

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

University of Arkansas
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Arkansas Memories Project

President Ricardo Martinelli

Interviewed by Scott Lunsford

February 21, 2010

Fayetteville, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
 - annotations for clarification and identification;
 - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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**Scott Lunsford interviewed President Ricardo Martinelli on
February 21, 2010, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Uh—we're interviewing President Ricardo Martinelli of Panama today here at the Pryor Center. My name is Scott Lunsford. Today's date, I believe, is February 21.

Kris Katrosh: First.

Ricardo Martinelli: [*Coughs*]

SL: Twenty-ten. And Mr. President, first of all it's a great honor to—to have you sitting here with us. Uh—I have to ask you this, that—uh—if it's all right with you that we are audio and videotaping this interview and that this material will be archived in the Special Collections Department here at the University of Arkansas in the Mullins Library and be a part of the [*RM coughs*] David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Vi—Visual History collection. If all that's okay with you . . .

RM: It sure is.

SL: Then that's a great answer, and we can keep going.

RM: It is. Please do.

[00:00:46] SL: That's great. Well, thank you very much. Usually where we start with these interviews is where and when you

were born and your full name.

RM: Well, my full name is Ricardo Alberto Martinelli, and my mother's last name is Berrocal. I am the son of—uh—of—of Dr. Ricardo Martinelli Pardini, the son of Italian immigrants that came to Panama somewhere in the 1890s. My grandfather initially came first to the US, and then for some reason he wanted to go to California and instead of taking the railroad, he just went to Panama to visit an old relative—eh—from Lucca that was living there. And then he noticed then that gentleman had a—a daughter [*SL laughs*], and he wanted to marry an Italian. So he married her. And then he slowly found out that he had a—she had a older sister. So he brought his other brother—so two Martinellis married two Pardinis. That's on my father's side. My father is a—is a dentist—was a dentist. He graduated from the University of Maryland in 1941. And my mother is the son—is the daughter of—uh—Spanish immigrants that came from Spain to Cuba, and there's a big Spanish community in Cuba. And then somewhere in the year in 1917, my—my grandfather and grandmother came here—came to Panama and—uh—working for Firestone Tire. At that time it was World War—World War I . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:2:26] RM: And there they had the—that—uh—my mother was

born in Panama in 1930. And—eh—being the son of immigrants from Spain and from Italy—eh—it has—it is something that has great impact on me because the US and Arkansas and everyw— everywhere here—this is a country of—of people from everywhere. So we share the same backgrounds but in different places. And—eh—I am—that has given me a great advantage to the many things in life because the—being an immigrant in a—in a foreign country it ma—eh—having no roots you have to be yourself, and you have to work a little harder than the people that were already there. And you have to—through study and through hard work you have to succeed. Not through connections, not through family ties because there was—there wasn't hardly any family. And—uh—I—I—I am—I am the oldest of five—five sons. I was born March 11, 1952, in the city of Panama. I went to a local school called La Salle, which is a preschool. In my sophomore year, I went to a military high school in Virginia called Staunton Military Academy. Eh— Staunton is better known for being the Woodrow Wilson—eh— birthplace. And—eh—then I—when I graduated I had three choices. I want—first I wanted to study agriculture because my father had quit dentistry and went into farming and ranching. And then I applied to three places. I applied to Purdue. I

applied to Arkansas. Then—uh—uh—a guy who I—married my—
my cousin that was here and also because of Arkansas through
Professor Paul Noland, and the university had established an—a
very old relationship with Panama. And they even formed the
department of agriculture at the University of Panama. And
many Panamanians have—have come here. And then to LSU. I
really wanted to go to LSU [*SL laughs*], and I—when I—been
accepted at all three of them, when—when push come to—came
to shovel I noticed that Purdue was too cold for me [*SL laughs*].
Arkansas, I didn't know where it was [*SL laughs*], and LSU was
the place. But my father opposed me because I had five cousins
who had gone to LSU, and all of them had flunk out . . .

[00:05:00] SL: Uh-oh.

RM: So it was a party school.

SL: Too much time.

RM: Too much time. So I suddenly came to Arkansas when first day
of—eh—first day of class, I went into ar—[*words unclear*—I was
an agricultural student. I went into the first class, and I noticed
everybody walk in and said, "Gee, there's not any good-looking
chicks here."

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh.

[00:05:18] RM: All guys. You know, these guys are wearing cowboy

boots, and they speak a funny English [*SL laughs*] that I don't even understand. [*SL laughs*] So I decided that—that day that it wasn't cut out for me. That I—instead of being one of them, I wanted to hire them to work for me. [*SL laughs*] And then I went into business. I went to the College of Business Administration. And—uh—how—that's how everything started, you know. I almost flunked my first semester because, believe it or not, you know, being in a—in a boys' school all through—uh—primary and secondary—being in a military high school, came to the university, I went in a class, and I sat right in the middle of all the girls [*SL laughs*], and I was just looking very proudly [*SL laughs*] to all them because I couldn't believe—I couldn't believe I was sitting among girls, you know. [*SL laughs*] Being a—always in a all-boys' school. But—eh—the transition from going from a military school to being for the first time—my life alone—eh—it wasn't very good for me, and to tell you the truth I—I—I didn't do very good the first semester. And as a matter of fact, I had a grade point of 1.2 or 1.3, somewhere around there. And then they put me on probation. And then—well, I—I ain't quitting this. [*SL laughs*] So the second semester, I studied like crazy, and I had somewhere around—about 3.3, 3.5, somewhere around there.

SL: Big difference.

RM: And—uh—it made the difference. It made a good balance, too. And then I suddenly decided this—that I was caught up and ready to continue here at the university. I had the opportunity one time of transferring, said, "No, no. I love this place. This is a great place. This place had the same values, the same people, the same—eh—greatness—eh—eh—the great—the same mentality that I have. So I want to remain here." And I did. I like [*coughs*] if I have to live all over, I would still come to the University of Arkansas.

[00:07:25] SL: That's a great compliment.

RM: Mh-hmm.

SL: Thank you. Um—you know what? Let's talk a little bit about your—your mom and dad.

RM: Yeah.

[00:07:32] SL: Um—what was—your—your father was a dentist . . .

RM: Yeah.

SL: . . . and—but then he—uh—ended up mov—moving into farming. Uh—so were you at—at home when that transition took place? Were you in Panama?

RM: I was—I was a very young kid.

SL: Uh-huh.

RM: I probably had—seven or eight years old. I—I wasn't very much aware of the situation.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: My father did everything he could for me never to become a dentist.

SL: Hmm.

RM: Never. He didn't want me to become a dentist. It always—I remember that he used to say that dentist was a very—you had to be—have a lot of sacrifice, and you have to be very—you have to be on top of everything. At—at those times—eh—when the—when you have a—a tooth re—repair, it's not like today that they put you an injection, you know. You had to—you had to—you had to—be—take an anesthesia. And—and it was a little different. The instruments were not as accurate nor as fast, and I would presume that people endure more pain at that time. And that's the reason why nobody wanted to go to a dentist. I don't know why he did it but he did it in a—perfectly. And I never became a dentist. He choose to—he—at that time land was very cheap in Panama. And he started buying ra—property in an area called Sona . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:09:03] RM: That's where my—my great-great-grandfather came

here for the first time. Which as a matter a fact is a—is an area that looks just like Lucca. Lucca is the place where my family comes from. And when—when I brought up my kids for the first time to Lucca, one of them told me, "Hey, Dad, this looks just like Sona." [*Laughs*] So there were—there in that small town at that time, there were ten Italian families, and we settled around there. My father started buying property. And he—he became a—a medium-size rancher. And one of the things I have to rem—tell you about—my father told me, "Now that you're going to the states and study, the Americans always ask you one question. 'What does your father do?'" [*SL laughs*] "Now you tell 'em—never tell a lie—just tell—always tell the truth. Just tell 'em, 'My father is a dentist and a cattleman.'" [*SL laughs*] And then five years later, you know, I don't know how the word got around. People thought that I had three hundred thousand acres, five hundred thousand head of cattle, you know.

[*Laughter*] You know the—you know the—you know how college stu . . .

SL: Yes. Mh-hmm.

[00:10:09] RM: . . . college years are. People start exaggerating things. And I never told a lie, but it—it was—told the truth.

[*SL laughs*] And—and as a matter of fact, you know, I—that has

done very great for me because—being—after that—being my father a rice farmer, I became involved very much with the rice farmers here in Arkansas. And one of my roommates, John Mason's father, was a rice farmer in Carlisle.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: We used to go the summer, work in his farm, ride tractors, patch levees, get water from here to there, you know. And at night we would have fun in Little Rock because Carlisle is half an hour from—from Little Rock. Those were the good old days. I used to go to Stuttgart to—it was just impressive, everything I saw there. And it was just wonderful.

[00:11:05] SL: So what about your mother now. Tell—let's talk . . .

RM: My mother—my mother we—my mother went to school in—since high—since high school—since primary school in states. And then she went to some pri—pu—private nursing schools in—in Dallas and New York. Then she went to Sweet Briar, and she met my father, and they got married in 1950. I was born in [19]52. And like I said, I am the oldest. I have a brother and three sisters. My mother is—is still alive. My father passed away . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: . . . several years ago. He used to smoke. He smoke for

thirty-five years.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: And he had quit for thirty-five years. But emphysema caught him up . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: . . . and he got it—took him away. My mother is still alive. She's—she's gonna be eighty this year.

SL: That's good.

[00:12:00] RM: She's alive and kicking. Like I said, she's always on top of me. As president, she comes and always tells me what to do. I'm still her little son. She—doesn't make any difference what I do. She just comes and [*SL laughs*] tells me what to do.

SL: She keeps you straightened out.

RM: As a family we're very close. Every Sunday we go to my parents' house. All the family, all our wives, our kids. And we just sat there and discuss—talk about everything. We are very, very close. It's a very tight family. [*Clears throat*] We help each other a lot. We—we share experiences . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: . . . talk about business. Talk about politics. Talk about problems with anyone. And we're very, very, very, very happy to have that tradition for—since I am a—since I am a very small

kid.

[00:13:00] SL: Um—so was your mother a practicing nurse? I mean . . .

RM: No, my mother wasn't a nurse. She studied business administration.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: She—she didn't—she finished only junior college. And my father wanted to get married. He's—it's very funny, because he was sixteen years older than her.

SL: Uh-huh.

RM: And—and my father for some reason he did something that—he changed his age, you know. [*SL laughs*] And—he just went—I don't know why he did. Don't ask me because I really don't know. He went to some government officials in Panama—did something—and instead of being sixteen years older than my mother, he was only fourteen. [*Coughs*] [*SL laughs*] And—and I asked one time to my—to my father, "Hey, Dad, why you marry a woman that is so much younger than you?" I said, "Why didn't you marry one of the ladies that were your age, more or less?"

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:13:53] RM: And then he told me, "Look at so-and-so, that are

more or less my age who I used to date then and see how they look. They look like a lentil. They—they're just" . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] Drying up.

RM: . . . "they're shrinking. And look at your mother. Your mother is beautiful. She just—looks just like me." My father never wanted to talk about age.

SL: Uh-huh.

RM: When you talk about age or problems, he was—stand up and go. He never wanted to—to—to run around with people his age. He wanted to run around with people younger than him . . .

SL: Younger. That's interesting.

RM: . . . so make him feel younger.

SL: Uh-huh.

RM: And I—I never—never heard from him—spoken—cursing no one or say a bad word. He always tell me, "You're gonna talk—say something about somebody—say something good or be quiet."

SL: My mother used to say the same thing.

RM: Yeah.

[00:14:49] SL: And that's—that's good—that's good advice. Did—well, did your mother—what was it like at the house, at home? Was your mother at the house raising the children, or was she out working? Was it both parents worked or . . .

RM: Was both parents worked. My mother worked for my father, and she was like a secretary or accountant.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: And being in both in—in cattle or ranching and some real estate operations, you know. They—they're—they—they were a working team . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: . . . all their lives. They remained married for over fifty years.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: And—and—no, they taught me the same values and principles that—that had made me what I am today. Yesterday I was at a reception . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:15:41] RM: . . . and I told the people that I am here because I came to Arkansas. [*Coughs*] What I learned in Arkansas—they shared the same values, the same experience, the down-to-earth, the humility. Being a—a person that tells always the truth. Those are values and things that I share, and I learn here, and I practice more. Because it was—when—when I went to the military school, we had to have a pledge every time we had a—a—a exam that we hadn't received any help from no one in the exam. The professors were gonna leave now. If we had

done that in Panama—the professor leave, everybody would be copying each other. [*SL laughs*] I mean, everybody.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RM: And—but that—that value of—of honesty and trust—professor would leave—same would happen here, and nobody would go, and—nobody would dare to go and cheat on somebody else's [*unclear word*]*]*—because they know the answer. At that time there were no calculators.

SL: That's right.

RM: There—there were no computers, no cell phones, no microwave, no cable TV. So things were a little different, you know.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: You—you take calculus, you do it on your own. If you take trigo—trigonometry, you have to do it on your own. It's not—not—right now things are very simple. Before they were much, much harder.

SL: A lot harder to work.

RM: Oh, yeah.

[00:17:14] SL: Yeah. What about your grandparents? Did you know your grandparents on your mother or father's side?

RM: On my father's sides, I di—I never met them.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: They—well, I—my grandmother, she pass away somewhere in 1920s.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: She gave birth to eleven kids.

SL: Wow.

RM: Oh, there was no TV at that time. [*Laughter*]

SL: Yes.

RM: And—and I never met her.

SL: Uh-huh.

RM: My grandfather, he died in 1955. I must have been three years old. I really don't remember him. I know—I've seen some pictures . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:17:51] RM: . . . that—I was with him. My—that's my father's side. On my mother's side, I met my grandmother in—I—she—she lived right next to us in Panama.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: And we had a good relationship. She was a very—very systematic and very consistent lady. Very—very bright and very—she liked tell a lot of jokes. [*SL laughs*] And let me tell you one thing. There—this—in Panama is a lottery that plays twice a week. Four numbers. And she was just fanatical . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh, no.

