**Ramiro Mu**ñ**oz Jr.**

**Casa Mexicana – Oxford, MS**

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Date: May 2016

Location: Casa Mexicana

Interviewer: Simone Delerme

Transcription:

Length: (1 hour)

Project: (El Sur Latino: Oxford, MS)

[Interview begins 00:26]

Simone:
Well, first I wanted to know how long you've been managing the restaurant?

[00:28]

Muñoz:
I've been here for about...since...I want to say September of...20...well, September.  How long have I been here?  It's been about a year and a half, two years.

[00:45]

Simone:
OK.

[00:46]

Muñoz:
Yeah.  Roughly.  Exact date, I'm not quite sure, I just kinda one day just came right in and...

[00:50]

Simone:
OK...

[00:51]

Muñoz:
...started...

[00:52]

Simone:
...and were you managing a different restaurant before?

[00:53]

Muñoz:
No.

[00:54]

Simone:
OK, so this is your first...

[00:54]

Muñoz:
This is...

[00:55]

Simone:
...experience.

[00:55]
Muñoz:
...yeah, my family, my dad and my mom opened up this first restaurant twenty years ago.

[01:01]

Simone:
This is their first one?

[01:02]

Muñoz:
This is the first one.

[01:03]

Simone:
Oh, OK.

[01:02]
Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[01:03]
Simone:
OK.

[01:04]
Muñoz:
And so, this restaurant is twenty-one years old, and I'm twenty-one years old.

[01:09]

Simone:
Oh, I didn't...

[01:09]

Muñoz:
So, I've been, we've been involved in the restaurant business my whole life.

[01:15]

Simone:
OK.

[01:16]

Muñoz:
Yeah, and this one specifically, since it was the first one, and we were so blessed with this one that was able to expand so well, we didn't wanna let it go. I went to school for a little bit, I went to culinary school.  I graduated from there.  Yes, ma'am.  And then after that, I went to Northwest.  I had plans to go to Ole Miss.

[02:00]

Simone:
OK.

[02:00]

Muñoz:
Like my sister did, and graduated from there, but I just decided to start working here. Mm, seven days a week, and just better the business. And so far, thank God, it's been working. [laughs]

[02:16]

Simone:
Good! Good, good!

[02:16]

Muñoz:
Yeah, we've been seeing nights, we'll have weeks with straight, where it's constantly busy.  Which is a great thing.  Obviously we're not where we still want to be yet...
We still have major improvements here and there.  But, as far as us being here day to day and...we have definitely seen the improvements.

[02:33]

Simone:
OK. OK.

[02:33]

Muñoz:
But, yeah, we, um...

[02:35]

Simone:
What have you done to make this happen?

[02:36]

Muñoz:
We've, uh... new staff, new kitchen, we've always had the same menu, and to be honest, if you go to any Mexican restaurant in the South you'll see that same menu, just different words.  But for us, it’s more in the way you prep it, how fresh your ingredients are...all that good stuff.  And that really did make a difference.

[02:59]

Simone:
OK. OK.

[02:59]

Muñoz:
But yeah, just the common business strategies, that, you know, just, kitchen, make sure that everything's in order, that your staff is here, you have everything fresh and well prepared. It's basically one of those things that has been helping us a lot here. And basically, I mean, this is the first restaurant where I've actually been here, and, run it.  It's kind of a responsibility.

[03:29]

Simone:
How's that been going?

[03:32]

Muñoz:
It's...not too bad.

[03:33]

Simone:
A learning process!

[03:34]

Muñoz:
Yeah, it's not too bad.  I for the past, first, about, I want to say, six to eight months. I was here all day, open to close.

[03:39]

Simone:
Wow, OK.

[03:40]

Muñoz:
Because I didn’t have the staff that I could be able to feel comfortable to, you know, let go. But now, I've kinda, I work five days a week.  With my breaks and all that, so I mean, it's not bad. Just because, I mean, I'm where I need to be, as far as people to...good people, you know?

[04:07]

Simone:
OK, OK.

[04:08]

Muñoz:
But yeah, it's just been learning a lot.  Hopefully.  'Cause in this particular restaurant, my sister and I both run it.

[04:16]

Simone:
Oh, OK, OK.

[04:18]

Muñoz:
Yeah, I handle day to day, scheduling, ordering, restocking, all that...stuff.  And she's more like the paperwork, legal side of it, all the, you know. So we're both kinda...

[04:34]

Simone:
What did she go to school...

[04:36]

Muñoz:
She went to Ole Miss.

[04:37]

Muñoz:
Yeah, she studied business.

[04:40]

Simone:
OK.

[04:40]

Muñoz:
Yeah, she studied business. Yeah.  I want to say. Honestly, I’m not a hundred percent sure, but I do think it was the business school human resources major.

[04:47]

Simone:
Yeah, yeah.  Absolutely.

[04:53

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[00:01]

Muñoz:
But yeah, my dad basically gave me a bunch of responsibility helping to run a restaurant, to see how we did, kind of learn, get the experience to later be able, hopefully, God willing, to run more of his businesses.  I believe total, right now...he has about twenty.

[00:21]

Simone:
Twenty!  OK.

[00:23]

Muñoz:
Yeah.  And like I say, it was all...it was him and my uncles, my dad's cousins, it's all a family effort...that runs it all.

[00:35]

Simone:
OK.

[00:36]

Muñoz:
Yeah, and it...

[00:37]

Simone:
...OK, beyond your immediate family...

[00:38]

Muñoz:
...beyond, yes, ma'am.

[00:39]

Simone:
Ah, OK, I didn't realize that.

[00:40]

Muñoz:
Yeah, the guy that runs the Olive Branch location is my uncle's brother-in-law.

[00:47]

Simone:
OK.

[00:48]

Muñoz:
So, I mean everything here is the people we've known for twenty-plus years, or friends or family, and I mean, it does get hard, working with family.  But nobody's gonna protect your business like your family.

[01:03]

Simone:
Right. Right.

[01:04]

Muñoz:
So yeah, it, I mean...it's basically the way it's been since it started and he came from California, and from Mexico.  With nothing, opened up this.

[01:18]

Simone:
So first Mexico, *then* California.  And then here?

[01:21]

Muñoz:
Roughly. A couple of citiesstates in between.

[01:21]

Simone:
Huh.

[01:22]

Muñoz:
Yeah. My whole family is from Mexico.

[01:23]

Simone:
OK.

[01:24]

Muñoz:
Born and raised, they moved to California, they moved to Atlanta, they moved to Nashville, they're all, yeah, they're all over the place.  Um, and in California, I believe they worked in the farms, picking up strawberries, and tomatoes and whatnot.  And then they moved over here and started working in the restaurants.  And basically, penny by penny, started earning to build this one.

[01:57]

Simone:
You were the *only* one in the town?

[01:58]

Muñoz:
The only one in town.

[01:59]

Simone:
Wow!

[02:00]

Muñoz:
We were originally across, this isn't the original location.  The original location's up the street.

[02:05]

Simone:
Oh, OK!

[02:06]

Muñoz:
Um, next to Pak Mail?

[02:08]
Simone:
OK, huh.

[02:09]
Muñoz:
Same old building right there.

[02:10]

Simone:
OK.

[02:11]

Muñoz:
It was a very tiny place.  And then Mr. Davis, who my parents met when they first moved here, rented this one.

[02:22]

Simone:
OK.

[02:23]

Muñoz:
And then we started renting it ever since then.

[02:25]

Simone:
Ah! OK, OK.  So you rent this one?  The one in Olive Branch, you own all that property, right?

[02:29]

Muñoz: Yeah. Yeah, that's more what they've been trying to do lately.

[02:33]

Simone:
OK.

[02:34]

Muñoz:
'Cause, I mean, renting...is good.  But I mean...owning is better. I mean, you're always gonna have...that.

[02:41]

Simone:
Mm-hmm.

[02:41]

Muñoz:
And right now, we're in the process of building another one in town.

[02:47]

Simone:
Ah!  How many do you already have in town?

[02:49]

Muñoz:
Just one for now, plans in future for two!

[02:51]

Simone:
OK.

[02:55]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[02:56]

Simone:
And then...

[03:01]

Muñoz:
We we wish to have it open soon, but that one, that will be as well, ours.

[03:02]

Simone:
OK.

