you and bring you back to the service area. The waiting room would be in the retail portion of it. And then, even deeper than that, I wanted it to be a three-tier room barbershop to where if you were getting a straight razor shave, you had the option to go into the third room if you wanted to, and back there nobody would talk. It would be just a shave. That's how the Speakeasy name came about, because in the 1920s when the

Prohibition ban happened, speakeasies were just that; it was the bars and establishments behind actual businesses. You would go into laundry mat or you'd go into a store and have to know a certain work or a certain knock or a certain shake to be open and given a ticket or whatever to get to the next room, so I'm just playing off of that.

That's a metaphor, not about the liquor.

Not about the liquor. I just took that—at Art of Shaving I realized some guys, even though it was just two chairs where I was at, there was just two chairs, it would almost—not ruin, but kind of set it uneasy when one was trying to get a shave and the other guy was shooting the shit. In my head, I wanted to create a location where I had three to where you walk into nothing but a storefront, you were asked and brought to the second where we were going to cut your hair, and taken to the third room for a shave, so that would never cross. Now, it just so happened—now, this is even way before I even thought about being here. When I picked that name, it just so happened to work out perfect that you have to walk up these old hotel rooms and down a hallway to get to us. It just played out. It just worked.

Because you're like a secret location within this established hotel.

Exactly.

But there is still that intimacy of El Cortez. I think this is a brilliant—

Thank you. I really appreciate it.

—opportunity for you. I believe that Kenny Epstein has such an amazing reputation in the city, I think it makes sense. I can imagine that moment just knowing him, more distant than intimately, but, wow, this is very cool for you.

That is definitely something that the legacy or impact of my grandfather had on all these guys is exactly what I want to give back to my community and I'm slowly going to do it. It's all about

this right here, this networking. I hope I can follow you guys on Instagram. I hope I can keep in contact with you guys because ten years from now, hey, I know him; I interviewed that barber, and we may be able to work together on whatever it is, whatever. Maybe not even in ten years. Maybe we should just go get a damn beer. I don't know. But I'm all about networking and meeting each other and I think that's where we need to come back because Vegas is growing quickly, but it's not about what you know, sometimes it's about who you know.

It will be interesting to have you listen to your recording thirty years from now.

I'm super excited about that. One thing I've actually got in the works, too, is starting to do a vlog—touching a little bit on that because I know this can happen on my own—a vlog of every day recording and talking and showing my business moves and showing this and showing that for a couple of reasons. One, like I touched on earlier about if you see somebody who came from a neighborhood or a skin color the same as you, it's just motivation to do it if that's the dream that you want to follow. But more than that, when I have grandkids or great-grandkids, they can say, “Man, look at that fat barber right there. That's my great-grandpa.” I think it would be really cool to document how awesome would it have been for us to look back on a video of my grandpa shaking hands with Jackie Gaughan and Jackie Gaughan looking at him and telling him, “Now, go make a million,” rather than just a story getting passed down generation to generation, but you actually have footage documenting stuff. I think that's amazing. I am actually really excited you said that because I am really excited in thirty, forty, fifty years to be able to listen to that and be like, man, he was full of shit, or, man, he really made it happen.

Thank you so much.

You're so welcome. Thank you for coming.

[End of recorded interview]