RM: . . . for buying lottery. She lived to buy a lottery—only that.
[*SL laughs*] At one time she used to play thirty-three. And thirty-three came up on the first, came up on the second, and almost a three ca—came up on third. Don't ask me how. That's one of the ?probabilities? that I still don't know. She won the first prize—but she had a—she didn't make very—very much money. And everything was reinvested in the—in the lottery.

SL: [*Laughs*] Of course.

RM: And she won the first prize, the second prize. If one number, she did win the third prize. She won the lottery over a hundred times in—during a sixty-, seventy-year span.

SL: Uh-huh.

RM: She—she died [*clears throat*] out of a heart attack somewhere around 1997, [19]98.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:19:18] RM: And I met my grandfather—who was a—was a businessman, a person who I admire very much, a guy way ahead of his times. And he—I was twelve years old when he pass away. Heart attack also. And he was a very—a very keen—a very—a very good businessman. During the war, he was very afraid of the—they were gonna bomb the Panama

Canal. And they—they moved to New York. That's why my mother and my uncles all went to different private schools.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:19:57] RM: And he bought an apartment in Fifth Avenue. And he was doing very good in his business. He was a distributor of cars and spare parts and had gas stations and real estate development. He could have made a lot of money if he would have stayed in Panama because the Panama one of—was one of the—the in second—World War II—what was it—one of the main spots for the—being the Panama Canal there—for the defense of the US. And Panama City was a very—I was told it was a very small city at that time that probably had a hundred thousand people. And any given time, there were over a hundred-fifty thousand US soldiers or Marines there. So you see the difference, and there was a very big business on everything. And many fortunes in Panama were made at that time.

[00:20:55] Many—they had very many military bases in Panama. They had over twenty-one bases. And there were all kinds of equipment. Everything going through there, going to the Pacific. And—but my grandfather didn't have the opportunity—he was very scared that they were gonna bomb in

Panama, and so he moved to the states. My grandfather was probably one of the persons who influenced the most in my business acumen because he was a very down-to-earth, very simpleminded, simple—very—he would focus on something, and I don't know how he'll get it through. He was an excellent person. And he pass away when I was twelve years old. I—it was very sad for me because it was the first person that I saw leave and depart in my life, you know. I thought people would stay forever. And that day I found out that people don't stay forever. People leave.

[00:22:05] SL: Do you remember any particular conversations that you had with your grandfather that stick with you to this day?

RM: Well, he—I remember that he always came and took us to the movies on s—on Sundays. And would take us to—for lunch, and we would go to—he was a member of the officers' club in the—in the Panama Canal Zone. And we'll go there. And he always tell me one thing, "In life you always have to tell the truth, and there's no work that denigrates the person's morale. All work that people do are just as good as the other." And he also told me one thing, "All businesses start in a very small scale. Don't think—think big but start small. If you start small, you'll get bigger. If you believe that you're gonna start big, you'll never

get bigger." And that stuck in my mind, and I believe that you always have to start from basics. I think there were some advices that—given to my brother and to me—who was a year younger than me—that have struck in my mind for many, many years. And I now understand the value of their—that advice.

[00:23:36] SL: That's good. Was—I know that you belong to the Catholic faith. Is that . . .

RM: Yes.

SL: That's correct. Was that—was the faith a mainstay in the household growing up? Was it . . .

[00:23:49] RM: Yes. You know, my mother is very devoted, and so is—so was my father. Myself, I am not. I have to admit it. I am not the—I do not go to church as often as I—probably many things that I don't believe and don't think they're done properly. But I respect everybody's religion. I resp—I don't—religion has been a main cause of many wars, the many misunderstandings among people. And I have been a—being a Catholic and having come to study in the US, where there's a variety of religions, I came to understand that all religions are good. All religions have the same purpose. All religions are—they like to serve humanity. All of 'em. And I always—the—in Panama the Catholics sometimes their religion is the only one there exists.

[*Coughs*] And because there are no Lutherans, there are no Baptists, there are no—when you go to a society where there's an ample variety of people from other religions you come to the conclusion that all of them are good. All of them have a God. All of them want to do good. All of them want to not harm your enemy. All of them are the same. So it's like going to different stores. Say, I'm going to Kmart, going to Sears, going to Walmart. [*SL laughs*] So I respect everyone. So for me religion is not an issue.

SL: And it was really not central in the household . . .

RM: Oh, no, no.

SL: Even though your mother, your grandmother—or your mother were very devout.

RM: No, no, no. As a matter of fact, I have two sisters that married Jewish people. And if we would have been bias, that would have never happened. And it's—I mean they always told me, you know, this is the religion that we choose. You are in. But they didn't enforce me . . .

SL: They didn't enforce it. Mh-hmm.

RM: . . . they didn't enforce me. They say, "You are old enough to know what to do."

[00:26:17] SL: What about—I gue—I would assume that the United

States' influence in Panama was prevalent all the time you were growing up and sounds like also for your grandfather's time and your father's time . . .

RM: Yes.

[00:26:32] SL: . . . so was English—the English language a part of your household growing up?

[00:26:38] RM: Oh, yes. My father always told me that if I didn't speak Eng—I was deaf, dumb, and blind. [*SL laughs*] English was the language. He always told me the story of this Spanish monarch, who was Charles V, who was the ruler of the world at that time. And he always said that he would speak Italian to the woman, French to the—to do business, Spanish to the goth—Gods, and German to his horses. [*SL laughs*] And then he would have—if that had been English, it would have been a language of all. So if you don't know English, you don't know anything. So you better know English. You better have—you better speak English well. Try not to have an accent because whenever you have an accent, sometimes people don't realize where you are—where you're coming from. And try to s—understand their way and the rationale and the way Americans think because you will always be—because Panama is under the influence of the US—you have to understand how the American

think, how the American reacts because it's gonna help you in business, it's gonna help you when you travel, it's gonna be the only way that you can communicate with people. It's gonna be—it's the universal language. It's the language that—spoke in the US and Great Britain. But it is a language that everybody needs to communicate, and one of these days it's gonna be the language of the world. So you better learn English [*SL laughs*], and you better—and don't s—I had a problem. When I went to a military school there were no—there were some Spanish-speaking people. And I—my English wasn't that good at that time. That's why when I came to the university that I flunk in English. [*Laughter*]

SL: Okay.

[00:28:41] RM: I was good in math but not in English. And I think I developed my skills speaking f—my English in a funny way, like you Arkansans do.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, we kind of slow it down a little bit.

RM: You know, but I have the advantage that I can understand the most funny English spoken by anyone in the rinky-dinky, little, smallest place in Arkansas [*SL laughs*] with the thickest southern accent. I still understand that guy. Something that cannot be said by even some Americans in the—on the North.

SL: That's true. That's true. It is a little bit different language—
dialect here.

RM: It's a little bit different. It's a dialect.

SL: Yes. Uh-huh.

RM: Y'all.

SL: [*Laughs*] I reckon.

RM: Yeah. [*Clears throat*]

SL: Well, that's good. Well, so English was spoken at the house and
encouraged all the time?

RM: To tell the truth, they s—when my parents didn't want us to
know something, they would speak in English.

SL: Ah.

RM: Ah.

SL: More incentive to learn.

[00:29:45] RM: More incentive to learn. And to tell the truth, the
English that I got in school at that time, it wasn't very good. But
I have to say right now, the—that the English my sons got in the
same schools is an English without an accent. My oldest—my
kids speak English without an accent. Zero accent. You can't
tell where they are. Because with the Internet . . .

SL: Yes.

RM: . . . and with all the influence of cable TV, and all the games,

and by catching up the language at a very small—young age— they have been able to acquire something that we didn't have. I got my English when I came to the states, and they got their English when they were two or three years old, and there's a hell of a difference.

SL: Big difference.

RM: Big difference.

SL: Yes.

RM: So I am—I can proudly say that my kids have no accent.

[*Coughs*] Even though I do.

[00:30:51] SL: Well, I think the accent is fine, and I think there's a beauty to having the accent, so . . .

RM: Well, you know something? My beauty of having the accent— one time I was here at the university and the—I was invited to be one of the ones in the Greek amphitheater.

SL: Okay.

RM: To tell the jokes, you know, about sororities, fraternities, and to dorms and whatever. And—me and this other guy. And I memorized all my jokes. I knew all of 'em. [*SL laughs*] But before we left, I decided to take a couple drinks because I was a little nervous.

SL: Sure.

RM: More nervous than usual. [*SL laughs*] And I took my drinks with a bunch of other folks. I told my jokes. I don't know if they understood what I said, but they laugh. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well, you were a success then. You were a hit.

RM: Yeah, but it was, "What the hell is that guy saying?" [*Laughter*]

SL: Well, that's all right. I bet you did fine. And I bet they understood the jokes.

RM: Oh, well. It is too tell—too late to know. [*Laughter*]

[00:32:05] SL: Well, I admire—I have the greatest respect for folks that take on the English language when it's not their native language. You know, I think the United States is probably facing—learning a lot more Spanish than—than they're accustomed [*unclear words*].

RM: You have to. There were no Spanish-speaking people here in Arkansas. Now I noticed that two newspapers a radio station, and a bunch of folks working in Walmart, the Tyson, and many other places, you know.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: Before, you know, before it was very awkward, you know.

SL: Yes. Mh-hmm.

RM: You know, people like to be friends with me because I had a funny accent.

[00:32:41] SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah?

RM: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Well, let's get back to the—I'm always—you know, I have this belief that we are who are because of the way that we were raised early on. Maybe even before we can remember what was going on.

RM: Yep.

[00:32:58] SL: How our parents treated us. How our—their—your—your fa—immediate family and friends and neighbors and the influences early on, and—so I'd like to talk a little bit about being raised in those early days, the earliest memories that you have. Do—what—thinking back now—what is your earliest memory that comes to mind?

RM: My earliest memory. To tell you the truth, I really don't know. I'd lie to you if I say something.

SL: Well, if you think of something just blurt it out . . .

RM: Gosh . . .

SL: . . . it's not . . .

RM: . . . gosh. That's a diff—most difficult question somebody has asked in my life. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well . . .

RM: Because I may be able to lie to you because I really don't know.

[*Laughter*] All right. Let me see. Oh, gosh, I never thought of it.

SL: You know, some people remember looking out a window. Some people remember their mother at the stove so . . .

[00:33:52] RM: I probably remember something—because they took a picture of me. Probably was two—one-and-a-half—two years old. And they—my mother and grandmother told me, "You did that, that day. You didn't even want to go. You wouldn't want to put this shirt and this pant, and you did something, and we couldn't put you in that. We had to put you in the other one." So I really don't know if that's the case. I have a picture of myself when I was a little kid. And, you know, I have my hands [places fist on face] somewhere around here [*words unclear*]. And I had a—you know, some shorts and a shirt. And they always say that they were not gonna use that one. They were gonna use another one. So probably I do remember that—what I did, because what I did is I throw it in the toilet. [*Laughter*] Without knowing.

SL: Uh-oh.

RM: But I really—to tell you the truth I really don't know. If you ask me, I really don't know. Probably—let me see if I can recall something from my grandfather. [00:35:01] I probably do

recall something. I was three years old. Probably do. Sitting in his lap. [*Slaps his knee*] Sitting in his lap. He didn't speak very—Spanish very well, so I didn't understand what he said. They always remind me of that. That he was telling me something when I was just [*vocalized noise*] "What the heck is that guy talking about?"

SL: It was so—you know, sitting on his knee, it was probably the tone of his voice that . . .

RM: Yeah.

SL: . . . that meant something to you as well.

RM: Didn't understand anything. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well, you understood that he was speaking to you, and telling you something.

RM: Yeah.

[00:35:47] SL: So that—that's important. What about—describe the house to me that you grew up in.

RM: We—when my—when we were—I was born we used to live in my—in my grandfather's house.

SL: Okay.

RM: And my grandfather and grandmother had a house in—I would say it's right—it was right in front of the British Embassy. Right now they have thrown the houses around that house, and they

have built some very high-rise building of seventy, eighty stories high.

SL: Oh, my gosh.

RM: And the house of my grandmother at this time is a fu—is a funeral home. So I don't imagine being—live in a house that right now is a funeral home. [*SL laughs*] So I remember growing in that area. And I remember one time I was walking—because it's right next to the sea—and I was—this probably the oldest thing that I did remember very vividly and very well.

SL: Okay.

[00:36:54] RM: I was walking a maid. And there was a car coming and had an accident in a statue, and I was right next to the statue. I didn't move. The maid didn't move me either. But my—I remember my mother coming and grab me—she was screaming—crying because she thought something had happened to me. Noth—nothing happened to me. The guy probably—I think that the guy die—had a heart attack or something. And he probably was gonna hit me. Didn't hit me and hit the statue. Well, he died. [*Clears throat*] So I will—yes, I never will be able to know—but I always remind of that incident. That's probably the thing that I remember the most.

SL: Sound like that was harder on your mother than it was on you.

RM: Yes. She always would keep reminding me on that. Like my—
one of my sons that fell into a pool once, and I had to rescue
him because he didn't know how to swim. [*Coughs*] He
probably was two, three years old. He still remembers that. He
still remembers.

[00:38:19] SL: What about the—so was the house a large house
that . . .

RM: It was a large house. There was an inside patio. I remember
the furniture that my grandmother took to her new house, and it
was very old furniture. Some of—there were some antiques
there. Some things are—the house was built somewhere in the
1920s. Is centrally located in Panama right now. Then when I
was seven years old, my father decided to move, and he bou—
he built a house. He was building a house, and he moved to a
rented house in Thirty-Ninth Street, I remember. Right now
right next to the house, there are the main offices of the local
airline—Copa—whi—which is in the New York Stock Exchange.
We lived there for two years. Then we moved to this location
which is one of the fanciest places in Panama called ?Obarrio?
where our—right now that area is full of hotels. They have
changed some of the zoning laws, and between my mother's
house, they are building—there's a Hyatt Regency, and there's

another hotel with a thousand rooms and a big casino being built at the same time. It's right in the middle and center of town. Property there—I me—I always remember my father telling me, "Yeah, I bought that house for—the land for six dollars a meter." [SL laughs] Which—believe it or not, that land right now is probably worth four thousand dollars a meter. It's one of the best real estate properties, and there is among two roads—very important—there are a lot of embassies around that area—a lot of the—a lot of—there were a lot of people living, but most of them moved away. There's—two doors—two houses—and the house right next to my grandmother who happens to be ?around?—right next to my mother is a big jewelry store because they changed the zoning. And I—my mother would have told her, "Please leave. What are you doing living alone in this house?" [SL laughs] And she's very stubborn. She says she's—she knows where everything is. She knows—yeah—she have lived there for—since 1961. So she's not gonna move.