[03:03]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[03:04]

Simone:
Same name, or...still?

[03:19]

Muñoz:
Different name! Different name, yeah.  Yeah, different...same kind of atmosphere and dining and all that.  You know, brand new building, nice equipment...it's supposed to be very nice.

[03:26]

Simone:
OK, OK.

[03:26]

Muñoz:
Very, uh...so, like, when you walk in there, you're literally, like...'Oh, my God, I'm in the restaurant!'  As if you walked into Mexico, you know?

[03:26]

Simone:
Mm-hmm.

[03:29]

Muñoz:
But yeah. Just, basically the way we’ve been working with family, and, this whole year.  This whole time.

[03:37]

Simone:
OK, OK.

[03:38]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[03:39]

Simone:
And you built these from the ground up?  These, this building, and the one in Olive Branch?

[03:43]

Muñoz:
Well, not this-

[03:44]

Simone:

The design?

[03:45]

Muñoz:

…not this building...

[03:46]

Simone:
OK.

[03:47]

Muñoz:
The design, the interior, yes.

[03:48]

Simone:
OK.

[03:49]

Muñoz:
The whole...

[03:49]

Simone:
...interior, OK.

[03:50]

Muñoz:
...interior design.  We were lucky enough, Mr. Davis, the gentleman who owns this property has given us pretty much the free spirit to do anything to the building.  So a lot of the things inside, the paintings, all that...is all kind of us. It's just kind of, the building that was here, yeah.  And all this...um.  It's all been my dad. Yeah, he's very creative when it comes to designing.  [laughs]

[04:27]

Simone:
Yeah, yeah, the one in Olive Branch has this beautiful mural, in the back and everything.  [Muñoz: Yeah, yeah.] It's impressive!

[04:32]

Muñoz:
It's very nice.

[04:33]

Simone:
The buildings have, just, you know, this artistic element.  Makes it very, very unique. Oh, that's fantastic. Fantastic. Which states do you have?  Are you beyond Mississippi at this point?

[04:43]

Muñoz:
It's Mississippi, Tennessee...and I want to say that's it.  Mississippi, Tennessee.

[04:54]

Muñoz:
Um...yeah.

[04:58]

Simone:
So, why Oxford?  Do you have a sense of why of all places they ended up...?

[05:02]

Muñoz:
I've asked...and....basically....whenever they were living in Nashville. My dad would drive around and would try to find or research good towns that didn't have Mexican restaurants.  Had the demand.  And he came up that Oxford, being Ole Miss, and seeing so much people coming through this small town...and then he saw, 'cause and in that time, I don't believe there was one here, and the one in Batesville.  So, around the area there wasn't really a Mexican restaurant.  To compete against.  And that's what kind of drove him here. Then the school and whatnot, I mean, there's mainly Ole Miss, that’s it, you know, kind of. So, I mean if you're...even now, with culture being what it is, if you're in a, if you go to a town, and you see that there's not a Mexican restaurant, but then thirty miles, twenty miles, I mean, to me isn't a very big spot. Just 'cause, I mean, right now...especially in the Mexican restaurant business, competition is rough.

[06:16]

Simone:
Is it?  OK. It's just...

[06:17]

Muñoz:
It's very...yeah...

[06:17]

Simone:
OK.

[06:18]
Muñoz:
I mean, on this one street there's one, two, three, four.

[06:21]

Simone:
OK.

[06:22]

Muñoz:
On...what is it, like, a five, ten mile street?  Not even. So, yeah, I mean, competition is very tough.  So that's why, back then, you kind of just had to open up a restaurant, have good, good food, smart, some good service, and you would make it.  I mean, it wasn't that big of a deal.  But I mean now, let's say one day here you slip on service, someone will say, "Over there they had better service," or, you know?  So you have to be very on top of your game.

[06:48]

Simone:
OK, OK.

[06:48]

Muñoz:
Mm...

[06:49]

Simone:
Do you have a sense of when that change happened?  Or when, all of a sudden, these other restaurants started popping up, and providing that competition?  'Cause you were the first!

[06:59]

Muñoz:
Yeah, about ten years ago.

[07:01]

Simone:
OK. OK.

[07:02]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[07:03]

Simone:
About half-way through?

[07:04]

Muñoz:
Yeah, about half-way through, yes, ma'am.

[07:09]

Simone:
Hmmm.  How about your parents, are they still very active in the business?

[07:12]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[07:13]

Simone:
Are they? Oh, they are.

[07:14]

Muñoz:
My mom not quite so much.  She stays more at the house, more taking care of my little sisters and all that.  But my dad, yeah, he drives around constantly to all them.  He's very involved in the kitchen in this one.   He's very involved, he, yeah, he'll come in and make sure that everything's right, beans, all the rice, all the food is fresh, and all that good stuff, so yeah.

[07:37]

Simone:
OK.  OK. OK.  So you've lived your whole life in Oxford?

[07:40]

Muñoz:
Mm-hmm!  My whole life.

[07:41]

Simone:
OK, OK.  And you went to school...

[07:43]

Muñoz:
Oxford Community school, and everything.  I was born in Nashville. But within the week of me being born, we moved to Oxford.

[07:52]

Simone:
OK, so.  So this is home-home, I mean, your home.

[07:54]

Muñoz:
It's home, yes.  I've been living in Oxford.

[07:58]

Simone:
Oh, wow-wow-wow!  How's the experience been?  Living here?

[08:00]

Muñoz:
It's very good, it's-

[08:02]

Simone:
Positive throughout?

[08:02]

Muñoz:
It’s very positive.  Um, we travel often.  So, whenever we tell someone that we're from Mississippi, they're kinda like, "Oh, well, I mean, look..." But, I mean, being from Mississippi and being from Oxford, to me, it's.  It is very different, yeah.

[08:16]

Simone:
Explain.  Explain!  What do you mean? I’ll hear that a lot.

[Pause]

[09:16]

Muñoz:
Um, yeah, you'll go to Tupelo, I mean, or you'll go to Batesville, Panola, I mean, Pontotac, New Albany...to other small towns.  Um, and just like the the feeling here in Oxford is, was more, like with the Square, the downtown area, I haven't seen downtown areas around Mississippi, like Oxford.  I mean, it's very different.  I mean, the restaurants, the shopping, the bars, I mean, everything's very...I’m not really sure how to explain it, but it's just different. Yeah, it's very, I mean, it's very nice.  And, like, in Batesville, you have more of your...rural kind of…suburbia areas. And here, I mean, you do see it, but not as often.  It's...I mean, in the past five years, it's grown a lot. Like, tremendously.

[09:19]

Simone:
Yeah, yeah, construction everywhere!

Muñoz:
Yeah.  I mean, I'm a fan of...in a business aspect.  To me it brings a lot more people in.  But, Oxford's small town charm needs to kind of stay. Oh yeah, oh yeah, traffic gets worse. Uh.  Everything, you know...I mean, it's fine, it's for the businesses, but for locals, you know, it's kind of.  It’s a very different change.

[10:12]

Simone:
Was there a lot of, or was there any push back in some of the smaller towns, when you first arrived?  In terms of the restaurants?

[10:18]

Muñoz:
Well...

[10:19]

Simone:
Or were people just very welcoming?  [Muñoz: Yeah]

[10:23]

Muñoz:
Honestly, what past restaurants have opened, I'm not really familiar with. 'Cause I didn't get involved.  Yeah, I...kind of just stayed away… in school, or whatever.  And I went to culinary school, so I did that for like, two years.  And then, from then on, after highschool and culinary school is when I got more involved.  I mean, I would have come into this restaurant, sorry, to work, and I would notice the restaurants around the area, in Grenada or Hernando, and stuff like that. I would go into work, like on a Friday night, when they needed me, like extra hands. But as far as day to day, or being involved with businesses, not very much.  But, I mean, now, the most thing, as far as I see, it's, I mean, everybody loves Mexican.  There's not very much people that don't...want Mexican.  With the bar...with the drinks, it's a bit more specific.  Just 'cause, it’s not, in Mississippi there's towns that are very religious.  Or they're very, like, so, I mean, you're from New York.  Anywhere in that area.  Gimme a bar, now, make it big and pretty and you know, that's a main a focus point. And, we had one restaurant in Senatobia, we'll have in areas like that where it's kinda more like hush-hush.  Keep the bar in the kitchen...

[11:40]

Simone:
Really?

[11:41]

Muñoz:
Yeah.  Some people won't... don't appreciate it.

[11:45]

Simone:
Oh, wow.

[11:46]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[11:47]

Simone:
And are almost opposed to seeing?

[12:12]

Muñoz:
Exactly.  And, I mean, obviously, you do have the people, I mean, you obviously have to sell margaritas in the restaurant.  Always.  You know, sell alcohol.  It's just the volume level of it, is not, it's less appreciated in some places than it's in others.  Just 'cause of the...I don't know if it's a religious aspect or if it's a kind of small town where...everybody knows you, and if you're drinking a marg, oh my God, you know?

[12:12]

Simone:

OK! [laughs]

[12:13]

Muñoz:
So, yeah, it's kind of one way. 'Cause, I mean, at some places, we have been wanting to build a bar and make it real nice and pretty.  But some places just don't want it.

[12:21]

Simone:
Oh, wow! That's so [Muñoz: yeah] interesting!  That's so interesting.  I would have never expected that.

[12:25]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[12:28]

Simone:
Well, I thought everyone loved a margarita!  [laughs]

[12:28]

Muñoz:
Right?!?

[12:33]

Muñoz:
Yeah, but, I mean, it's just that you have to know where you're opening and what your people want.  'Cause I mean, if you're gonna spend so much money on a bar, then, you know what I mean, there's a bar here, I personally love it, but if people are sitting at it, having a good time, drinking, being social, along my bar, I mean...in Oxford, there's so many. I mean, there’s numerous amount of bars. So, when I see my bar on a Tuesday night. And it's full.  I mean, that makes me...happy, 'cause people appreciate the work you been putting in. And anyone dining, or anything like that, the patio, or stuff like that, it's very enjoyable when someone comes in, and is like, "Hey, I want to sit at the bar!"  or "Hey, I want to sit on the patio!" Versus, "Hey, just sit me down somewhere," you know? 'Cause, I mean, people appreciate it more, you know?

[13:25]

Simone:
OK, OK.  And, is it a lot of students that are customers?

[13:29]

Muñoz:
A lot of our clientelle are, yeah, it's half, it's very diverse.  We'll have locals that have been with us forever. Yeah, and we'll have college students who just love our margaritas and love our deals. And, in town we do cater to a lot of the apartment complexes.

[13:48]

Simone:
Oh.  OK.

[13:49]

Muñoz:
Yeah.  I mean it’s fun, it’s nice that they appreciate us and out of all the places in town, they choose us. And we highly appreciate that.  I mean...we try to help out the community as much as much as we can.  With the Chamber, and stuff like that.

[14:04]

Simone:
Oh, do you? OK.

[14:05]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[14:06]

Simone:
What are you involved in...in the Oxford Chamber of Commerce?

[14:09]

Muñoz:
We are a part of it.  And we do try to help with events going on in town or I believe last year, we helped out with the gala that we had. It had a chef shuffle kind of deal, and we love to help with that.  And this year, we're doing it as well, but it’s on Thursday.

[14:28]

Simone:
This upcoming Thursday?

[14:29]

Muñoz:
This upcoming Thursday, yes, ma'am.

[14:30]

Simone:
Good to know!

[14:31]

Muñoz:
Yeah, and then with the Double Decker, and the schools in town, we just love to get involved with the community.  So community, that's what we're here for to service the community, and help it out, and help it grow.

[14:46]

Simone:
OK.  Have you seen a lot of growth in the Latino population?  Here?

[14:49]

Muñoz:
Uh, yeah.

[14:49]

Simone:
Yes?

[14:50]

Muñoz:
When we first moved to Oxford, I believe, there was me, our family, and another family.
[Simone laughs].  There was two families.  Yeah.  [Simone laughs again.]  Two, uh, and no more than five families, for sure.  And, I mean, now, there's just major increase. With all the construction in town, and all the...you know.  It's brought a lot of Hispanics... it's made the Hispanic community very abundant.  It's grown drastically. Um, to where now, in high school, when I graduated...I think there was, total twenty, thirty kids.

[15:30]

Simone:
OK.  That were Latino?

[15:31]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[15:31]

Simone:
Really?

[15:32]

Muñoz:
And, uh-

[15:32]

Simone:
How many were...

[15:33]

Muñoz:
...and not in my graduating class, but, in the whole school. Yeah.

[15:36]

Simone:
How many student do you remember were in your graduating class, or how many in the school?

[15:40]

Muñoz:
In my graduating class, it was either, like, it was still, like, two or three.  [laughs] My class wasn't very big.

[15:51]

Simone:
OK.

[15:52]

Muñoz:
But-

[15:33]

Simone:
How many students? Or, is it, like, a hundred?

[15:55]

Muñoz:
It was, like, I think it was like three hundred.

[15:58]

Simone:
OK!

[15:58]

Muñoz:
Yeah, something like that.

[15:59]

Simone:
So the whole, uh, the whole school?

[16:00]

Muñoz:
No, it-

[16:00]

Simone:
Or just your class?

[16:00]

Muñoz:
It was just, my class, yeah.

[16:02]

Simone:
Oh, OK!  Yeah, that's pretty good, yeah!

[16:03]

Muñoz:
Like I said I'm not a hundred percent sure, it's like a rough number.  So, you’d want to research it.

[16:14]

Simone:
But enough that, yeah, yeah...it was such a...

[16:15]

Muñoz:
Yeah, oh...

[16:16]

Simone:
...super small town...

[16:16]

Muñoz:
Mm, yeah.

[16:17]

Simone:

...everyone knows everyone...

[16:18]

Muñoz:
Exactly.

[16:20]

Simone:
Yes, sir.   Yeah, I don't have a sense of...

[16:21]

Muñoz:
No, yeah, no, I mean, here with Ole Miss, and everything, drinking and having all, like, all that stuff is more appropriate.  With the Grove, and all that good stuff, I mean, this town is...honestly, I wouldn't move anywhere else.

[16:35]

Simone:
You wouldn't?

[16:36]

Muñoz:
No!

[16:36]

Simone:
OK!

[16:36]

Muñoz:
I mean, obviously, if it continues to grow like it is, and it gets real, real big and I mean, and it loses that downtown feel where you can go, and you know who has what shop, you know, all that good stuff.  And, I mean it does take away a little bit, but I mean, as far as the places that I've been to, I haven't really seen much of a place like Oxford.

[16:57]

Simone:
OK, OK.

[16:58]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[16:59]

Simone:
And you know a lot of people, uh, presumably in the community, that are...

[17:01]

Muñoz:
We definitely do know a lot of fellow owners of other businesses in town, or stuff like that, yes, ma'am.

[17:15]

Simone:
OK, OK, so the network's, kind of, grown...

[17:17]

Muñoz:
Yeah, and a little bit, yes, ma'am.

[17:18]

Simone:
OK.

[17:18]

Muñoz:
And, of course, joining the Chamber has helped us tremendously with that aspect of...networking, you know, the people around town, and all that good stuff.

[17:25]

Simone:
OK.

[17:27]

Simone:
How long have you been part of the Chamber, is it relatively recent?

[17:28]

Muñoz:
It's relatively recent, yes, ma'am.

[17:30]

Simone:
Oh, OK.

[17:31]

Muñoz:
Yeah, it's pretty recent.  Um, yeah...Give me one second.

[17:32]

Simone:
Yeah, absolutely.

[17:35]

[TAPE CUT]

Simone:
So, the other question, you're bilingual, I just heard you...

[00:03]

Muñoz:
Yes.

[00:06]

Simone:
OK, OK, how about at home?  What language do you usually speak?

[00:06]

Muñoz:
Spanish.

[00:10]

Simone:
In your home.  Spanish?  With the family?

[00:11]

Muñoz:
Yeah.  With most of my family it's all mainly Spanish.  Um, of course it's English with the siblings and stuff like that, or...'cause my, and my dad and my mom both speak English, but with a very heavy accent. Yeah, and so they tend to speak Spanish.  All the time.

[00:31]

Simone:
OK, OK.

[00:33]

Muñoz:
And with my little sister, she's five.

[00:35]

Simone:
Oh, OK!

[00:36]

Muñoz:
So she...her English is very, like...strong [laughs].

[00:39]

Simone:
OK.