[00:40:51] SL: Do—doesn't want to let go.

RM: Almost sixty-n—one. Will be close to over—almost fifty-some years.

SL: I don't blame her.

RM: And she's not gonna leave.

SL: I don't blame her.

RM: And she's just happy there.

SL: Yeah.

RM: Yeah, it's a nice house. It has everything. It is the house that I grew up. I—first when I got married, I move in a—to a duplex and—with my wife. And then now we bou—then I bought a house in cal—a place called Gulf Heights which is all residential, a very nice neighborhood. All single homes. And now that I am president, they have locked streets, and nobody can go through my house. *[Laughter]*

SL: Well, if that kind of stuff happens, yes.

RM: For security reasons.

[00:41:50] SL: Well, it sounds like to me growing up, that due to your grandfather's hard work and business acumen and your father and mother's hard work *[RM clears throat]* that you had a fairly affluent life, that you all were comfortable. And I know that's not all the case for the whole population in Panama . . .

RM: Yeah.

SL: . . . I know there's quite a dichotomy between folks . . .

RM: Yes.

SL: . . . that are comfortable and folks that aren't.

RM: Yes.

SL: So did you ever—were you ever aware of—of that dichotomy as a child growing up?

[00:42:22] RM: Oh, yes. Very much aware, very much aware. Very much aware because Panama is the country of the have and the have-nots. The have, have a lot. The have-not—don't ha—don't have very much. Things have changed a lot, and there's a growing and a very affluent middle class. But still we can have some poor people like everywhere.

SL: Of course.

RM: Even in the US you have nine percent of the population that is poor. In Panama we have somewhere around thirty-two percent of the population that is poor. You—wha—probably a—poor here is much—is a much wealthier person there because you have to look at the persons in power of money and what you can buy with a dollar. And here pro—it's probably more expensive. But being a—having grown in Panama—having been going to summers to the interior—and knowing what—reality of things, you know. And working my way through everything, you know, have made me realize that the ones that—in li—in life you have to just—you have to start giving. And I share—I love to give. And when I ran for president in 2004, as you know, I ended up last. I had five percent of the vote. Fourth out of four. I ended

up "behind the ambulance." Behind the ambulance. [*SL laughs*]
I would have easily quit. But they taught me never to quit. In my life I always fight one more round. Let me tell you what is fighting one more round, and why is one more round very important in my life. So I sat down and said, "Gee, what the hell I did wrong? [*SL laughs*] I am the best. I do this. I am a good guy. Why? Why people didn't vote for me, and they vote for him, and for her? [*Vocalized noise*] Something is wrong here." So I—made me realize and made me start inner thinking, "What did I do wrong? Why people didn't like me? Why people didn't vote for me?" Of course, everybody that runs knows that he is the best, knows that he is going to win, even by looking at the polls or the poll—I mean the polls tells you the truth, but ?either side?, you believe that last day, the people are gonna change their minds, and they're gonna vote for me. How wrong I was.

[00:45:01] SL: [*Laughs*] It's a rude awakening, yeah?

RM: I got exactly what the polls told me. So I sat down, said—well, how a businessman can approach and change and make people believe in me. And I founded a foundation. I began giving scholarships to poor kids. At the present time we have a commitment forever and ever that we are putting one-and-a-half million US dollars in scholarships for poor kids. And so I mean,

people like simple people. People like people—Panama is a very hot place where you don't have to wear—got a coat and tie. I'm not gonna wear a coat and tie. I'm gonna wear what I like to wear. I'm gonna say what I like to say. I'm gonna tell the truth. I'm gonna go straightforward. [*Clears throat*] I gotta have the humility to accept what I do right and what I do wrong because I am not perfect. And those are [*coughs*] probably some of the values that I learn here in Arkansas. And here you've got a lot of down-to-earth people. You got a lot of people who are very, very simple, very sincere, very honest. So I got back my—sitting down in a—with a bunch of friends—we would some—sometimes drinking [*laughter*] to get more illustrated.

SL: Of course.

[00:46:36] RM: And I said, "Gee, I gotta change that." And I did. And we—in 2009 I ran against the government, and it's—and also—let me give you a comparison.

SL: Okay.

RM: I ran against the—the Democratic Party and the Republican Party and the US government at the same time, and I beat all three of 'em. So people have very high expectations for what we're doing. What we need to do. And I believe that in seven or eight months, we have done a very profound change. Simple

things. For ten years, taxis were not painted yellow. Well, taxis are painted yellow right now. Used to get up in the morning to get a—an appointment. Now you don't have to get up early because the appointments are there. There were people who were—didn't pay taxes at all. The owner of the national airline, making over two hundred million dollars a year, paid one-and-a-half million dollars in taxes. Now he's paying twenty million dollars in taxes. The casinos pay no taxes. The ports pay no taxes. The duty-free pay no taxes. The banks pay no taxes. [00:47:54] Who pay the taxes? The merchants, the middle class, and the salaried workers. Now we're reducing the taxes for the salaried workers. We're reducing the taxes for the corporation and taxing other people. The largest local bank just announced that a payment of dividends of one hundred ninety-two million US dollars this year, out of their profits. That bank only pays twenty-three million dollars in income tax. Less than ten perc—less—just peanuts. But those are the folks that sometimes they—don't want change.

SL: Of course. [*Laughs*]

RM: They don't want change.

SL: Yeah.

[00:48:35] RM: I mean I—if I am the owner of the bank, why should

I pay taxes? Well, I have to sit down with them and reason with them. Say, "Look, if you don't pay taxes, we cannot operate the health care system, the transportation system," which we are building a metro. We are getting rid—getting rid of all the buses. The buses that the US counties dispose—the county buses for school—for transportation of the kids to the public school system are the buses that we use in the city. Over here they are painted yellow.

SL: Yes.

RM: Over there we painted red. And we call 'em the "red devils," because they just go run around like crazy. [*SL laughs*] Killing people. Providing lousy service. We're gonna get rid of all the buses. They're paying—all—and they bought those buses for ten thousand dollars. We're paying—we're paying each owner twenty-five thousand dollars to get rid of that bus. Brand new buses with air-conditioned and everything, a decent transportation system. Building a metro. Expanding the canal. Setting up—cleaning the bay. Because it was very easy when you had a very nice bay to put a sewer, connect yourself, and dump it in the bay. Now we're cleaning the bay. We have—we are—have a massive infrastructure problem that will—it's gonna help a lot of—a lot in the creation of jobs. So we are promoting the

country, and I think the best mode is the president, but sometimes when presidents travel—I don't see this happening in the US, but at least now in our country when they travel, we get very much criticized of the press. They criticize you, because, "Oh, you're traveling. You're doing that. You should be here doing that or doing that other thing." You know. [00:50:36] But every time yo—anytime—every time I travel, I get something for Panama. I became very good friends with Berlusconi.

SL: Okay.

[00:50:41] RM: Very good friends. Because being Italian descendant and also having Italian passport because I—being directly related to them, to the Italians. And Berlusconi is gonna give me—he's gonna donate a hospital in Panama. Berlusconi has promised me that he was gonna go there. Well, you know, he got hit by a guy who hurt him.

SL: Yes.

RM: But he's coming in the next two months. And he promised that he was gonna make a promotion, a free promotion—may cost a couple million dollars—on Italian television and on his personal, private TVs, to promote people to come to Panama. He told me that he did that with the President Mubarak of Egypt in [*unclear*

word] El Alamein. It's a tourist place in—somewhere in the Red Sea. And now one and a half million Italians go to [*unclear word*] El Alamein every year. So if I get Berlusconi to do that for Panama, and we get one and a half million Italians. I am very happy. They consume. They buy things. They stay in hotels. Very nice.

[00:51:55] SL: Tourism. Tourism i—is . . .

RM: Tourism is alternative.

SL: . . . a great, great business to tap into.

RM: It is. It's the best.

SL: And Panama is still quite beautiful.

RM: It's undiscovered. Panama is an undiscovered place. One of the most beautiful places in the world. Cheap.

SL: I was looking at real estate last night.

RM: It's cheap. [*SL laughs*] Cheap prices are cheap. You can get everything you want cheaper than the US. Everything. And there's no inflation. We use the US dollar. Lots of security. And it's just a wonderful place. Weather is stable all year round. Nice, really nice.

[00:52:43] SL: Let's talk a little bit about technology [*RM coughs*] when you were growing up. I can remember when my parents got our first TV set. Can you remember when TV came to your

home?

RM: Oh, yes. I rem—I remember that the first TV channel—I probably was five years old—it was a US Air Force channel—US Southern Command channel. And everything was in English—I remember watching. And then the Panamanian television came in in 1959. It was black and white at that time. Oh, of course we all do remember the *Bat Masterson* or . . .

SL: Sure.

RM: . . . the—*The Flintstones* or the *Surfside 6* in Miami. Let me see, one other program . . .

SL: *Ed Sullivan*.

RM: . . . one other program that—it was very famous—*Lassie*.

SL: Sure.

RM: I mean, *The Beverly Hillbillies* later on. And many other programs. And it was black and white at that time, and then color TV came to Panama somewhere in the 1968, [19]69. Oh, probably a little earlier than that. Of course, there was no remote controls. [SL laughs] Some very ugly-looking televisions. Ugly looking.

[00:54:02] SL: You know, the thing is about that early television programming is, there were some values there. There were things—there were family values that were being produced. It

was basically wholesome television. It was family-oriented television.

RM: Like *I Love Lucy*.

SL: Yes. And now I know . . .

RM: It's different.

SL: . . . it's totally different. And I think you have actually—are not really wanting to do any censorship, but there is some kind of issue now with television in Panama.

RM: It's a great issue because the local channels, they want to compete for rating against each other. And then suddenly they decided that they—the news, they're gonna have more blood, you know. All the crazy things, you know. This guy killed his wife. They robbed that one. They shot another one. They rape another one. You know, they make big issues out of all these. They have people outside of the hospital to see when somebody comes wounded. And then when you're looking at the news, instead of giving news and making news, they'll just rein havoc, you know. All blood. All blood. Then after blood came the series—the famous series with very funny names, you know. *El Capo*—the women of *El Capo*—*Without Tits There Are No Paradise*.

SL: [*Laughs*] There you go.

[00:55:34] RM: They have all this advances, you know. All these beautiful ladies, you know. That they are—bec—in order to do something in their life, they have to enlarge their . . .

SL: Breasts.

RM: . . . their breasts. They have to go out with this *capo*, or mafia man. And in order to have a good bag or live in a good house or live a good life, she had to prostitute herself, do things like that. Or boys, you know—the role model to have a good car, to be a nice guy, a cool guy, was to become a drug dealer. I mean, these stories may be real or may be not—they were not the typical role model that any country should have. I—the—so I just ask them, "Please, cut the blood. Put the news. Anything you want. Criticize me if you want to. That or me, instead of killing—of the destroying in society. Please, instead of having those novels, series at seven o'clock, put it at nine for people with more mature audiences. More mature mind can come and watch 'em and determine if that's what they want to do or not."

SL: Right.

RM: "Or have fun." So that—you know, but once I notice—and let me tell you something. I was very sad that civil society was complaining about them. The church was complaining about them, all churches. I sat down with all the members of the

Catholic Church—all the bishops and the archbishop—they told me—I told them I was gonna do it. They said, "We'll support you." You know what happened at the end? All of them left me alone. [*Laughter*] They killed me.

SL: Oh.

[00:57:31] RM: The media just killed me. They wiped me out. They made—they put me in a crusher, and they destroyed me. So I decided—I sat down with the owners, said, "Please, just" . . .

SL: Show some restraint.

RM: . . . "show some restraint, please." [*Laughter*] And they did. They did.

SL: I heard that they were . . .

RM: They did. They did.

SL: . . . starting to move it to a later time . . .

RM: Yes, yes, yes.

SL: . . . and some of the series are gone . . .

RM: But the newspaper, the anchor people, didn't like that. Didn't like that. And I took a pounding. They knock me off six points— or six or seven points of my ratings. And I had to do another things. We had an attorney general who is the ?estranged? sister of Mother Te—she looks like the ?estranged? sister of Mother Teresa . . .

SL: Oh.

[00:58:22] RM: Very nice lady. She sell herself as a very honest, transparent person. But we have the most notorious cases in Panama, then nothing happens, you know. People were caught with the—tons of cocaine, go free. Cases that are—just everything—the evidence is there—they go free because they found nothing. And then they to—but she was the darling of the media. And she's a very beautiful lady. Nice lady. I like her very much. But I came here to change a country that—change the judiciary system. So she had a process that started four years ago. I wasn't even there. And the process—because she was tapping the phones of other people without any authority . . .

SL: Without a court order. Uh-huh.

RM: . . . without a court order. And based on that she was separated from her—as an attorney general. I took—have taken such a pounding for that. Such a pounding for that. That kno—knocked me off thirteen points. I had a ninety-one percent rate of approval. Now I am—went back to sixty-eight point five. Now I'm going back to—now I am already in the seventies. And—but I took the risks. I knew that some people may say that I am concentrating too much power. I knew it. I accept it.