[00:40]

Muñoz:
She’s in school and whatnot.  So with her it's mainly English, it just depends, you know? But it, it's both.  Me and my other sisters both speak Spanish, or know how to read Spanish, write in Spanish, and we do, we're very fortunate and lucky enough to know two languages.

[00:55]

Simone:
Yep. Absolutely.  Do you see any push-back...with...people who maybe hear you speaking Spanish in public spaces?  Or hearing...

[01:03]

Muñoz:
Some people are thrown off by it.  Like, here in the restaurant, if a customer hears me speaking Spanish they’re like, "whoa, what are you saying?"  like, what, you know?  But, I mean, it's not something that we've seen be a major problem.  There's maybe one customer in every two months.  I mean, it's not, like-

[01:19]

Simone:
That's good! [laughs]

[01:20]

Muñoz:
Yeah, it's not that...

[01:21]

Simone:
That's a good thing. OK.

[01:21]

Muñoz:
...big of a deal.

[01:23]

Simone:
OK, OK, OK, OK.

[01:24]

Muñoz:
Yeah, and the way we communicate here, with the staff, I mean we...my whole staff here, I'm lucky enough too, that we all speak English and Spanish.

[01:32]

Simone:
Everyone here...

[01:33]

Muñoz:
Everybody...

[01:34]

Simone:
...is bilingual?

[01:34]

Muñoz:
...everyone in the building is bilingual, yes, ma'am.

[01:36]

Simone:
OK.  That's amazing that you were able to [Muñoz: yeah] find staff, and we're trying to get students that are bilingual to work for us, and we're, like, 'we can't find the students!" [Muñoz: Yes, ma'am] It's really hard!

[01:47]

Muñoz:
Well, one of the ladies that works here with us part-time, um...she worked at one of our other locations in Memphis. In the Memphis area, yeah.  And when she came down to Oxford, she saw we had the same, it was the same training, so, I mean it was easy to transition, to go from...one restaurant to the other, 'cause, I mean, it's the exact same thing.

[02:11]

Simone:
Same menu?

[02:11]

Muñoz:
Same, same menu, same everything.  So, I mean, it's easy.  And I mean, so that's kinda how...'cause that's just Memphis, and it kinda helps us...bring other people from the outside in.  Our staff get more people to work here.  [laughs]

[02:26]

Simone:
Yeah, I hear that.  I hear that.  So, you have one in, just one in Memphis?

[02:29]

Muñoz:
There's a couple.  There's, yeah, there's, like a...three. Yeah.

[02:34]

Simone:
OK.  [laughs]

[02:35]

Muñoz:
There's...I believe there's three Casa Mexicanas, and then there's a couple more different ones.

[02:40]

Simone:
OK.

[02:40]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[02:42]

Simone:
And then in DeSoto county is it just the one in Olive Branch, and the one in, uh, Southaven?

[02:46]

Muñoz: There's, like, Olive Branch...Southaven...yeah. Basically, just that, in that area. But yeah, it's just in that relative area.

[02:59]

Simone:
OK.

[03:01]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[03:02]

Simone:
Are your employees, are you, do you get a lot of students...that [Muñoz: yeah] end up working for you?

[03:05]

Muñoz:
Half of my employees are students, yeah.

[03:07]

Simone:
They are, OK, OK.

[03:09]

Muñoz:
Yeah, they...like, now...I've been dealing with the shift change, of not having people...just because students...leave. [laughs]

[03:17]

Simone:
OK, so that's what

[03:18]

Muñoz:
And yeah, that's what, right now, it's like, ugh!  'Cause, I mean after this one weekend, after graduation weekend, it's kind of just ...slowed down, yeah, it's just, it gets more relaxed, more easier to control, you know, a lot...lot...less people. I mean, which is fine...with me, 'cause, I mean, we have... September and August to turn them around. I mean, it's not a whole lot of change, like, it's pace is down a little bit.

[03:47]

Simone:
OK, OK, OK.

[03:48]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[03:49]

Simone:
A little break until the rush comes back.  OK, gotcha, gotcha, gotcha. Do you find that a lot of members of the Latino community...come here...as customers to eat, or are there other...

[03:58]

Muñoz:
I...

[03:58]

Simone:
...places?

[03:59]

Muñoz:
I have.  Yeah, we'll have...on Saturdays especially.  I do see them around lunchtime, that's a very, uh, it's...it's most, most of where our customer base.  Yeah, I was just about to, on days like today, I mean, it's more...

[04:20]

Simone:
Yeah, graduation [Muñoz: yeah] and students [Muñoz: yeah] and every single table's going to be packed [Muñoz: yeah, exactly] and you'll have a line outside [Muñoz: exactly].  [Simone laughs]

[04:26]

Muñoz: Yeah, hopefully.  Hopefully.

Simone:
Yes, yes, yes! [Muñoz laughs] I know you will.

[04:27]

Muñoz: It's...yeah, we do see them quite often...in here.  It's, like, around lunchtime and those, well, I mean, with the construction workers in town, and all that good stuff.  It does help us out a lot.  Yes, ma'am.

[04:30]

Simone:
OK.  Do you find that they all live in a certain area in Oxford, or is everyone just kind of scattered around?

[04:44]

Muñoz:
More scattered around...

[04:49]

Simone:
Scattered around here.

[04:50]

Muñoz:
...yeah.  I mean with the churches, with the mass services and all that stuff they kinda...tend to...be together.  And kind of join...and make the community even stronger.  With...let's say, like, some are Catholic, some are Christians, I mean...their religion, it helps them a lot to kind of find the community.  And, like, here...last Sunday, we had a huge party of, like, forty.  They’re all, like Honduran, Guatemalan, Central American…yeah, I mean, that's...uh, I love it when people like that come and stop by, 'cause, I mean, they're... Latinos helping out each other, which is great.

[04:52]

Simone:
You find a lot of non-Mexicans Latinos here then.  [Muñoz: Yeah.]  I'm hearing Hondurans, Guatemalans, [Muñoz: Yeah], I would have never guessed...

[05:37]

Muñoz:
Honduran, Guatemalan, um...Salvadoran, all the...people from everywhere. Everywhere, yeah.  It's Mexico, South America...it's very...it's all, yeah, diverse, yeah.

[05:37]

Simone:
OK, and there's churches that have the Spanish language [Muñoz: Mm-hmm] services here?

[05:42]

Muñoz:
There's, there's a few, yes, ma'am.  There’s not...a lot...like, in fact when we first moved here, um...there was the St. John Catholic Church, who had mass services in Spanish.  So, that, we loved that.  We were a-

[05:55]

Simone:
You would go, and, oh, wow, OK.

[05:58]

Muñoz:
Yeah, that's when I did my First Communion and all that.  Aaaand, but in the past, in the couple, like, years in the past...it has changed.  Just because...I mean, it's so many people.  That, and so they, they...I guess...prefer just to have English service.  Which is fine, I mean, the one that we go to all the time as well. I mean, I try to go as much as I can [laughs]. You know, but also in the mornings, I have to be here.

[06:17]

Simone:
Yeah, I hear ya.  I hear you.

[06:19]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[06:50]

Simone:
OK, OK.  And how about, do you live in town, or...?

[06:51]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[06:52]

Simone:
Are you nearby?

[06:55]

Muñoz:
Yeah, we live in, not in town.  Kinda like out in the...suburbs.  [Laughs]  Out more towards...the highway.

[07:06]

Simone:
OK, OK...

[07:07]

Muñoz:
Yeah, but I mean...

[07:09]

Simone:
...so it's not...

[07:09]

Muñoz:
...it's, like, it's a ten-minute drive.

[07:09]

Simone:
OK.

[07:10]

Muñoz:
Yeah, it's not bad.

[07:11]

Simone:
So that's not too bad then.

[07:11]

Muñoz:
No, ma'am.

[07:12]

Simone:
Not too bad.  And then the...property...in one of the articles, it mentions, on highway six that...It looks like a Spanish villa to me when I drive by.  'Cause, I live near Memphis, so I drive through Batesville...and down [Muñoz: Oh, yes, ma'am.] highway six...  And then there's Steeplechase, and then there's...

[07:25]

Muñoz:
Our house.

[07:26]

Simone:
Have you seen...that-that is yours?

[07:27]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am...

[07:29]

Muñoz:
My parents, family is out there.

[07:30]

Simone:
OK, yeah, I wasn't sure what that was [laughs], 'cause you can see the gates with [Muñoz: Yeah.] the horses...But, yeah, I drive by and in one of the articles it says, you know, these are the mystery owners [Muñoz laughs] of that property.  It's, like, ok!

[07:43]

Muñoz:
Yeah.  I didn't realize that was their...opening point to that article, but I mean, I guess, why not?

[07:49]

Simone:
Yeah.

[07:51]

Muñoz:
But, yeah, that's just something my mother and father wanted to build.  'Cause, I mean, they've done so well with their businesses that, you know? It's-

[08:03]

Simone:
It's one of the most beautiful [laughs] places [Muñoz: Yeah, they...] that I've gotten to see.

[08:05]

Muñoz:
Yeah, they're very proud of their house, yeah they love it.

[08:09]

Simone:
...when did they build it?  Is it, from the ground up? Or?

[08:12]

Muñoz:
Ground up, yes, ma'am.  We originally wanted to build it within the neighborhood of Grand Oaks.  Which is up near by the hospital.  And, 'cause we, I mean, we originally lived in a neighborhood when we first moved in.

[08:29]

Simone:
You were in [Muñoz: We-] Grand Oaks?

[08:31]

Muñoz:
We, no, we were in Shady Oaks, over here, yeah.  And then...whenever they wanted to expand they looked into that area. To kinda build their house. Um...for some reason, the...community wasn't very...open.

[08:52]

Simone:
Really?  Is it the architecture?

[08:54]

Muñoz:
I think so, yeah.

[08:55]

Simone:
OK.

[08:56]

Muñoz:
I think so, yeah.  So...they were like, 'no, we don't want to deal with that. We'd rather just...live somewhere ourselves.' So that's when they came over here to highway 6.  And they built that about ten years ago.

[09:10]

Simone:
So, you've been there, well, you've had some...

[09:11]

Muñoz:
Yeah...it's been there, it's been there a [laughs over his last word].

[09:13]

Simone:
Yeah! How long did it take to construct?  Was it all, I mean, is it different phases?

[09:18]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[09:19]

Simone:
OK.

[09:19]

Muñoz:
At first they built the house.  And the driveway and all that, that was the main focus point.  And then over time, my dad is a very big, uh, fanatic of...the equestrian.

[09:30]

Simone:
OK! Yeah. Horse fans.

[09:33]

Muñoz:
Yeah. He, he's very...like, that's just a hobby made into a business that's his, that's what he loves to do.  Um, and so, he, well, he built his own little farm there, with the, uh, barn, stable, arena [laughs].

[09:50]

Simone:
Really?  OK.  I had no idea what's beyond the gate, [Muñoz: Yeah...] you can just see...[Muñoz:...he has, like a...]...the house...[Muñoz:...whole little, like...]...that's it...

[09:55]

Muñoz:
...like, little riding, little area, yeah.

[09:59]

Simone:
Wow, OK!  And he built a farm. [laughs]  What kind of animals do you have?

[10:03]

Muñoz: Everything.  Everything.  Like sheep, cows, peacocks, ducks, swans...bunnies...everything.

[10:13]

Simone:
You'd never know, would never know...

[10:15]

Muñoz:
Yeah...

[10:15]

Simone:
...from that angle.

[10:16]

Muñoz:
...yeah, no, there's everything there, yeah.  It's took, we have, like, our own little petting zoo.  [laughs]

[10:20]

Simone:
Wow!  OK.

[10:21]

Muñoz:
Yeah, they both, my dad was raised more in the city...as a kid.  Just 'cause there was more job opportunity.  Um, my mom was more of the farm, country life.  So they, that’s what they love to do. They love to be able to have these things that remind them of...you know back in Mexico. [laughs]

[10:45]

Simone:
Yeah, yeah, it's just [Muñoz: yeah] what I was going to ask.  Did they meet in Mexico, or...if it was here?

[10:50]

Muñoz:
Um, they were born in the same town.

[10:52]

Simone:
Oh, OK.

[10:53]

Muñoz:
It's all one little, small, little town in the mountains of Jalisco.  Um, and it's called San Jose de la Paz. And my dad, they were both raised, born...in the small, little town.  They were born, like, off in a little farm.

[11:10]

Simone:
So both of them are familiar...

[11:12]

Muñoz:
Yeah...

[11:13]

Simone:
...and they grew up, being able to raise...

[11:15]

Muñoz:
...and, yeah, they...

[11:16]

Simone:
...oh, wow, OK.

[11:18]

Muñoz:
...they were...born very...very rural, you know, uh...it's a beautiful, uh, we go, we go visit it twice a year.

[11:27]

Simone:
Oh, OK!  That's fantastic!

[11:28]

Muñoz:
Yeah, my, yeah, my grandparents still have it, and it's still there, where my mom was raised, and it's a great little area to go to.

[11:37]

Simone:
OK, OK!

[11:38]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[11:39]

Simone:
Oh, that's nice that you have that connection...

[11:40]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[11:41]

Simone:
...and got to see that.  Do they actually, with the farm, do they sell things from it, or...

[11:45]

Muñoz:
M-nah...

[11:46]

Simone:
...is it just for your...

[11:46]

Muñoz:
...so...

[11:47]

Simone:
...enjoyment, and...

[11:48]

Muñoz:
Just enjoyment.

[11:48]

Simone:
...hobbies...

[11:49]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[11:49]

Simone:
...and kind of, love, and whatnot.

[11:50]

Muñoz:
Yeah, just...something we do in the pastime.

[11:52]

Simone:
OK. I mean, are you an equestrian, or do you ride much?

[11:56]

Muñoz:
I used to, I used to a lot.  Um, back in high school.  I would, I had my one horse, I would ride it, uh, twice a week.

[12:04]

Simone:
What was his name?  Or her name?

[12:06]

Muñoz:
It was, uh, Hermes, like the god.

[12:09]

Simone:
OK, yeah.

[12:10]

Muñoz:
Yeah, it was a beautiful horse.  I loved it.  But I never rode it, 'cause I was busy or whatnot.  So I gave it to my little cousin.

[12:20]

Simone:
Oh, wow!

[12:22]

Muñoz:
Yeah, he loves horses.  So, yeah, that's what I did with it.

[12:27]

Simone:
OK.  So you have other family that lives...

[12:29]

Muñoz:
Not in the...

[12:29]

Simone:
...in town?

[12:29]

Muñoz:
Not in town.  My...um, uncle, on my dad's side, is about forty-five minutes away.

[12:35]

Simone:
OK, OK.

[12:40]

Muñoz:
And then my other, and then on my, uh, on my mom's side, everybody lives, like, seven hours away,  five hours away, yeah.

[12:41]

Simone:
So you're alone here then...

[12:42]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[12:42]

Simone:
...in a lot of ways.  OK.

[12:44]

Muñoz: Yeah.  That's the way that they like to go, their own route.

[12:48]

Simone:
OK. So, in terms of just growing up here, in middle school, how was school?

[12:56]

Muñoz:
[says something in Spanish] It was, it was nice, it was yeah.

[13:02]

Simone:
With, I mean, not really?

[13:05]

Muñoz:
Mmmm, no, I mean, I was basically the only Hispanic.  It was probably me and two other guys, or like a little, small, little handful.

[13:13]

Simone:
OK, what was that a...

[13:14]

Muñoz:
It wasn't...

[13:15]

Simone:
..were people conscious of what that even means to be Hispanic?

[13:24]

Muñoz:
No, not really.  I mean...it was, just, uh, normal, you know? Here in Oxford.  I mean, it's very...you have a couple Hispanics, a couple of Asians, a couple of African-Americans, couple of, a little bit of everything.

[13:41]

Simone:
OK, so your school was...

[13:41]

Muñoz:
It, it's a...

[13:42]

Simone:
...diverse...

[13:42]

Muñoz:
Yeah...

[13:43]

Simone:
...in that way.

[13:43]

Muñoz:
...it's very diverse, yeah.

[13:44]

Simone:
Did you, were there tensions, well, at Ole Miss, there's always tensions, race relations, was it similar at the high school and middle school level or is it just, like...

[13:52]

Muñoz:
It was, like...no, it was just maybe a stupid little remark here and there, you know?