[01:00:00] But I selected a person who's gonna do the job. I don't even know the guy. I don't know him. I spoke with him three times in my whole life. One who's good. You can't bribe him. And time will tell. I know that some people may not like it. Some of them do. But the—only time will tell. Only time will tell. [01:00:30] But Panama is the first frontier for drug trafficking into the US. Last year [*coughs*] I believe we got fifty-five or fifty-seven tons [*SL gasps*] of drugs. Yesterday we had a brief encounter with three speedboats with twelve armed men and a bunch of drugs. Our boats. And we—we're chasing them. I still don't know how many tons we got or how—kilos or whatever—pounds or whatever of cocaine, but there must be some—a lot. And we have a straight fight against the—being the first frontier for drugs coming into the US. And you know something? I never seen a Somalian in my life. And it re—every trail—I know those places are in Africa. They have a civil war. But the same trail they use for drugs is the same trail they use for illegal immigrants. Now we have five hundred Somalians. I want to see them. I want to see how a Somalian look like. Forgive me for being my ignorance, but I never se—one time I remember I saw a girl from Mongolia. I wanted to see her because I never be—seen a mo—a—just a re—yeah, they're

regular human beings, but, you know, like I met someone from Nepal, you know . . .

SL: Right.

[01:01:47] RM: . . . I mean, I never seen a Somalian. So why does a Somalian wants to come to Panama? So I spoke with them, you see. One of them spoke English. "We are not going to Panama. We're going to the US." So the same trail that the drugs uses is the same trail for illegal immigrants and to do bad things. And we don't know what do to with them. We send them back to Colombia. They come back. They—sometimes they cross to Costa Rica, and we ship 'em back. You know, sometimes the—they cross to Costa Rica, and they go to Nicaragua. I don't know what happened, but to tell you the truth the law says they ship them to the country they came from. But Brazil, Brazil wanted to have the soccer game, so they opened their frontiers . . .

SL: Oh, I see.

RM: . . . to all the African countries because all of them vote. So all of them come to Brazil, and what can we do? We need the help—I told the American ambassador, "Lady—Lady Ambassador, you've got to help me with that. These guys are not going to Panama, these guys are going to US."

SL: Let's stop right here. We're gonna—we're gonna change tape.

Trey Marley: We're gonna change tapes.

[Tape stopped]

[01:02:55] SL: You—I know that—I know there's others out there
that are probably looking at the watch and . . .

RM: I have no watch.

SL: [*Laughter*] Okay. Good, good. Well, you know, we were talkin'
about—we've be—we've talked about your parents and your
grandparents some. We've talked about the house that you
grew up in and the culture that was around you at the time.
We've—and we've talked some about your administration and
your policies that you're trying to . . .

RM: Why don't we talk about Arkansas? [*Laughs*]

SL: Let's talk a little bit about Arkansas.

RM: I'm a honorary Arkansan.

SL: Well yes, you are and . . .

RM: And I was appointed ambassador of good faith and good will.

[*Coughs*]

SL: That's—and you—and it looks like you're proud to be that way.

RM: My heart. [*Thumps chest*]

SL: Well, tell me [*RM clears throat*—I know that Arkansas was not
your first choice.

RM: Nope.

[01:03:45] SL: But this Arkansas-Panama connection really begins with Paul Noland, doesn't it? Dr. Noland . . .

RM: Yeah, it does begin with him, yes.

SL: . . . and kind of an agricultural extension service initially.

RM: Yes, yes.

SL: And he ended up actually starting the agriculture department at the university there?

RM: I think he laid down the foundations for—and the—probably the first teachers—or professors—were from the University of Arkansas. From what I heard in—at that time the US government during the Eisenhower Administration selected, you know, cert—certain countries in Latin America, and they selected certain schools, and Arkansas was assigned to Panama. I would presume that other—Costa Rica or Nicaragua had other states. For some reason, Arkansas was assigned to Panama, and Professor Noland and other professors went there and helped set up the school of agriculture and—two schools of agriculture as a matter of fact. And they lived there for a couple years. And that's the reason why so many guys from Panama—people like Lucho Moreno was a—who was later on in his life the president of the Chase Manhattan Bank and president of the national bank

in Panama, came to study here [*clears throat*] or even the father of my vice president who ha—happens to be the largest producer of rum and liquor based out of sugar cane [*coughs*] came to study here. So a bunch of Panamanians came up and studied. Some agriculture, some other things, you know. [01:05:40] And there was a guy, ?Rodrigo de la Guardia?. And ?Rodrigo de la Guardia? was marrying my first cousin. And he was here at the same—when I apply. He was the one who I sent the application through, and he was the one who got—followed the process. I took my TOEFL. Took my SAT, and I'm he—I came here. That's probably one of the best thing I ever did in my whole life.

[01:06:16] SL: [*Laughs*] Well, what was the—did you fly in to Drake Field or [*laughs*] . . .

RM: Oh, gosh. First time I came the wrong way. I flew Miami—at that time there were no—none of the—the major carriers that do exist right now. And I flew to Miami, and then from Miami I flew to St. Louis, Missouri. Oh, crazy, crazy [*unclear word*]. [*SL laughs*] Bad connection. And then I took a Pitman flight. Pitman Airlines, which I don't know if it still exists. And—in a DC-3—landed in Drake Field and came to Fayetteville. Then I became a little more modern and spoke with my good

friend ?Martinsen? Travel Agency, which happens to be here. As a matter of fact, I saw him once in China, you know, with a— tall guy with a very funny moustache, and he was conducting a tour in ?Guangzhou? and I—when after I saw him, you know, and I look at him—said, "Mr. ?Martinsen?." "Hey, Martinelli, how you doin'?" Because I used to buy my tickets from him. He was brighter than the travel agency that I was using. And I loved it. You remember at that time there was no Internet, and the . . .

SL: That's right.

RM: . . . and the travel agency made a commission on the—based on the price of a ticket. And I suddenly found out there was another—and a best way—a better way. I would flew—I would flew Braniff from Panama to New Orleans, get another Braniff flight to Fort Smith, and then I cou—I could go by car—go to— from Fort Smith to—somebody would pick me up—to Fayetteville. It was very, very difficult and very different to fly in a DC-3—all DC-3—which were the only planes that flew to Fayetteville. To Fayetteville, there was no jet. Now you can fly in a jet.

SL: Yes.

[01:08:21] RM: And to very many different places because Walmart at that time was a very rinky-dinky, little store [*SL laughs*—it

had one—the second store was in Fayetteville.

SL: That's right.

RM: And I remember meeting one of the—Walma—one of the Walmart girls—Alice. I remember seeing Don Tyson, the owner of Tyson Foods, because I—when I lived in Skull Creek—mowing the lawn—and on Saturdays—or even collecting rents, believe it or not. And, you know, those were the good times and the old times. You know, I always wanted to be a retailer. And probably part of my success is being here and going to Walmart and going to Kmart and said, "Gee, when I grew up, and I open my retail store it's gonna call Ricamar."

SL: [*Whispers*] Ricamar.

[01:09:13] RM: And my parent company is called Ricamar. And it was all based because of Walmart and because of Kmart. And I remember a Gibson's store was here, too.

SL: Absolutely.

RM: Yeah.

SL: Sure.

RM: I remember the gas wars at that time. Remember buying gasoline for ten cents a gallon.

SL: Yes.

RM: I remember buying a—the—I had a friend—a good friend of mine

which I just located him "Stumpy" Mike Atkinson, whose wife, Susan, she used to work at Tyson's, and we'd buy through her five pounds of boneless chicken breasts for one dollar and fifty-five cents.

SL: That's right.

RM: So we would barbecue that for [*SL laughs*]*—it last us for whole semester. [*Laughs*]* They were little pieces, you know.

[01:10:05] Ah, it was different life at Fayetteville that time.

Very—I remember that for some reason or another—I don't know if my mother and father did it on purpose or not. I—they made a mistake when they gave me the first allowance to come to university. I told them, for instance, that university cost a little more, that I had to do this, and I had to do that—so it ended up that at the end, I ended up with an allowance—instead of one hundred twenty dollars—which was the regular allowance of everyone—I ended up with allowance close to one thousand dollars a month.

SL: Uh-oh.

[01:10:46] RM: Oh-oh. And trust me I spent it all. [*Laughter*] I remember having my fake ID. Like real college students did. Of course my—mine was in Spanish at that time. So I would go and buy some liquor where I could buy liquor. I always

wondered, you know, gee, there was a Vietnam War at that time, said, "You guys can go and die for your country. You can't buy liquor. How's that? That's crazy."

SL: It is crazy.

RM: And I remember, you know, at this point one of the things I hate to recognize that I did, but I know—I think all kids have done it. I had a fake ID, you know, to go to the liquor store and buy couple—bottle of whatever. I didn't try to use it very much but had to done.

SL: [*Laughs*] It was the normal thing to do back then.

RM: Yeah.

[01:11:44] SL: So you remember—gosh, let me think. Let me [*RM coughs*—let's walk down Dickson Street here. I guess the—George's was still there.

RM: Oh, yeah.

SL: And . . .

RM: There was the place where we—you know the—it was Co—it was in Colliers. The drug store?

SL: Colliers. Uh-huh.

RM: There was another drug store where we always cash our checks.

SL: That was The Palace Drug Store. Yes, sir.

RM: The Palace Drug Store. Palace, right at the beginning. I know,

the funny thing about The Palace Drug Store, you know, you'd go and cash checks for six ninety-five, seven dollars, eight dollars [*SL laughs*] you know, one ninety-five, fifty cents, you know. At that time there was no debit cards.

SL: [*Laughs*] That's right. The—let's see now. Does the Piggly Wiggly Store just around the corner maybe . . .

RM: Yep. [*Coughs*]

SL: Think that's right. And the . . .

RM: And there was a movie theater right in front.

SL: The UARK theatre. Mh-hmm.

RM: UARK.

SL: And the bowling alley.

[01:12:32] RM: The bowling alley. And there was a—the ope—well, there's—I mean right now where they have all these new bistros or discotheques or whatever, there used to be a Burger King. Yeah. There was a Burger King . . .

SL: Oh, it was . . .

RM: And before Burger King a BurgerMax, I think it was.

SL: Well, there—it was . . .

TM: Minute Man?

SL: There was Minute Man.

RM: Minute Man, yes.

SL: The Minute Man. That's right.

RM: And there was a very good place for barbecue. The—I forgot the name of it—right over the ra—the rail—the railcars—somewhere around that area.

SL: I'm trying to remember what barbecue place was there, but you're right . . .

RM: There was a barbecue place. Very nice barbecue place. That time . . .

SL: . . . there was a barbecue pla—course there was always B&B Barbecue.

RM: Yes and at that time there was—The Rink was the place to go.

SL: Yes. [*Laughs*]

[01:13:27] RM: And there were not too many movie theaters. And the Northwest Arkansas Mall—they opened in my sophomore—junior year. That changed life in Fayetteville.

SL: It did. The square changed.

RM: I remember I did work with a friend in the Boston Store for a couple days.

SL: Uh-huh. I worked across the corner at Hunt's.

RM: The Hunt's. Ah, nice, nice, nice, nice. Very, very, very, very nice. I remember I had a friend that, "Hey, why don't you work here for two, three days and help me out on this. Otherwise I'll

never make it." [*SL laughs*] I remember taking up the place with my friend for two, three days. I remember making a sale of—to a guy who came in of—over a thousand dollars.

Everybody was so surprised, you know.

SL: Uh-huh. [*Laughs*] Those were good days.

RM: Those were the good days and . . .

[01:14:30] SL: Let's see, now what—let's talk a little bit about—
where did you live when you came to university?

RM: I—the first year I live in Pomfret Hall . . .

SL: Okay.

RM: . . . co-ed hall. When I looked I said, "Co-ed, oh, this is where I want to live." Men and women together. How hard and far from reality. Women were one side way up, and the men were on the other side.

SL: That's right.

RM: And then my second year, I moved to Skull Creek.

SL: Skull Creek. Okay.

[01:14:55] RM: And I also live in ?Glenview? apartments, Leverett Gardens, Chateau Apartments. Oh, there was a couple others. I came in the summer, I live in one—two summers, I think. I think one was two summers—stayed one in two—I—we were jumping around from place to place, you know. I understand

there are many, many, many, many more apartments right now.

SL: There are. There are. I think I was probably working at that DX station right there in front of Skull Creek Apartments when you were living there, I bet.

RM: Yeah? I remember that station. I used to go and have my oil changed there.

SL: Yeah, and I probably changed the oil for you. [*Laughs*]

RM: And I remember very, very well when they opened Leverett Gardens.

SL: Yep.

[01:15:41] RM: And as a matter of fact, last night we went to Maxine's. Maxine's tap bar. And I was looking at a picture of Maxine's that I had—I took with her. And Maxine is not what it used to.

SL: No.

RM: Different crowd, but the smell is the same.

SL: Yeah.

RM: No—no—no—no smoking. And I noticed also—we always used to go to Maxine's on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Never on Friday or Saturday. [*Clears throat*] [*SL laughs*] That was—we'd go all frat parties.

SL: Yep.

RM: Was much, much better. Now I'm staying at the f—the old Fiji house.

SL: That's right.

RM: I would never expected that to become a fancy hotel, a boutique hotel. It was a crampy, old house. Now a fancy boutique hotel.

SL: Now, I'm trying to think—I knew a—did you know Jim Borden . . .

RM: Jim Borden.

SL: . . . back then in the Fiji house? I think he . . .

[01:16:44] RM: Well, I had two very good friends.

SL: Okay.

RM: . . . in the Sigma Nu Fraternity. And I even know their handshake. John Mason and Phillip Raley. As a matter of fact I—both of them were my roommates. Both of them—I saw them in this meeting—I came to university—both of them have changed a lot. Both of them great guys. [*SL laughs*] Both of them know a lot of stories about me, and I know a lot of stories about them that we better don't tell 'em.

SL: We don't want to know those stories.

RM: We don't want to know but great guys. One is a lawyer in Pine Bluff. The other is a real estate broker—has his own firm in Little Rock. Had a lot of SAE friends, a lot of Kap Sigs. I just

saw my good friend ?Lambert Lynn March?. He was in SAE.

?Bob Hardgrave?. Stanley Reed.

SL: How did you meet Stanley Reed?

RM: I met him when I was in school. Don't recall him very much but I was a—he was a very good friend with ?Lynn?, and I was a good friend with ?Lynn's?. I remember seeing him, but he was a jock at that time. And jocks, you know, they were a little different. [*SL laughs*] They were like—like Congressman John Boozman, you know. We were here at the same time. But being a jock, you know, that was a different world, you know. They don't drink, and they have special classes. [*Clears throat*] You know, they were on the side. [01:18:14] Very many good friends, and we had a—we have a very good friend and who's—is a—is an American of Ecuadorian descent—called Ricardo Cabeza de Vaca who happens to be the chairman of—now it used to be Merck Sharp & Dohme in Russia—now is—he runs Abbott Laboratories in Russia and all Eastern Europe. We're waiting for him. Some of the good old friends that we have—?Jane Myers?, hap—she's happily married. Also a girl that—happily married, and I remember I used to date her—?Cecilia Kraft?.

SL: Is that right? Yeah.

RM: Let me see. One of them was a Chi Omega, and the other one

was a Pi Beta Phi? No, I can't recall. I'm trying to see some of my old friends and all the new ones. ?Sada?, she's from Blytheville. Wish I could find her or another good friend ?Theresa Cravens?. She's—one small, little town—I really don't know who she's married. But I will look her up one of these days and find her. [SL laughs] And plus many, many, many, many, many other very good friends that I made through my life while I was at the University of Arkansas.

[01:19:36] RM: There was a special person. Colonel Farlow Burt and Irene Burt. They were live—they were living right next to the chancellor somewhere at 444 Olive Street?

SL: Okay.

[01:19:43] RM: And he was a retired Army colonel who had fought in World War I and World War II. And Mama Burt—I would call them Papa Burt and Mama Burt, who was a—it was a s—a teacher at the university in the education department. And the good thing about Colonel Burt is—was he had the oldest collection—that must be worth a fortune—of *Times* and *National Geographic* that I have ever seen in my whole life. And he was—believe it or not—he was buddies with—with George Patton, buddies with Douglas MacArthur and Dwight Eisenhower, Omar Bradley. And based on that, I just bought myself in e-Bay

an autographed picture—of course not to me [*laughter*—of Dwight Eisenhower, the "American Caesar" Douglas MacArthur, Omar Bradley, and George Patton.

SL: Wow.

[01:20:42] RM: And I remember sitting down with him for—I was studying, he would be telling me all these stories—all these things he did—he went there, he went there, they—when Patton did that, when Bradley did that, that he saw MacArthur in the 1930s doing whatever. That he went to China for this or he went—he we—he had the opportunity of going to Flying Tigers in China and all kinds of stories that makes—that somebody have to write them. I still remember them, and that's probably I'm so fond of so [*clears throat*—all those four American generals.

SL: 'Cause you heard . . .

RM: I heard st—I mean I was . . .

SL: First-hand stories.

RM: I've heard first-hand stories, you know, of somebody who knew them and was their good friend. He was very, very old at that time. I'm talking on se—he's—he was probably in the s—seventies or eighties—seventies. Seventies. Very, very decent, hardworking person. Very, very nice guy.

[01:21:53] SL: So what about your studies here and your professors

here? Were there any professors that influenced you while you were here?

RM: Oh, there were—there was a good professor in investments. And I forgot his name. Oh, gosh. In business. There was a very good professor in marketing. I would say those two guys had a profound effect on me. I even—there was some people who—there was an Indian fellow who taught us—Egyptian—no, Egyptian who taught us, and I remember—oh, gosh, this is a funny story.

SL: Okay.

RM: You know, one of—I wouldn't say the—my friend's name, but [*SL laughs*] he is one of the ones I mentioned.

SL: Yes.

RM: He got the ex—the final exam. And everybody in that fraternity—which I won't say the fraternity either [*SL laughs*]—had the exam. And I had the opportunity of obtaining the exam. And I said to myself, "Gee, I know all these questions, right? I shouldn't look that exam." And I didn't. I didn't look at the exam. You know, sometimes people have different ways and different contacts to get tests ahead of time for various reasons . . .

SL: Sure.

RM: . . . which I don't know, and I don't want to expand. And I remember, you know, having the opportunity of seeing exam and not—and copying or memorize it. Or go on my own. And I'm on my own. I went on my own because I remember when I was in military school, I shouldn't receive any help. And I didn't. And I did okay, as a matter of fact.

SL: Yeah.

RM: Not as good as the other ones, but I did okay.

SL: Well, you did better than okay, really, because you stood your ground and did the right thing. You did the "do right" rule.

RM: But trust me I—took me a while to s—to make up my mind.

[*Laughter*]

[01:24:09] SL: Well, that's good though [*RM clears throat*] that you did that. So what about the campus life? I mean . . .

RM: Oh, lovely. Hey, twelve thousand students. Everybody knew me. I knew everyone in the school. I—of course, I was probably seventy pounds—maybe it was seventy pounds skinnier. No gray hair. I remember I had a moustache. And had a nice car. I dress well. I had a lot of friends. Many, many friends. And I remember I'll stand up in—during the time between classes in front of the business school, and everybody would walk by—would say, "Hi, Ricardo, how you doing?" "Hey,

Ricardo." "Hi, Martinelli." I knew everyone that was to be known here. I met everybody, and I feel so happy. [01:25:07] I felt so happy, and so that after graduation, I cheated on my parents, and I told them I wanted to have a minor in agriculture because I didn't have that opportunity of studying agriculture. I didn't study agriculture. I came here to party. [*SL laughs*] So I took a whole semester partying, and I enrolled for the second semester. And one day I said to myself, "Gee, this is not right. I am wasting my time." I go to classes. Make good grades. I am not gonna do anything. I shou—instead of getting a master's, I'm getting all these funny classes, you know, that I can have an easy A. Every single night I am partying, going out with a different girl, going to places, traveling, when my mother and father believe that I am studying, having a ma—minor in agriculture, which is not true. So one day I decided I am leaving. And I did leave. Made up—put everything in my car. Cancelled all my classes and left. And I did it. Just like that. It wasn't right. It was really wrong, and I left.

SL: Where'd you go?

RM: Panama. To work for my father. [*Clears throat*]

SL: Well, but then you came back.

RM: No, that was after I had graduated.

SL: Oh, okay . . .

RM: After.

SL: . . . okay, I see. Instead of working on the master's you went . . .

RM: Instead of working on the master's, I had a white lie, say I was gonna take a minor in agriculture. Which I didn't. I remember going to work for the university in their farm in Stuttgart.

SL: Wow.

RM: Learning about rice and then at nights going see my good friend John Mason or other friends and just run around—have a good time.

[01:27:11] SL: Did you do any duck hunting? When you . . .

RM: Oh, yeah. Duck and deer hunting. I did everything that everybody did here. [*SL laughs*] I had a great time.

SL: Well, now what about . . .

RM: That is why I had so much fun and so much fun-loving care for all people from Arkansas. Everything had to do with Arkansas.

SL: What about football games?

[01:27:27] RM: Went to all of 'em. Even in Little Rock. All of 'em. We'll get up early or we'll get so—pay someone—we'll get someone to—one of the new recruits from any of the fraternities to stand up in line, two o'clock in the morning. Get us good

tickets. And the good thing was to—how can we hide whatever liquor we're gonna get in. [*SL laughs*] And how we're gonna ?make it?. And what party we were going that Saturday night. [*Clears throat*] So, you know, we all went to "The Pit".

SL: Yes.

RM: It was the place to . . .

SL: Park.

RM: . . . make out, party, park, drink.

SL: Yes, yes. I'm f—I confess to that.

RM: And I have to admit it. And, well, I did everything everybody did at that time. And I never told you the story about the—always fight one more round. When I was in the military school, there was this big foot—football guy. We were—in the afternoons and Saturdays, you know, nothing—not much to do. People would put on their gloves and start fighting, you know. There was big guy. And this guy is beating everyone, you know? Everybody is scared of him. And then I remember him saying, "Hey, I'm gonna beat one of these spics here."

SL: Oh . . .

[01:29:01] RM: And I said, "Spics?" I just arrived. "What the hell is a spic?" "A spic is somebody who speaks Spanish." "I don't speak Spanish." Then he said, "No, you're not a spic. You're a

wop." "What the hell is a wop?" [*SL laughs*] "A wop is an Italian." He said, "Wop and spics are same thing. They speak Spanish, Italian, who cares?" [*Words unclear*] "I'm gonna fight that guy." So I went up and fought the guy. He almost killed me. First round, almost killed me. And I sat down, said, "No, no. Take these glove. I am not going back over there in my life." [*SL laughs*] And the guy came to me and said, "Hey, always fight one more round." I said, "What?" "See what he is doing to me. I'm not gonna fight." "Always fight one more round. Go." So I went. Second round, almost killed me. But the guy was tired. Third round, he still ?whipped? me, but I hit him a couple times. From that day on, nobody did any hazing. Nobody would dare to touch me or my brother. Nobody would dare to say anything to me because I stood up. Because I fought one more round. [*Clears throat*] That's why when I ran in 2004 and I lost, I went back. That's why in the 1989 invasion—US invasion—that my stores were looted—I went back. I told my cre—creditors and my banks and suppliers, "Hey, I have no money. I would like to pay you." I remember I told my wife, "Hey, there's no way in hell that I can pay all this money." Something like seven or eight million bucks at that time. "Well, we'll go to Australia." I said, "Australia. You're crazy. You go

by yourself. My mom and dad are here. I don't wanna leave them. You wanna go, you go." "We may go to Miami." "Miami? Heck, no, I ain't going to Miami. Anybody can see me walking, throw the car at me, and hit me." [01:31:11] I said, "We're gonna stay here." My "fight one more round" came back to me again, and then I started all over, and I did pretty good. It was a recovery time. Everybody had a sense of pride—wanted to push the country forward after Noriega—the regime. And I did it, based on that simple old fight in the military school. So that's my motto. I always fight. I am a fighter.

SL: One more round.

RM: One more round.

[01:31:55] SL: That's good—that's a good one. You know, we haven't talked at all about—and I hate to leave the university topic, but how did you start your supermarket business? It's called Super 99. Is that right?

RM: Yeah.

SL: How did that get started?

RM: Very funny story.

SL: Okay.

RM: When I was—after I got out of school, my father—very strict—and mother—I was working for them. I remember that time I

was making five hundred dollars a month. [*SL laughs*] Coming from a thousand dollar allowance to make five hundred. It was a big difference . . .

SL: Big difference. [*Laughs*]

RM: . . . oh, yeah. Working and making less. Then one day—you know, I would like to party—and then my father told me, "Hey, you didn't make your five hundred bucks. You don't even make what I pay you." Said, "Who, me? You talking to me? I want to prove you I make what I pay you." I remember that time there was rent controls on some of the properties. My mother was leasing the property to this Chinese guy who had a hardware store. And then I noticed I could raise the guy's salary, and I went through all the channels and the housing minister to get the approval to raise his salary. And I negotiated with the guy for a month, two months. I remember the guy was paying six hundred a month for rent, and I increased the rent from six hundred to fourteen hundred. That was eight hundred bucks. So when the guy paid me, I came to my father, said, "Look, that's the five hundred that you pay me. This is three hundred more. You didn't have that. You have it now." He sh—he said he couldn't believe it. [01:33:45] Well, to make a long story short, say I am going to get a—get me an M.B.A. So I went up

and s—I wo—applied to the school that was in Nicaragua, now is in Costa Rica—called INCAE —that is run by Harvard Univer— Harvard University—called INCAE. And I went up and got my master's degree. I remember that I was offer—it was very funny—I was—and one of the professors—all of them were American professors and that time was—most of the time—the Sandinistas and all that. And one of the professors asked me, "Hey, I noticed that you are very much pro-American. Why don't you become a CIA agent?" "Who, me? [*SL laughs*] CIA? You want people to hang me by one of the trees here? You're crazy. I'll help you, but I'll never become a CIA agent. [*SL laughs*] Thank you very much."

SL: Good decision.

[01:34:35] RM: "Nice to see you." And then I remember I was offered a job at the First Natio—First of Chicago. And it wasn't in Panama. It wasn't in Central America. And my father told me, "Hey, come to Panama. I'll pay you the difference. You're not gonna complain to me?" I said, "No." "I'll pay you the difference." So I came to Panama. Didn't wanna work for him. So I went to work for Citibank. And I got higher pay, so he had—every month he had to give me something like six or seven hundred dollars a month—that he owes me because we made a

deal.

SL: Yes.

RM: Working at Citibank was very wonderful experience. A nice bank. Largely—used to be largest bank in the world. Largest bank in the US. Not anymore. I remember that my boss was a member of the Rotary Club, and I had a client and that client had a loan and the loan got a fixed payment. And every year, every month, I had to call him up and say, "Hey, you have to put up so much money because the loan you have fixed is not sufficient [*clears throat*] because interest rates have gone up seventeen, eighteen percent at that time." So the guy—I went up, and I fixed that with the guy and the guy told me, "You can't do it." "What do you mean I can't do it? You have to pay. I give you a fixed rate, and you have to call you every month so you can pay this." He said, "No, because I'm a very good friend of your boss, who happens to be a member of the Rotary Club with me." "I don't care. This is not right. This is wrong." [01:36:18] So I went up and made my report and changed that. My boss called me, said, "You've got to change that." "What do you mean I've got to change that? This guy is not the biggest client. This guy, I have to call him every month." "Nope, he's my friend." Said, "Thank you for saying this, I don't

care if he's your friend or not. I can't do it. It's wrong." Said, "You've got to do it." Said, "No, I'm not going to do it." So I went back—he was the highest VP, so there was a bunch of layers between him and myself. And, you know, everybody started pulling the plug on me. "Hey, you gotta do it." So one day my im—immediate boss came to me and said, "Do it." And I said, "No." Said, "Remember I am the one who approve the salary increases." "I don't give a sh—I don't care. I don't care." [SL laughs] I'm sorry for that word [laughs] . . .

SL: That's all right. That's right. You're fine.