[14:00]

Simone:
OK, OK. No big...

[14:01]

Muñoz:
Like...nothing major.  No, ma'am.

[14:03]

Simone:
OK, OK.  Well, that's [laughs] good, that's a good thing.

[14:06]

Muñoz:
I mean, there were little remarks here and there, but, I mean, it's just basic high school, middle school, like, young teenage type stuff.  [Someone coughs]  It was no big deal. [laughs]

[14:21]

Simone:
OK, OK.  Were there tensions between the African American population and, the white population, not including you?

[14:31]

Muñoz:
Mmmm...

[14:32]

Simone:
Like things you observed as an outsider, or?

[14:33]

Muñoz:
No.  It's...very...I believe it's more the person you are then the race you are. I never had that experience with people.  Um, obviously, I...have never seen it out in the other small towns, but, I mean, I would imagine that it would be more of a big deal there. Yeah, the racial issues are more...of a problem.  But, I mean, here...here, uh, I feel it's more...the kind of person you are. And how you behave.  That'll get you more...a different look towards the people, you know? Yeah.

[15:22]

Simone:
Well, that's good, that people enjoy being here.

[15:25]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[15:26]

Simone:
That's a very positive thing.  But the future, I mean, things that you see...in the future for family, or yourself, in terms of businesses?  I know you said there's one more that you're planning [Muñoz: Mm-hmm.] on expanding.  Can you...?

[15:37]

Muñoz:
Yeah, we hope to keep it going.  We hope, we hope...it's...it's a tough business, but...it's all we know.

[15:45]

Simone:
OK, OK.

[15:47]

Muñoz:
I mean last night, and I had my little sister working, she's thirteen.  And, I mean, she loves it. She'll ask me, "hey, I need money, can I work?"  I'm like, "of course."  So, yeah, she'll come in for like two, three hours, and stay at the register, host, or you know, something easy that she can just [someone coughs] step into and kind of experience herself.  'Cause, I mean, even myself, I did that. [someone coughs]

[16:13]

Simone:
OK, so that's where...

[16:14]

Muñoz:
That...

[16:14]

Simone:
...you learned to...

[16:15]

Muñoz:
...yeah, back when I was her age, I would come in.  I would, uh, I would host, or I would register, or I would help out in any way that I could, like, carry, take out chips, bus the table.

[16:24]

Simone:
OK, OK.

[16:25]

Muñoz:
Stuff like that.  Which, I mean it's fun.  And I mean, it's good to have...I mean, within a family business, it's good to start them young, so they have an appreciation...of things, and then understand how everything works.

[16:40]

Simone:
And, yeah.  She has to work for money, right?

[16:43]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[16:44]

Simone:
'Cause there's not an allowance or anything is there? [laughs]

[16:46]

Muñoz:
Every now and then there might be, but yeah. She may be, like, "oh my, I want this pair of sunglasses!"  Or "I want this" or... Um, "if I save this much money, I can buy them" and whatnot.  So she'll. So, yeah, she enjoys working. And yesterday, she asked me, "Hey, am I working?  I want to work!"

[17:04]

Simone:
That's impressive!

[17:04]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[17:05]

Simone:
That's impressive!

[17:06]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[17:07]

Simone:
That's really a great work ethic at thirteen!

[17:08]

Muñoz:
Yeah, thirteen.

[17:09]

Simone:
Yeah, usually...

[17:10]

Muñoz:
She appreciates...

[17:11]

Simone:
it's, like, 'I don't want to do it, I want to go out.'

[17:12]

Muñoz:
Yeah. She appreciates having her own little income I guess. [laughs]

[17:16]

Simone:
Yeah!  That's really impressive.

[17:17]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[17:19]

Simone:
Are there other things that I should know, about the family, or the business, about your experiences here, in trying to communicate to people?  A lot of what I'm trying to do is communicate to people outside of Mississippi.

[17:31]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[17:32]

Simone:
Because the perceptions...

[17:34]

Muñoz:
Yeah, of course...

[17:35]

Simone:
...always and negative, so, you know a positive, kind of...

[17:38]

Muñoz:
Yeah, well, I mean, in a lot of parts [someone coughs] towns in Mississippi and in the south...it's...I don't want to say it, but it is your stereotypical.

[17:49]

Simone:
Mm-hmm.  OK.

[17:50]

Muñoz:
Of course.  You're going to have your small little towns, that's...very segregated, or that is, like...an...you know, stuff like that.  Um, but as well, you are gonna have your towns, like Oxford, like more like your big towns, bigger.  All I, I don't want to say, like, cities... But just, like, a bigger population town that has more of a diverse population. That's more accepting towards it.  Like, here in Oxford, this past weekend, I believe we had the first gay pride. Which is very exciting for the city.  I mean, it's a big [loud bangs] Yeah.  Yeah. It was a very big step for us.  As a community.  To kind of be more [cough], how do I say it?  More...in the, more up to speed to what America's moving towards.  Which is nice, but yeah, like I said, places in around town, uh, around Mississippi area...are...gonna be more... stand-offish.  Resist.  But I mean, there's nothing really we can do about it. And I mean people just need to be, to get away from their thoughts and the way of thinking to where, you know, it's more open-minded.

[19:04]

Simone:
Yeah, yeah.  And that new legislation, of course.

[19:07]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[19:08]

Simone:
Incredibly problematic.

[19:09]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[19:10]

Simone:
It's just, uh, have you heard a lot about it?  It's, uh, kind of, some big...

[19:13]

Muñoz:
I tried, honestly-

[19:14]

Simone:
...conversation, or?

[19:15]

Muñoz:
I honestly try to stay away from the political... politics. Um, just 'cause, I mean, it's not...I mean, I am affected by it.  Me being Hispanic and illegal immigration being such a big deal like it is.  I mean, I don't, it doesn't affect *me*, I was born here, and my family all...most, my parents weren't born here, but they are now citizens, so, I mean, they, we all do our part for the country.  And, when I hear...or see articles in the paper about illegal immigration and deportation and stuff like that, it is a very sour topic for us.  Because, I mean, I understand if people are here to work, and I mean...I understand all of that. And, but I mean, I also understand the part where...us as a citizen...don't want to be paying...for someone else's...you know? So, but we, for us, we do see both sides of the scenario, I mean, I say, hey, if someone wants to work...and they have, are...being helpful towards the country, and aren't causing too much of a rif and they're, I mean, they're working and they're paying the taxes. And I'm, like, hey, just let them work, let people...look for a better life.  Um...and if it's not much of a, and if they're not causing a problem, then what's the issue, you know?  Which is the way I, just that's the way I look at it.  I mean, and again, there are, it's just, like I said, it...with people living here in town, it's not the race, if they are or, it's not the color of their skin, it's more the person they are. And their character.  'Cause, I mean...you know how work has been, it's hard working.  And they're paying their taxes, they're doing all their part, to help out where they're living.  And then you'll have the one Hispanic, who would, just wants to come...collect the money and go.  Which they're not, which is not what I'm, uh, I'm not OK with that, you know. If you're gonna come into the United States...find work, we're here, all here to work, but help the country, you know?  So, yeah, I, we definitely see...both sides of the... of that whole topic.  And, I mean, here in town, there...there is a large community of Hispanics that are here just to work.  Um...I'm not very familiar with where they work, or who they are, who you know, but I mean, it's like...it's there.  And, I mean, it's there in every town you go to, and every city you go to, you're gonna have that one group of… illegals that are, that all they want to do is just work.  And, I mean, it's sad to where they have to go turn in, trial and tribulations, uh, just to be able to do that.  I mean, like, I've heard stories of people taking three months to cross.  But being stuck in certain areas, where they can't do anything.  And I mean, and that's the kind of stuff you hear on the news as well.  I mean you hear...um, mothers sending over their children and they're being very scary and very dangerous.  Which is, I mean, [loud bang] it's a very tough subject...to, uh, look at.  I mean, people want to...find a better...life for themselves.  And like I said, if you're here for that, then I'm all for it. Yeah, I mean, it's, I...like, seeing the communities expand, and my Hispanic roots and whatnot...and for it to grow.  And help out the community. Yeah, I mean, is what I, what we, what we like to do. We like to give our community a good name. Like, I mean, helping out as much as we can, and being helpful.  Not being too much...problems. You know. Stuff like that. Yeah, so that's why most of my employees here are Hispanic.  Just, um, I have a guy from Ecuador, I have a guy from Mexico, I have people from...all over the place, like, from the university.  Um, and...they're students, looking for a job, and I mean, I'm...if you're willing to work, I'll work with your schedule, and I'll work with you, and...I'll give you guys an opportunity, and with anybody who wants to work. It, let it be African American, it be Asian, it be Hispanic, uh, Central American, American I mean, if you want to work, I'm going to give you a job. Just 'cause I want to help out the community.  And help you out, if I can, and when someone's helping me out, then I'm gonna try to help them out as much as I can.