[01:37:19] RM: "No." So to make a long story short, said, "This guy, I am not going to have any future here. I am leaving." So I began to say goodbye to all my clients, and it happens that the Chinese guy who I had increased the rent—it was on my mother's property—was one of my clients, and he had a hardware store. [01:37:46] I went by to say goodbye to all my clients. Thank God, I was very happy. I had probably around fifteen clients, good clients. Three of them offered me a job. One of them was the Chinese guy. So remembered back experience of Chinese—I have loaned that guy—remember that time—a million bucks. A lot of money at that time. And I went to work for him. First day of work, you know, everything all

right. I was going to become the general manager because he had no sons. He had a couple nephews working there. The Chinese are very tightly knit. And then, you know, everything with that guy was speaking in English. There was no Spanish. He would hardly speak Spanish. And I used—his name was Francisco—I used to call, "Uncle Frank."

SL: Okay. [*Laughs*]

[01:38:34] RM: And I went to Uncle Frank and said, "Well, I'm going to see the inventories. I'm going to see the accounts. I'm going to see all that." So I walked to the warehouse, and I noticed it was very low. It was [*unclear words*]. I come up and ask him, "Oh, well, our inventories are low." "Oh, it's because we had great sales during Christmas." Oh, great." Well, I began to look at the accounts, and I noticed that many people didn't want to supply him. So—and I was loo—looking even further, and these things were not right. So he—that guy had cooked the books.

SL: Oh.

RM: So I came up to him and say, "Hey, you cooked the books." Says, "Yes, I did." "These advances to purchases, the merchandise is coming?" He said, "No, no, that's a plug-in figure." "What do you mean a plug-in figure? You cheated me. I loaned some money on that." He said, "Yes, but I cooked the

books. You gonna go back to Citibank, you can go." "Me, go back to Citibank? Heck, no. I'm staying here. But I'm telling the truth. I'm going to go and call the banks, Chase and Citi, and I'll tell them the truth." He says, "You can't do that." I said, "Look, by telling the truth, they will understand. They will help you, and they'll help us forward. If we continue cooking these books, we are gonna go under." I got a meeting with both of them, explained them. By being honest and transparent, they understood and they helped me. [01:40:17] At that time that business had six stores, was selling six million dollars a year. First year operation we raised sales to nine million and we're making money. Second year we went to eighteen million. Then I changed the hardware to the supermarket concept. And to tell you the truth, I became a minority shareholder. I had eleven percent of the company. Then the guy in 1984, three years later, he told me he wanted to sell. I went to Citibank. At that time there was the LBOs—the leveraged buyout—management buyouts were on trend. And by being honest with myself and honest with my fellow officers at Citibank—all of them were the bosses by now. [Coughs] So they selected a company to do a management buyout, and they selected my company—that company. They loaned me at that

time three point—three point two million dollars to buy the company. They loaned me that money in 1984, effective in July 21, 1986. The day that I was gonna go and sign, Uncle Frank had a girlfriend in the company, and he said, "No, I am not selling if you don't take care of her. I'll give you two hundred and fifty thousand more dollars to her." [*Coughs*] Said, "What? We have done all this." [*SL laughs*] So the bank allow me to pay that money to her. We bought the company. And 1989 we had—from six stores, we had nine stores. Seven—no s—let me see, six were looted. Lost the warehouse. Lost seven million bucks. And now I have probably—own the largest local companies, selling five hundred million dollars a year. Have four thousand five hundred employees in that company and making a very decent profit. I've been approached several times by Walmart to buy me out. And the reason and the—why I am telling you all this is by being transparent, by coming forward, by fighting that one more round, is why I'm here. The pre—at the present time. If I would have done the opposite, I wouldn't be here.

SL: Yeah.

RM: I wouldn't be president. I wouldn't have live up to my standards, and I wouldn't live up to—I wouldn't be able to sleep

at night. I wouldn't.

[01:43:22] SL: You know, that experience with that company
[*RM clears throat*] and your insistence on honesty and
transparency probably has helped prepare you for your
current . . .

RM: It did.

SL: . . . occupation.

RM: Yeah, you know something? I—before I arrived there were so
many business—crooked business dealings were—that were
going on, and probably I could have made over a hundred
million bucks. Some land sales, some business—some Chinese—
some casino permits, some payments to other people. A
hundred million bucks. It was wrong.

SL: Yeah.

[01:43:58] RM: [*Claps hands*] I'm sorry. It's not for me. I'm not
here for the money. I'm here just to have a real change and to
have fun. And I have fun in my—as president because I can
influence and change things. Before it took me a long while to
achieve something. Now I'm a phone call away. And, trust me,
I love it. I love to be able to change things. [01:44:24] I'm so
happy to have come to the university and have an endowment
on my name for people from Arkansas or people from Panama

both. And I ?established? that endowment, and last night there was a dinner. There were some wealthy people—Chancellor Gearhart would say, well, this guy who gave so much, this guy was [*SL laughs*—I took the opportunity as a b—as a—in my new profession as politician to ask and requested more money for the university. I requested more money for that endowment, too. Which I hope it helps Arkansans and Panamanians to have a better life, to have a better education at this fine school. So I'm going to do—continue to all my efforts to help that so more people, whoever they are. I don't care how they select them because that's none of my business, whether I am very sure they will be selected properly—have a better life.

[01:45:23] SL: You know, Dan Hendrix and the World Trade Center were kind of waiting on the fair trade agreement to get online here with the United States. I know that you are for the fair trade, and this idea of transparency and honesty just fits like a glove into that, doesn't it? I mean . . .

[01:45:57] RM: Well, you know, I don't understand why the free trade hasn't been signed. Initially it was Panama's fault because Panama selected in the last government as president of the assembly an individual who was accused—or indicted, I should say—for the killing of an American soldier after the invasion. I

never understood why they did that, but they did it and that put all the negotiations on the side. [*Coughs*] When we arrived into power, they add up some more preconditions—which I agree. One of them is to change the membership of persons to be able to form a labor union from—they reduce it from forty to twenty. The other one is to have the varied shares of—because in Panama you can have a corporation that you can have varied shares that have people who don't have to put the name of the real owner. And you can also have in our banking system numbered accounts, you know, that have no name. To be true, to open a numbered account, I think in Panama right now, I think I have the formula for—to cure cancer is more simple. [01:47:20] It's impossible. And so I told 'em, "Hey, where do I sign? I sign it." No more numbered accounts. Varied shares? Look, if I—my shares are in my name, everybody's shares are in their name. I would say for taxes. I pay taxes. You pay taxes. If I don't pay taxes, you don't pay taxes. So I went up and signed that, too. When it came to the labor unions, believe it or not, labor unions like a clique—like a clique of people want—who want no more people come in. They oppose that. Instead of favoring, they oppose because they don't want to have more labor unions. Because having more labor unions is a negotiable

power. So the "Americans" understood there was no problem.
[01:48:06] You look at Panama exports. Panama exports everything to the US tax free because we are in the Caribbean Basin Initiative. There's a enormous trade surplus on the US behalf of close to four point five billion—five billion dollars. On your behalf. That—in your favor. That every time it comes to Panama, has to pay duties. Has to pay duties because we don't have a free trade. Ours goes in for free, and yours comes in—pays. So if you start looking at it, it would probably cost the Panamanian government four to "five" hundred million dollars to have a free trade. But when an investor wants to go to a country, he'd like to have a security that the secur—the judicial system works. I have to admit that the judicial system—being a Na—Napoleonic Code and being here in the common law . . .

SL: Yes.

RM: . . . it's different.

SL: Yes.

[01:49:14] RM: So you have to understand it's not that it's corrupt. It's that it's different. So an American doesn't understand the Napoleonic Code unless you are from New Orleans. [*SL laughs*]
We don't understand the common law. Okay, then the provisions of the treaty says that an American who invest in

Panama or any other country, he can have—he can be abided by the local laws or by the US laws. So that's something that helps the US investments, which are very, very big in Panama.

SL: Yes.

[01:49:46] RM: Billions and billions and billions and billions of dollars, who are there—billions of Americans who have put their money there and live there. Probably three or four percent of the population of Panama is American. And then not having the free trade—these people are not based on US laws, or no local laws. So I really don't understand. Labor unions in here, and the states believe that signing a free trade kills and destroys jobs in the US. In this case, it's the other way around.

SL: Yeah.

RM: It's gonna promote more jobs. But sometimes people are so obtuse, so stubborn that they don't understand the reality.

SL: They have the blinders on.

[01:50:37] RM: So I—when the congressmen go there—we also have another problem. The Republicans are favoring the free trade, and the Democrats are divided. And I don't believe that President Obama wants to pass a treaty with the help of the Republicans and a split on the Democrats because that's not politically correct for him, and I understand. And I understand

also [*clears throat*] that he's having a—like to do some changes in health care and some other things ahead of this. And I also understand that there's—every two years you guys have elections. So understand his point of view. So we just tell 'em, "whenever you are ready, we are ready." Want to si—and those who would like to sign off a treaty of information agreement—because I always say that Al Capone went to jail for not—not—for not paying taxes, not for killing people . . .

SL: That's right.

[01:51:36] RM: . . . or selling booze, for not paying taxes. So the US wants to know what its citizens have in other countries that are evading taxes. It was completely normal. So we are willing to sign. I think hopefully we'll sign that by the end of next month—this month. March, at the end of March. So there will be—there shouldn't be any restrictions or impediments or—for that. But we understand. When you guys are ready, we are ready. We don't care. We have lived without it. We don't need it. You need it more. But on the other hand, we have asked, you know, certain things like if it's possible, that the flight that originate out of Panama into the US could be—could become local flights like they do in China, Aruba, the Bahamas. That also give a—another edge to the—to—for the drug trafficking because that

will allow custom officials and immigration officials to take over the airport. And you know what that means? That means no drugs in there. That means that the DEA, the immigration, Homeland Security, are gonna be there. So whoever wants to have in the first frontier—drugs—ship to Europe or the US in planes—which is the fastest way, easy way with duffel bags or whatever. I don't know. But if you have the Americans there, it's gonna be difficult. I wouldn't say it's impossible. It's difficult. So they say, "Well, we really don't know, we don't want to do it, the homeland security, the—whatever." [01:53:21]

Then we asked another thing, well, conventions. We are building a couple convention centers. US conventions made in Panama allow the American corporations to deduct them from taxes, like you have done in Costa Rica. For that they say, "Yes." Then we asked another thing to help you guys out. Well, if possible, some of the Medicare, Medicaid patients that—everything is so expensive here—operate them in Panama. We have an agreement with the University of Texas, with Johns Hopkins hospital. Operate them over there. Use our facilities. It's cheaper. ?Your doctors? University of Texas MD Anderson.

SL: Yeah.

RM: Why not?

SL: Why not.

[01:54:06] RM: And the—and—but sometimes, you know, sometimes—I always say in life the politician has to be a businessman. You have to think that running a country is like running a business. You have to take care of the well-care of your citizens, the well-care of your—the people who are voting for you and not voting for you—to—of your country. But sometimes people don't see that, and academics, sometimes they mo—take more—take a more strange approach and don't—don't see—they don't understand through politics the realities of what is good. I'm not talking about President Obama. I am not talking about anyone. I'm talking in general.

SL: Yes.

RM: Sometimes we lo—we—you have to—to see what competitive advantages we have—that will favor the relationship among two countries. That—we are signing treaties with everyone who wants to sign a treaty. And you want to know information about your citizens in Panama? We sign it. We don't care. That's—it's your—it's your problem, your guy.

SL: Yeah.

RM: I mean we don't want to shelter tax evaders or people who are—had a bad reputation, you know. Hey, we want—nobody wants

them. Ship 'em out. If they are with us, ship 'em out. If they are yours, ship 'em out. But I will be here waiting. We are good friends, and we have, you know, have all the patience in the world.

[01:55:38] SL: Well, I know Arkansas agricultural business would be—would really enjoy a fair trade agreement with Panama.

RM: Especially rice farmers.

SL: Yeah.

RM: Because Panama imports a heck of a lot of rice and include—bought—some of them have been bought in Arkansas. I think rice, I mean, selling—some rice. We could be—more could be bought. And I'm very sure—so those are some of the things that we can negotiate, you know. Buy more agricultural products. Buy more corn, more sorghum, more rice. Panama is—it has been a true—an ally and a good friend of the US for many, many, many years. And like I told president—Secretary Clinton we're gonna be your honest brokers in the region. We're gonna help you out. Because the US position with the new governments, populist governments in Latin America is not doing very good. You need someone in the region who understands them, who's yours—your friend that can be the go-between amo—among them because at the end all governments in theory

want the be—the well-being of their citizens. So sometimes some people want it one way. Some other people want it other way. You gotta have someone who accommodates the pe—the different people . . .

SL: Takes it to the center. Mh-hmm.

RM: . . . yeah, take it to the center. And we're going to be that—those honest brokers because I be—we believe that the government that we are doing in Panama—two businessmen running a country without being a politic—a . . .

SL: Elected.

RM: . . . not—without being a professional politicians.

[01:57:34] SL: Oh, yeah. Mh-hmm.

RM: Because a professional politician only knows politics.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: And in those countries the—after a professional politici—politician becomes a governor—in government. Then they became entrepreneurs. Because they stole some money, and now they have to do something with it. [*SL laughs*] We are the other way around . . .

SL: Yeah.

[01:57:53] RM: We already businessmen, and we are not there for the money. We are there to change, to do things different.

Sometimes to do different things, you have to have a strong hand. You have to have a position that you can change, you know. Sometimes governments just go up and down, up and down, and never have the opposition, nothing. Sometimes you have to take a decision, and I believe that the decisions that we have taken sometimes are—we make mistakes. But we make mistake, we withdraw. We say, "this is wrong, we did wrong, we're gonna correct this," and we do it like everybody should. But sometimes, you know, people are not very appreciative of that, and people like to co-govern with you and like to tell you things that you should do because they want them to do—you to do that.

SL: Right.