[25:09]

Simone:
That's fantastic.  That's fantastic.  So you're a good boss!  [laughs]

[25:10]

Muñoz:
I try to, I try.

[25:12]

Simone:
[still laughing]  A nice boss!

[25:13]

Muñoz:
Some would say against that, 'cause, depending on the day.  But yeah. It just depends on, you know, how you are. [laughs]

[25:21]

Simone:
OK, OK, but yeah, I guess you have to keep things in check.

[25:25]

Muñoz:
I would-

[25:26]

Simone:
Challenge.  So much challenge.

[25:27]

Muñoz:
...hope people could say that, that I am.  I would hope so.  [more banging]  Yes, ma'am.

[25:32]

Simone:
Alright, good.  Thank you, thank you.  Is there anything else you'd like to add, that I should know, about the culture, family, or experience?

[25:39]

Muñoz:
Mmmm...

[25:40]

Simone:
Anything else you want to tell [laughs] the world [laughs] that they don't know about Mississippi or Oxford?

[25:45]

Muñoz:
Mississippi or Oxford...mmm...yeah, I mean, Mississippi?  What can I say?  [Simone laughs] It's...Mississippi, hmmm.  [Simone laughs]

[26:03]

Simone:
Speechless?  [laughs]

[26:05]

Muñoz:
Yeah, it's just...I...just don't know.  Mississippi, it's...it's, come and go, you know?  You...you go to a town where it's accepting of things, and then you go to a town that's not.  Um, but in working, we keep working to let it, people...are gonna have their views.  And some people, there's nothing you can do about it.  And some people they do stuff, like, you can...there's a way of teaching them...that it's all not just...like...easy.  Like it is in a big city.  To where, if you're Hispanic, you're gonna have this huge community, this family, that are gonna welcome you with open arms. Um, and here...in Oxford, it's not like that.  Just 'cause it, I mean, it's very different, and in other places, you will.  You'll have that....that kind of role.  They don't wanna, I don't wanna, you know, be here, 'cause then they'll have, like, two people to hang with and a bunch of people to...to live with, or... You know?  Stuff like that.  So, I mean...  Like I said, here, in Oxford, when we first moved in it was just a couple families. And now, it's gotten so big, and so large, and a lot of that has to deal with more job opportunities...more...more construction, more development, all that good stuff, is what helps a lot, the community, to, like, expand and have that large...Hispanic...population here.  Yeah.  But here I know...if you don't have some friends that come in, or people that come in, are like, hey, my nanny is from Mexico, my housekeeper's from Ecuador, Guatemala, or places like that, so I mean, it...people like that help out.  The hiring, the people who are not, who can't get a job everywhere, you know? Just because of their status. And, I mean, someone wants to...give someone a job and help them out, then, I mean, that's great.  Great for you.  They're doing a great thing. [laughs] It's not, it's not what's supposed to happen, I mean, you know, but...

[28:26]

Simone:
Right, right.  But there's willingness...

[28:27]

Muñoz:
Yeah, yeah...

[28:28]

Simone:
...you're finding, here in Oxford?

[28:29]

Muñoz:
Yeah, yeah, there's-

[28:30]

Simone:
Open-mindedness.

[28:31]

Muñoz:
Open-minded people, will, like, some ladies, or something, I mean, if you need extra help or stuff like that, or...that'll hire someone-

[28:39]

Simone:
That are willing to...

[28:40]

Muñoz:
Yeah, like, I know one lady who's worked with the same family for fifteen years now. There's, and the children have grown up and they're still...the lady’s family to them. Um, yeah, I mean, that's, which is great, and like I said, I hope, places like that, or it's like that, I mean, everywhere.  And I mean, I accept more stand-offish, but I mean, with, with the times...it'll, eh, hopefully it will change.

[29:09]

Simone:
OK.

[29:10]

Muñoz:
Yeah.  And the culture here...in town, in Mississippi, you'll have, like in Jackson, Mississippi, you'll have, like, your independent state, kinda stuff, or, you have a, little things here and there, that'll kind of help a bit of the community.  Um,back...When we first started in here, on El Virgin de la Guadelupe, we had a little parade, um, for it. Yeah, and- Here in town, yeah, it was a very long time ago.  It was twelve years ago, it was...the community was a lot smaller.  And, I mean, it made the newspaper.  I mean, if you look if you go to the Oxford Eagle, yeah, if you go to the Oxford Eagle, it’'ll have pictures of the parade that was the (Lady of Guadalupe). I remember, very clearly, that night.

[30:05]

Simone:
Where was it held?  In the Square, or?

[30:07]

Muñoz:
It was, it was...I think, so, yeah.  It was on the Square. We walked around with a little candle.

[30:14]

Simone:
Mm-hmm.  Wow.

[30:15]

Muñoz:

Yeah.

[30:16]

Simone:

And your family was kind of behind organizing that?

[30:17]

Muñoz:
No, it-

[30:18]

Simone:
Or just a group?

[30:19]

Muñoz:
It was just a group effort, yeah.  A group effort by a church.  Yeah, and it's one of those things where you wish, eh, here in town, 'cause I mean, in Memphis, it's a lot more, or like, in Olive Branch, there's a church there that'll have, uh, Spanish service.  And it's huge.  It's very big, and I mean we go there as much as we can, and the church always gets filled up.  Always.  If you're barely a few minutes late, you're not gonna get a chair.

[30:47]

Simone:
Do you know what it's called?

[30:50]

Muñoz:
(Sighs) Uh, St. Peter's, I think.  Um...

[30:53]

Simone:
The Catholic church?   I didn't think that...

[30:55]

Muñoz:
The Catholic church.

[30:55]

Simone:
Oh, yeah! It's beautiful!  Yeah, yeah!

[30:59]

Muñoz:
Yeah, on Church Road, yes, ma'am.

[30:59]

Simone:
I didn't know that they had a Spanish service.

[31:00]

Muñoz:
Yeah, they have a Spanish service.  I mean, it's huge.  And here, I kinda wish we had that.  We had...uh, the opportunity to...kinda have somewhere for all the Hispanics to meet. And I mean, each person had a done their part in trying to do that, and there's families here that will have their own, it's not necessarily Catholic, it's more Christian. But they have, like, there's a family, and like a couple families [bang] that will set up a little church area and they'll have their service and bring the community together as much as they can.  And it's nice of them, to...offer that to...people who are coming in.  So they kinda...know.  You know, 'cause it's...if someone’s coming in brand new to town, and you're like, oh, hey, where, you know, where do people, like, in, you know.  But it, [laugh] Uh, socialize [banging], uh, I mean, no one wants to live in a town, where it's kind of just yourself, and it's boring yeah, and no one to interact with.  I, yeah, isolated.

[32:04]

Simone:
Yeah, yeah. Absolutely, absolutely.  So that's there.  And it's working.

[32:06]

Muñoz:
Yeah, people do their part in trying to open up.  Like the churches or the little services here and there.  That'll help.  It brings people together. Which is a great thing.

[32:22]

Simone:
It's the church though that's the unifying...

[32:25]

Muñoz:
Yeah, it's very...hold them together, I mean, as well, there's, there's just families that know someone that will come over here, or family, the church, um, job opportunities, um, I mean, many of them pushing people, uh, Hispanics, towards the...community. Yeah, you know, I mean, and, in a town, about forty minutes away, called Pontotoc, there's one church, it's a very small town, but the Latino community is very big.

[32:55]

Simone:
Really?

[32:56]

Muñoz:
It's very big, yeah.

[32:58]

Simone:
Pontotoc?

[32:59]

Muñoz:
Pontotoc, yes, ma'am.

[33:00]

Simone:
I'll have to check that out then.  OK.