RM: And sometimes we have that problem, you know. That's the problem that you have in a country—that people are used to say, "Hey, let's do things my way, not your way." So I think that we should do is come to some agreement in the middle and try to see the best for the people, for everyone. [01:59:15] And those are the things that, when you come to a state like Arkansas, and you start looking at the people, everybody's down-to-earth. Everybody's sincere. Everybody's hardworking. Everybody's honest. I mean, the shared values that you should

have are here. I mean, it's not a big city like being in Washington, DC, that you see all kinds of things, all kinds of whatever. Or Dallas or New Orleans. The basic values of society are in rural places. In rural pla—I don't mean to offend no one, but it's no—nothing bad being rural. Nothing bad being in a small town or a college town where—like Fayetteville. Fayetteville is a college town where all of us depend on what happens at the university. Everything runs around the university.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[02:00:04] RM: Now hopefully there's Walmart, Tyson, whatever. But in Fayetteville everything happens—goes around here.

SL: Yep. We're big economic engine.

RM: In New York—New—whatever university are with—within the city of New York nobody cares about that. Or New Orleans or in Houston. Nobody cares abo—there's so many other things, you know.

[02:00:29] SL: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm. Is there—you know, I don't want to linger too much longer on the University of Arkansas, but is there anything else that you want to say about the University of Arkansas? Because I do want to get to how you met your wife . . .

RM: Oh, great.

SL: . . . and your family but if—if we have the time for that . . .

RM: Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . but is there anything else about the University of Arkansas that you'd like to . . .

RM: Oh, it was a great place to be, great place to live. If I—like I mentioned you before—if I'd—if I had to live all over again I would do exactly what I did.

SL: [*Laughs*] That's good. That's good. Well, you came away with a good education.

RM: Oh, yeah. I came up—I wasn't a—an A student. I wasn't an F or D student. I was right in the middle. I know that you have to do everything—you have to be good, not excellent, just good in everything.

SL: Yes.

RM: And not bad, you know. Just be a normal human being.

SL: Liberal arts education.

RM: I noticed that people who are—who got very good grades not necessarily do good in life.

SL: Yes.

RM: I learned that being a beautiful girl doesn't necessarily mean you're going to get marry. [*SL laughs*] I seen some ugly girls

marry five times. I seen some pretty girls never marry.

SL: Yes.

RM: So life is—sometimes it's not what people think it is.

SL: I th—I think it would be a mistake if we didn't at least talk about . . .

TM: Scott, we should probably change tapes.

SL: Okay. We're out of this tape.

RM: Okay, no problem.

[Tape stopped]

[02:02:06] SL: One of our interviews went fourteen hours.

RM: Oh.

SL: We spent two days with Coach Broyles, as well.

RM: Oh, gosh. Coach Broyles.

SL: The Governor gave us a couple days.

RM: Coach Broyles, that's—he used to go to the pep rallies and cheer us up every single time.

KK: Speed.

SL: He's g—he was—he's quite the guy. I li—I'm very fond of Coach Broyles and, you know, I was telling you Eunice Noland was my den mother in Cub Scouts. Well, Barbara Broyles, Coach's wife, was my Sunday School teacher, so . . .

RM: Oh.

SL: . . . anyway, it's a small town here in Fayetteville.

RM: It is.

[02:02:43] SL: I can't believe that you and I really didn't cross paths while you were here.

RM: Probably did and . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] I . . .

RM: I wa—was around from [19]69 to [19]73.

SL: I graduated Fayetteville High School in 1970. I was born here and raised here. I've really just spent all my life here. I bet we crossed paths and just didn't—didn't know it.

RM: Probably. Most likely.

[02:03:05] SL: Most likely. [*RM clears throat*] Okay, so we've kind of—if there's anything else about the University of Arkansas and Fayetteville you want to talk about?

RM: Oh, no. It's just a lovely place.

SL: Good.

RM: Wonderful experience that I had—my life here. Has changed a lot for the good, for the good. Now is a—now it's a real city. It's no longer as rural and—I shouldn't say without offending no one—a little backwards. Just has everything that any large city would li—would have. It's a cosm—cosmopolitan—people from everywhere. Large corporations who are attracting people. It's

a good place to retire. Good place to live. Good place to have fun and good place to raise your kids.

SL: We just need you to bring some of this to Panama.

RM: Well, we're—that's what we're trying to do. [*Laughter*]

[02:04:15] SL: Okay, now—so you—you gave me a little story—some stories about your career—your business career and how you ended up owning a hardware store that became Super 99, and you've had a very successful business opportunity through all that. Tell me when your—tell me about your wife and how you guys met. Her name and . . .

RM: Her name is Marta. Marta Linares. She c—she comes from a very, very old family in Panama. Her father was a politician and a businessman, but more politician than businessman. And he always told her, "Never marry a politician." [*SL laughs*] And I wasn't a politician when she met me. As a matter of fact, I—when I met her I was—knew that she was nice looking lady. Good lady. Good mo—a good mother. And good family. And I approached her and said, "I'm Ricardo Martinelli, and you're Marta. Nice to meet you." I got to talking to her. She was with two friends. She didn't want to talk to me. I say, "Can you give me your phone number?" Said, "No, you go and find out." [*SL laughs*] "Oh, but you know I will find out." So I called her up

for the first time to go out. Say, "No, I don't want to go out with you." Oh, gosh, gave me a fine excuse. Well, I better find something better next time—to call her in—and invite her something more exciting. I call her for a second time. Say, "No." Said, "What?" Okay. I better find something more exciting next time. So I called her . . .

[02:06:10] SL: This is kind of like going another round. [*Laughs*]

RM: [*Clears throat*] Yeah. Call her the third time. She say, "No."

Then as my ego was so hurt that I told her, "Look, thank you for saying 'no.' You don't know what you are missing. I don't want to call you anymore. I am sorry. I don't know that you were a snob." I don't recall I told her, but it wasn't something very good. And then she hung up, and she went and told her mother. And her mother say, "Why? Why did you do that? He looks like a nice guy." Say, "I now his father very well." And, you know, my father had gone out with her.

SL: Ah.

[02:06:59] RM: Ah. And then, "Go and talk to that guy. That guy is a good guy. He's never going to call you back again." So she went up and called me.

SL: Oh.

RM: And I already had another appointment. But I was, you know—

it's gonna happen to me. Couldn't happen to me. So I said, "Yes, okay. Let's go out." I remember I went to a movie—went to some bar or party later on. And she always says that I was opening the door and, you know, I was very polite. Now that we have been married for thirty years, I don't open her door. [*SL laughs*] She always complains about that. And, you know, we started dating, and we used to go running, and we used to go bicycle riding and, you know, we did all the things, you know. At that time I was working for Ci—for Citibank. I ma—I got married in 1978.

[02:07:58] SL: Good you could remember that.

RM: Yep. [*SL laughs*] I got married in 1978 in August. And we have been happily married for many years. We have had our ups and downs, you know. Like every couple, you know.

SL: Every couple. Mh-hmm.

[02:08:15] RM: You know, my life is—was very difficult because I worked very hard. I am a—I am almost a workaholic, I should say. And I work every single day at any time. Even at the presidency, I go seven thirty, eight o'clock in the morning. I leave ten, ten thirty, eleven o'clock. Every single day. I work on Sundays. I started dating her. Got married. I remember we went on our honeymoon to Acapulco. And then, you know, at

that time, you know, money was a little tight. So I ended up—we went to this hotel called ?Las Preses? which is very funny because this hotel—there were no Cancuns, no Playa del Carmen, no—nothing of that. The Riviera Maya—nothing of that. Only Acapulco. So we went to this hotel that has this "just couples." And they give you this funny chip—it was pink—so that everybody knows that you are there, and you are newlywed. So I remember when—they have very nice pool, little cottages on top of the mountain. Everything very nice. I remember when I was gonna go and pay for the hotel I noticed that the bill was different. Say, "What do you mean?" I said, "Different. We are a couple." "No, no, no. The price is per person." "What do you mean, you Mexicans? You, you, and you, and you." [*SL laughs*] "This a couple's hotel, how?" He showed me the—in a very, very small numbers. And this deposit was ninety-nine dollars. The room was that—it said, "per person." So I got very upset. I remember that. She got upset, too, 'cause we feel ripped off, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[02:10:09] RM: And we went to Mexico City, and then every—would take a taxi, speak Spanish, and then we'd say, "Take us to this hotel," if rate was higher. So we forgot we're gonna go to that

monument or that church is close to the hospital—to the hotel. So instead of going to that place we're going to speak like Mexicans and don't say anything more in the taxi, and we'll stay, say we wanna go to so-and-so place, not to the hotel. And the rate will be half. [*Laughs*] [02:10:48] Oh, well, that was 1978, and we had a—we—I was working for Citibank at that time. At that time, I wasn't working very ha—as hard as I used to. I got up at there—I'll be at the bank at eight, eight thirty, and I'll leave at five. I'd be in my house at five thirty, six, you know. You know, I was just a regular guy. Had two kids at that time. Then I went to work for the hardware store. [02:11:19] My wife is very lovely. She is very understanding. She doesn't ?bug? nor complain. She has to be very good to put up with me. [*SL laughs*] She has to be—she has a very nice character. Now as a s—as first lady—she always used to get up late. Now she gets up early. She has taken her job very seriously. She has a very high approval rate. She is doing a great job. She used to be shy a little—don't talk in public. Now she talks. She behaves very well. She's a real woman. A nice person. Sometimes we are a little different, you know. Sometime it takes two different characters to complement each other. If we will be—I mean, first I like to go to the beach and swim, and she doesn't like to

take too much sun. I love the sun. I mean, I have different colors of my skin—just by looking at me—I have suntan all day long because when I go I don't even take any—I don't even put myself a—any sunblock. I just like to be the way I am. And—but we have found some things we like in common, like skiing. We go to—have been going to Colorado for the last twenty-two years, and . . .

SL: Wow.

[02:12:49] RM: . . . and we had fun. We like to travel, and we used to travel a lot. She's very scary—of planes and ships, and she always take her pills not to . . .

SL: Get sick.

RM: . . . get sick. She gets sick very often and—and we have to take her Dramamine or whatever pills, you know in a boat or—and she always begins. She likes to re—pray something every time she goes in a plane. She's very scary about that. We own a private plane—a small jet, and I use it very often, in going to places, and she doesn't like to come. We also have a heli—two helicopters—personal helicopters and she—for her to—now she is—now she will fly the helicopters because she knows the pilot. And she will fly the plane because she knows the pilots. But took her a while to convince herself. She's also—is the head of

the foundation for the scholarships that we—we give away.

[02:14:03] SL: Uh-huh.

RM: And she's a very—she has been a great mother to my kids.

Great mother. And she's a wonderful woman. Wonderful. I don't deserve to have her. [*SL laughs*] That's the truth.

SL: Most men say that about their good wives, that we're not deserving.

RM: She's—she know how to forgive—I—you know, I'll always been flirting. You know, I like to tease around girls and have fun and you know. And she just—she understands. She just—she doesn't bug me. [*SL laughs*] I know that—I'm al—will always be home. I—you know, as you grow older, you are not like you used to be. You—if I go into a party or a wedding or whatever and I stay until very late, it take me a couple days to recuperate.

SL: Recover.

RM: It's not like it used to.

SL: That's right.

[02:15:02] RM: I don't sleep very much, so when I get up at night and sleep—I s—a—always sleep four or five [*vocalized noise*]—the day I sleep six hours it must be—I have to thank God for that day because I don't sleep very much and sometimes I take an occasional nap in my office. ?In my office? or in the

presidency. I just close the door one—go to one of the
couches . . .

SL: That's a healthy thing to do though.

RM: . . . read a book and sleep half an hour or an hour and then—
and get up, and I feel like a—I'm brand new—start all over.

SL: It's a power nap.

RM: It's a power nap.

SL: That's right.

RM: It was great, and I have been—not used to but then every once
in a while—I have gone into places and I fall asleep. I
remember one time [*SL laughs*] I—before I got married I went
to a discotheque. I fell asleep and—in a little corner. Around
seven o'clock in the morning, I got up and said, "What the hell
am are we doing here?" [*Laughter*] And there was—they were
closing the place. [*SL laughs*] Thank God I was—I got up in
time. But I slept, you know. I was young at that time. I
haven't done it when I am old, but, you know, but sometimes,
you know, I am also s—I also say in the presidency when we are
in cabinet meetings, you know, we have some ministers who
speak little more than the usual. So always come "Blackberry
time." Everybody, you know, gets the Blackberry, start
answering e-mails or—or sending chats or whatever.

Because there's some people who speak a little more than usual.

[02:16:50] SL: Many times less is more. So does your wife—does Martha enjoy being first lady, you think?

RM: At the beginning I think she wasn't, but I think she's really enjoying every single minute. And the only thing that we don't like is there's too much people, too much interaction of bodyguards and things like that. We are ve—we don't like that.

SL: Well . . .

RM: And I—when I—we went to [*words unclear*] wasn't nobody around, you know? Nobody to be bugging, nobody asking me anything. We want to be regular human beings, you know. Regular people.

SL: Well . . .

[02:17:35] RM: And when you are there—I hate to go to weddings, you know. Because you go to weddings everybody's just bugging you, asking you, or praising you, or complaining. [*SL laughs*] Or both. And you—I don't have the fun that I used to have. When I go to a wedding, I will go and dance, and I will talk to people and have a drink, sit down and eat or whatever. Now people just flock on top of you. I used—when I used to go in politics to a place, you know, people didn't know—sometimes they didn't know who I was. Now everybody knows who I am. I

am the top of mind of everyone. [02:18:29] And you know, politics is a lot about gossip.

SL: Yep.

RM: So much gossip. They—people have a wo—wonderful, creative mind—some things—sometimes for the good and sometimes for the bad. So you have to put up for that. You have to put up—to get up in the morning and go see, you know, the radio shows, TV or radi—and people talk f—against you or for you. And sometimes the people who talk against you are—they do it in a mean way, in a very horrible way because they want to destroy you. They want to destroy your character. And when I was running for politics, they told me everything in the book. Everything. They invented so many things. They invented ?drugs?. I don't—I don't even take aspirin. I'm taking nothing. They told me I was crazy. They told me that I used to—we used to beat up kids. They told me that—they invented things—I raped so many women. Said, "Me?" Everything just to distract the mind of the voter. Everything. The only thing—they didn't tell me I was gay. [SL laughs] But beside the—I was a thief, I didn't pay taxes, I cheated on everybody. I cheated on my wife. I cheated to—they told the—the cashiers at the restaurants—at the supermarkets were fixed to cheat and rob people. Because

it was very, very low. Sometimes campaigns get very, very low.
[02:20:08] SL: You know—and that stuff—all those falsehoods, they
keep repeating them . . .

RM: Oh, no.

SL: . . . until people believe them.

RM: Not after—people believe them but after they see reality—they
s—they say, "Oh, that's wrong." Then they have noticed that
everything that they said, it was wrong. And even all that—I
mean, it was such a pounding that even with that pounding,
that's why I think I won by a landslide.

SL: 'Cause they were sick of all that stuff.

[02:20:37] RM: I mean, because some people, "That's not true. It's
impossible. That didn't happen." They say that I didn't pay
Social Security to my employees. I didn't pay taxes. They say
that I was a slave driver. I mean they invented everything.
They told me I was Mussolini. They told me I was Hitler.

SL: Yeah.

RM: They told me I was going to kill all the Jews. [*SL laughs*] I
mean, you wouldn't believe what they say. You wouldn't believe
what they say. I mean—and I just went, "Oh, well." [02:21:04]
I passed the page because I was fighting against the most
corrupt government in history. They were thugs. They were a

thief. They were stealing everything. And now we have a president of Panama who is in house arrest. There's two foreign ministers who are in jail. And I do not want to open everything up because I want—put all of them in jail. And I don't want to have a—people think that I have a personal vendetta against them, but they all know that they did wrong, and they didn't that to come to surface. In life you have to forgive, you have to pass the page and continue going forward, and you shouldn't waste time with them doing—just going to—shouldn't waste time helping the—solve the problems of the country. How will I build more roads, more schools, more hospitals? How I become—how the country—how we build a metro? How we build more ports? How we build a convention center? How we build hotels? How to get people to come here? If I don't—if I dedicate my time to go against the people who did something to me—which—they are very mean people—I don't . . .

SL: You would consume all your time.

RM: . . . yeah. I have no time.

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

RM: I don't—I pass the page and forget it, you know. Go and find another sucker who is gonna waste your—his time doing that. Not me. I have many, many, many other things in life to do—

than start chasing people, you know. I like to change problems not people.

[02:22:52] SL: You have a great and exciting opportunity in front of you now, and by everything that I was able to read about your administration and what's going on. It all seems to be pretty positive. I didn't run across much negative stuff on what you're doing.

[02:23:14] RM: Oh, no. Not what I'm doing. That was before the election. I mean, it was mean. I mean . . .

SL: Politics are mean. It's a mean business.

RM: . . . yeah. I got my kids and my wife and my family and said, "Look, we are going to be told many, many things, many things that are not even on the books. They will invent everything. You all know the reality. Please don't get affected. Don't take it personal, all this politics." When you take things on a personal way, you go for a kill. But when it's politics, it comes here it goes out here because I understand that they have to do their job but hopefully they do it in a very constructive way because sometimes—we don't do everything right. We are not perfect. Being perfect is only up there in heaven. In this life we're all imperfect, and sometimes we do things wrong, but we have to correct them.

[02:24:22] SL: You know, one thing we didn't talk about is your time with the Panama Canal. Didn't you—you were an administrator there for the Panama . . .

RM: I was the chairman of the Panama Canal Board, and I had the great opportunity—was—of taking over and getting the keys of the canal from the Americans, and it has been very good. And I hate—I have—probably have to say that before the canal was run as a nonprofit organization just to serve the purposes of the US government in order to have a low tar—low freight charges, and have a—it was just a wonderful place with a—the perfect socialist state. Everything was owned by the government, the commissaries, the housing, everything. The Americans who lived there lived in the perfect socialist environment. There were nineteen golf courses . . .

SL: Wow.

[02:25:24] RM: . . . everybody works for the government. And now a lot of tha—those property—excellent, beautiful property—has been put up for the use of everyone. Hotels have been built. All the houses were sold, and they were completely remodeled. Some of the ports that were handling three thousand co—three hundred thousand containers a year now handle seven million containers a year. The airports, everything, you know. We

really took the—an upside on the property, on all the everything in there. [*Clears throat*] And it was very good because the ca—the Panama Canal, I can now officially say without hurting no one, is more efficiently administr—managed than before. There are less claims. We have almost quadrupled the income, and we are expanding the canal. The canal is debt-free—zero debt—has close to three billion dollars in c—in cash. It has nothing to do with the government. It's run like a private company with an individual board appointed by the presidents, but they have their own autonomy. They do whatever they please. And it's a—we are expanding the canal. It's a five point two billion dollar—it's almost building a brand new canal. And we're doing what the Americans and French did a hundred years ago in a more massive way and a more—with more technology. [02:27:08] Before there were not the technology that we have here right now. And the canal—the locks of the canal are specifically made for US carriers—air—aircraft carriers. And believe it or not, the continental defense of the US is sea based, and you need that canal to cross those ships in a very fast and efficient way from one ocean to the other ocean because, remember, at one time Russia was on your easter side—eastern side. And Russia is no longer one of the main problems. China is on the other side, on

the western side. And China as of now is not a problem, and I hope never becomes a problem, but this probably the first time that you have in two ends of the US countries that have nuclear cap—capabilities, and you can have a nuclear chill, but you have to have those ships ready to move in a freely way—in a very easy manner—through a place called Panama and the Panama Canal. So the locks were made specifically to fit the accommodation of the aircraft carriers. That's something not very many people know. And I know if I infringing—something I should say. But suddenly—more—sooner—sooner or later somebody's gonna figure out.

SL: It's gonna know. Yeah, sure.

[02:28:47] RM: Because it's two plus two. I mean, it's simple.

[*SL laughs*] Once they see the s—the size, and once they see what the airport carriers are they will say, "Hey, two plus two is four." So it's—and believe it or not, once—China has become so powerful, and Walmart has bought—buys—and Kmart—everybody—buys so much from China that sometimes you need to bring merchandise from China to New York, Atlanta, Houston, New Orleans. And so difficult to bring them from the eastern—the western ports of LA or Seattle or whatever. You have to bring it by railroad or by truck.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RM: Which is more expensive . . .

SL: Yep.

RM: . . . than to bring it by ship. It has to cross the canal and go there. So whenever the Panama Canal is finished, the post-Panamax ships that can carry up to thirteen thousand containers.

SL: Wow.

[02:29:52] RM: And the draft of all the ports have to be—you have to be—you have to go deeper because the transportation system is gonna change once the Panama Canal is in power. The locks—the present locks—we—there's a wo—a worldwide name of Panamax ships. Panamax is because those are the ships that fits and accommodate the Panama Canal. Now with the post-Panamax—those ships—the Panamax ship carry four thousand containers. Now—and a draft on the ports is forty-one feet. Now we have to go to a draft of fifty-seven, up to sixty feet in all the US ports. In all the ports of the world because larger ships bring economies of scale, and they're gonna be able to translate that into better prices to Americans consumer and to everyone.

SL: Sure.

RM: Why should you bring a ship of four thousand containers if you

can bring a ship for—with fourteen thousand at the same cost?

SL: There you go.

RM: At the same cost. And then that will translate in a better standard of living, a better co—hopefully a better cost to consumers all over the world. Panama, US, Europe, whatever. 'Cause that's the only way, and that connectivity that Panama has, not only our airport, in the sea, in the ports that we have—Panama has probably 40 percent of the cranes in Latin America. The ports of Panama—there's no port in the US bigger than Panama ports. No port, not even the—New York . . .

SL: New York or Los Angeles—Long Beach.

RM: . . . or any—yeah. Los Angel—Long Beach. [*Vocalized noise*]

SL: [*Laughs*] Panama.

[02:31:31] RM: Rinky-dinky little Panama. Because ships go through there, containers go there, and from there comes in the mother ship and the—in—and then smaller ship comes. This goes to Mexico. This goes to Venezuela. This goes to Honduras. This goes to Miami. This goes to other places. So the ?moveable? containers probably in Panama within the—in the near future is going to be one of the—it's—we're going to be in the top five. Top five in the whole world. We're in the top twenty now. We're going to be top five.

SL: That's great. That's really good—big accomplishment.

RM: And that brings revenue. That brings employment. That brings a very quality of life. You have to be competitive in this world.

SL: Well, there's not a canal like it anywhere else.

RM: Well, and so some other countries say they want to build a canal. Go ahead build it. [*Laughter*] Go. Go.

SL: Good luck.

RM: I'll—I help you to build it.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, that's good news.

RM: Yeah.

SL: That's good news for everybody.

[02:32:38] RM: So you have to have a safe Panama, a secure Panama, a Panama free of drugs because every time we catch a drug shipment, three or four people die. [*Clears throat*] "Oh, I got my drugs. He was the one. Because of him, we kill him or kill his family or kill his brother or kill a member of his gang." [02:33:00] So we need to control drugs that are coming here or to Europe. Because in that way we control—we reduce the crime that we have in the—in town. And we have done a great job. You are going to see the statistics this year that crime has come down because—for instance, we just put cell blocks in all the jails. So I notice that

all the transactions and all the killings and all the drug dealings were done in jail. From jail to outside. We went there—take away the cell phones. Next day they have new cells. When we spoke with the four cell companies, "Hey, please put that cell tower somewhere else." "No." Then I began to know why. Those are the—in a cell that I had a thousand people that were seven thousand calls and one of the companies, one of the four companies, seven thousand calls in one day. One—and that was the smallest of the cell companies. Everybody had a cell phone. Oh, you're not doing anything in jail. Well, "Hey so-and-so, go and kill so-and-so." How are you going do that? So now with the—probably in the next two months, no more cells in jail. Our crime rate is going to go down.

SL: Yep.

[02:34:21] RM: And we're taking ste—we are building more jails, putting more, tougher laws. We, for instance, we are accumulating penalties. Be—you kill once, you kill twice, you ki—you go for life. Before, they only—the—you—they only accuse you of one thing. Now it's accumulation of punishment. And that is something that eventually—what they have done in California, what they have done in New York—these three-strikes have worked.

SL: You're out. Yeah.

RM: It works. Nobody wants to be in jail. We have reduced the penalties for young kids who were ki—making lot of killings. From—we were reducing that to twelve years, because I mean, since they were kids they were going k—there was a kid who was sixteen years old and had killed seven people. This guy has to be in jail. Can't ship him out. He's gonna kill someone else.

SL: Yep.

RM: So now he can go to jail for fifty years. It's bad, but it's the only way.

SL: Makes sense. It's common sense.

RM: Yeah.

SL: Can't let 'em go.

[02:35:33] RM: I mean, I—it's very bad because we need to have a better education for people not to commit a crime. But for that you need to have opportunities. You need to have the transportation system. You need to have a more fair country. You need to have more—a good health system, so people don't think of stealing or robbing or killing or going into drugs because there—there's no opportunities. You have to give them the opportunity, and that's what we're working for. Give 'em opportunities, so people—they don't commit a crime. I believe

that if people—you have a tough law, you have tough judiciary system, you have—also at the same time, you have a good system of education, health, and opportunities for all people, and good sports. People are going to go into the good things and not into the bad things. That's why the series—TV series, you know. You cannot put the hero to the bad guy. That's crazy. Bad guys always ki—get killed at the end. And these—but these are the only movies that the bad guy never get killed—is a good—the bad guy becomes good guy. That is crazy. You have inverted the values of society, and that's not good.

[02:36:45] SL: I think you've got a good handle on what—sounds like you've got some really good administrative things in the works here.

RM: That—you know what, that's why I love my job. And, you know, sometimes people in Latin America—even here in the states—everywhere, you know. Once they are the first term, they want to go for the second. Well, this guy ain't going for the second.

SL: Really?

RM: This guy's going home. This guy is coming more to Arkansas to see football games. [*SL laughs*] This guy's coming more to Fayetteville. This guy is going to enjoy life. I bust my butt so many years working—now sacrificing. I want to have some fun

before it's all over.

SL: That's smart. I think that's good.

RM: [*Vocalized noise*] I want to enjoy life.

SL: Well—and you know, you'll lea—you'll leave the office in better shape than it's ever been.

[02:37:40] RM: When I w—when I leave that office I want people to say, "That guy changed the country, did a good job." Yeah, well, he could have been tough. He could have been whatever, an SOB, or efficient or strong or weak or whatever. Well, they wanted to show that he was corrupt, that he was a thief. That I don't—because being an immigrant, being the son of immigrants you—the only thing I have is my name. Nothing else. My word is my bond and my name is only thing that counts. I have no—my roots doesn't go way back, and whatever I do, I have to do it right.

SL: That's stuff from your grandfather's knee.

RM: Yep. Well, I don't know if he told me but [*laughter*]. . .

SL: But somehow or another, you got it. Well, that's good. Is there anything else that you have to talk about before we send you on your way?

RM: Ah, before . . .

SL: You've been so generous. I . . .

RM: Oh, well, I'll be coming more to Fayetteville.

SL: Well, I hope that you look us up, and we'll sit down and talk again.

RM: I am sure. Love to.

SL: You know, I'd love to be—I'd love to meet your wife and visit with her, too.

RM: Oh, love to. We'll bring her here next time.

SL: Good.

RM: That is a promise.

SL: Okay.

[02:39:00] RM: I will bring her here next time, and let's—invite me five years from now.

SL: That's all right. I'll still be here. We'll be . . .

RM: To see if I told you was BS or not. [*SL laughs*] If I did change or not change. If I did right or did wrong. I'm ready.

SL: Good.

RM: I'm going go see my old buddies, my old roommates, my good old friends—Mason, Raley, de Vaca, Marshall [*vocalized noise*] [*SL laughs*]*—and many, many others. Like to see all—some of—some of my old flames. They are just as beautiful as ever, I imagine.*

SL: Well, it sounds like you have a home here, too.

RM: Yeah, I do.

SL: You do.

RM: I feel very happy, very excited to be here. And, you know, just feel like home.

SL: Well, thank you.

RM: Thank you very much.

SL: Okay.

RM: See you.

SL: You have a safe trip, okay?

RM: Thank you.

[End of interview]

[02:39:51]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]