[33:01]

Muñoz:
And yeah, like, they'll, they have the one church, Spanish service, every Sunday.  Yeah, and it's very big there.  Um, just trying, like, a community, that kinda, like, stick together.  And, I mean, that town, it’s very small.  It's...yeah, and it's...their...they do have to deal with more of, like, the stereotypes and whatnot, [Simone: Mm-hmm.] but they are, they do have that...that community there...of churches, uh, the church, and they go there every Sunday, and have their community and their friends and all that.  They all speak Spanish.  And it's great, yeah.

[33:49]

Simone:
And you have a restaurant there?

[33:50]

Muñoz:
No.

[33:51]

Simone:
No!  Oh!

[33:51]

Muñoz:
Not there, not there, no, ma'am, not there. One of our, uh...one of our family friends...has a restaurant there.  And we like them, not to, you know...

[34:06]

Simone:
OK.  Well, at least the town has a little representation of Mexican food

[34:08]

Muñoz:
Yeah, they have the representation, yeah.

 [34:09]

Simone:
OK.

[34:09]

Muñoz:
And a lot of people, not everybody...but a lot of people in the area, that own Mexican restaurants are...typically...from the same area in Mexico.

[34:21]

Simone:
What, what area?

[34:22]

Muñoz:
It's, uh.

[34:23]

Simone:
That's interesting!

[34:24]

Muñoz:
Yeah, I know a lot of people, and, like, the gentleman who lives in Pontotoc, some people from Jackson, they're all from the state of Jalisco.

[34:37]

Simone:
OK, so...

[34:38]

Muñoz:
Michoacan and...

[34:39]

Simone:
...oh, OK...

[34:39]

Muñoz:
...And yeah.  It's very...a lot of people, like, if you go back to our town, where we live in Mexico, a lot of it is people who came to the States and opened up their businesses.

[34:56]

Simone:
Ah, really?

[34:57]

Muñoz:
Yeah-

[34:58]

Simone:
In your, back in Mexico...

[34:58]

Muñoz:
yeah...

[34:59]

Simone:
...where your parents are from?

[34:59]

Muñoz:
...and it's...

[35:00]

Simone:
Oh, wow!

[35:01]

Muñoz:
...yeah, it's a lot like that, but, that people will have, like, a restaurant in Texas, or...stuff like that, or South Carolina, or, uh, Georgia, or, yeah, like, all of my family, like from both my mom and my dad's side that's what they're involved in.  My godfather has something in Savannah, and he knows people from back home that work with him, or they'll have restaurants in the area, or my... here in town, I mean, here with us...there's a lot of people from Memphis that we know that are also...somehow we know them from back when, you know, long time ago.

[35:43]

Simone:
Wow, so it's kinda like, people talk and [Muñoz: yeah] know where to move and communicate.

[35:47]

Muñoz:
I, yeah, I guess so. That's kinda the way that, yeah.

[35:50]

Simone:
That's an amazing connection that they just, yeah.

[35:51]

Muñoz:
Yeah, it's just this-

[35:52]

Simone:
It just happens to…

[35:53]

Muñoz:
...little, like, a small, little networking group that, they, you know, all kinda know each other.

[35:59]

Simone:
Yeah.

[36:36]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[36:01]

Simone:
A lot of the restaurant owners, typically.

[36:02]

Muñoz:
Yes, ma'am.

[36:03]

Simone:
OK, OK. So the town back home in Mexico is, I mean, presumably, middle, upper class, little bit different situation than a lot of the [Muñoz: yeah] parts of Mexico?

[36:11]

Muñoz:
It's, yeah, it's still very rural.  It's still in the mountains, in the hills, and it's...But I mean [laughs].

[36:33]

Simone:
Yep? Yeah, no.

[36:35]

Muñoz:
Yeah. It, it's-

[36:35]

Simone:
You're gonna have businesses here [Muñoz: yeah, it's...] and there...

[36:38]

Muñoz:
...and they...they, I mean, and just, like, anyway, they work hard here. And they want somewhere to live.  I mean, not live, like, somewhere to go, maybe for a week or two in the summer, or stuff like that.  And that's, that's very big.  It's a, it's, yeah, it's very...

[36:59]

Simone:
What was the name of, of the community specifically?

[37:02]

Muñoz:
San José.

[37:03]

Simone:
San José, OK.

[37:04]

Muñoz:
A-and give me one second.

[37:05]

Simone:
Yep.

[37:06]

Muñoz:
I'll put together a little packet that we...

TAPE CUT

[01:25]

Muñoz:
Yeah, it, here it says most of the Mexican restaurant owners in Georgia and Mississippi and North and South Carolina, have moved to the United States from this one town José la Paz, in the state of Jalisco.

[01:35]

Simone:
Wow. Wow.

[01:38]

Muñoz:
I mean, everything is...family business.  I mean, it's all...the same.  I mean, of course, it's not just owning.  I mean, there's people from all over Mexico that are in this business.   I mean, everywhere, in the areas that we see them the most...has been from that one small, little town, that has now, you know, peope have made it, everywhere. A lot of people there have restaurants in Jackson, Mississippi, Arkansas, uh, South Carolina, Georgia-

[02:17]

Simone:

So, it's the south though, specifically the, yeah, the South?

[02:19]

Muñoz:
No.

[02:20]

Simone:
Haven't ventured up North, or West Coast [Muñoz: N-not-] or someplace...

[02:22]

Muñoz:
I mean, of course, my aunt is from the same small town.  And my mom's brother, my uncles. And they are in the north, they are in Illinois, up there. So, yeah, I mean, it does branch out a little bit. But, yeah, it's mostly-

[02:42]

Simone:
Only here in the South.

[02:42]

Muñoz:
Yeah.

[02:43]

Simone:
Well, that's what I wanted to hear! [They laugh.]  That's good, that's good.  'Cause agian, we're focusing on the South.

[02:47]

Muñoz:
Yeah, it's...

[02:48]

Simone:
It's growth, and, yeah, it's very unique.

[02:50]

Muñoz:
Yeah.  And, I mean, everybody started their businesses, from here between twenty, thirty years ago.  So they all started, back when the...color of you skin, or the ethnicity that you are...wasn't as accepted as it is now.

[03:11]

Simone:
OK! So they started when it was even more challenging.

[03:15]

Muñoz:
Yeah, they-

[03:16]

Simone:
Ah! See I was thinking it was such a small population that...

[03:20]

Muñoz:
Mm, no. I mean...

[03:21]

Simone:
Wow, I thought the opposite.

[03:22]

Muñoz:
People love Mexican food.  All Mexican food.  And they loved it back then.  So, opening up a Mexican restaurant, it being Mexican, wasn't really, like...let's say, like, a big deal.  To where it was, like, discrimination.  It was just a fact that you were Mexican, you know?

[03:41]

Simone:
OK.

[03:42]

Muñoz:
That’s was, eh, kind of threw people off more, and the language barrier, and...them not being able to communicate as well, or stuff like that, you know.

[03:54]

Simone:
OK, OK, yep, yeah, I guess the restaurant really helped...

[03:57]

Muñoz:
Mm-yeah...

[03:58]

Simone:
...the community, the, the accepting...

[04:00]

Muñoz:
...yeah, and I'm...

[04:01]

Simone:
...in terms of...

[04:01]

Muñoz:
...yeah, and back then, obviously, I don't know much about.  I mean, I was a baby, and I wasn't having any idea. Um, but I mean, I imagine that it would be like the...all the Asian places that have new businesses and, all the sushi, hibachi, all that.  That people at first were like, 'Whoa, whoa, whoa, what is...?' You know?  So I remember Benihana in Memphis used to be the only place in the area that would do hibachi.  Yeah.  And now, I mean, there's two in this town.  So it's stuff that people, at first are, like, woo-woo-woo, we’re not into and then, like, boom, like, it all went, it, it's everywhere.  So it's kinda like... I imagine it being kinda like that.  I'm not, uh, certain that's how it was, like, if, my dad would definitely know all about that. How it was when he first opened it.  Very, I mean, I'm sure it was...the way...I think it would be, it'd be the same way, you know?

[04:57]

Simone:
OK.  Yeah, yeah, yeah

[05:00]

Muñoz:
So.

[05:01]

Simone:
Thank you, thank you, thank you!

[05:02]

Muñoz:
Of course.