INTERVIEW WITH SAUL OLIVERAZ

APRIL 9, 2009

KEK: Hi, this is Karen Kalnins. I’m a reference librarian at the Oklahoma City University Law Library and today is Thursday, April 9th, 2009, it’s about 10 o’clock in the morning and this morning I am in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma speaking with Mr. Saul Olivarez…..

SO: That’s correct.

KEK: Mr. Olivarez is an attorney here in Oklahoma City. And this interview is part of the broader oral history project that the Oklahoma City University Law Library is sponsoring. As a part of that project we are going throughout the state of Oklahoma and interviewing attorneys and judges to get some insight about their experiences and the Oklahoma courts. So, welcome Mr. Olivarez.

SO: Thank you.

KEK: Thank you, I was so pleased when you agreed to this interview.

SO: Well, I think it will be interesting so I’m kind of excited about it.

KEK: Well, great, great. Well, what drew you to the law?

SO: Well, I didn’t want to be a doctor anymore is what it was. In high school I was very good at science; very good at that but then in college I just didn’t enjoy it anymore. I really enjoyed government and the debate that we had in those classes and so I changed my major and here I am, an attorney now. So, pretty much I just didn’t enjoy the idea of being a doctor anymore.

KEK: Was anybody in your family an attorney?

SO: No, I’m actually the first person to do anything post-Bachelor degree I guess. My father is actually a high school dropout, my mother has very little college, and then the rest of my family is pretty much maybe high school. So, I’m the first person. With that said though I do have some mentors that were lawyers that kind of guided me along the way and I met them through work while I was in college. I worked for a law firm in downtown Dallas called Passman and Jones. They are a fifty year old firm; they’ve been out there a long time. And actually Mr. Passman and Mr. Jones have both passed away recently this year. Very important life mentors to me and very much guided me and kept me on focus. But I would definitely give kudos to them for what they did for me.

KEK: It sounds like it. So, where did you do your undergraduate?
SO: I studied at the University of Texas at Arlington, in Arlington, Texas. I got a bachelor’s degree in Political Science with a minor in Psychology. I took more or less a year off and then went to OCU Law School and finished there in 2006. And I have been practicing since.

KEK: What made you decide to go to OCU?

SO: Like right now, the economy was really bad and everywhere I applied, there was so much competition; I just basically went where I got in because in my opinion a lawyer is a lawyer is a lawyer as long as you pass the bar exam. And so I went to OCU. The competition; I believe, they claim, I don’t know where the statistic comes from, but it was the second most competitive year in application history so I don’t know if that’s true or not but I got wait-listed at Hofstra in New York and I forget where else now but I ended up going to OCU. And I enjoyed it, I really did.

KEK: Tell me about your experiences at OCU.

SO: The first year of law school for me was kind of a shock because I was in a room full of very intelligent people. And, college, undergrad, is not necessarily like that. I’m not saying that everyone in law school is completely super intelligent but they are significantly more intelligent I would say and it’s very competitive but I enjoyed it. I made great friends; there were maybe ten of us Hispanic kids, ten to twelve maybe. I think only five or six of us graduated. But, with that said, that’s not a big deal. We, there were no issues of race or anything, it was a great time, I made lots of friends. But I would have liked to have seen a lot more diversity I think but that just may be Oklahoma. There is a growing Hispanic population but not necessarily a lot in law school. But, I enjoyed law school, I really did. I learned a lot, made lifelong friends. I have friends all over the country now and I enjoyed it. It was difficult, it was not easy.

KEK: No, law school is not easy.

SO: I don’t think there’s anything about law school that is easy. But, I miss the social aspect of law school, I don’t miss the homework. Some friends and I still reminisce about law school days, the fun we had.

KEK: Tell me about that lack of diversity. Do you think that that, I mean have you spoken to other attorneys who are of Hispanic or of Latino origin, is that common, I mean from your experience, or do you think it’s just in the state of Oklahoma or…..?

SO: I don’t necessarily think it’s just in the state of Oklahoma, I just think our numbers just need to get up is what we need to do, we need to push more in our community for education and pursuing post-bachelor degrees; i.e. a doctor, lawyer, a physicist, whatever. And we just really need to push more of that. Oklahoma I think in particular has a very fresh immigrant population, if that’s politically correct. If you compare Oklahoma to Texas or Colorado where my family is from, which is Texas and actually California is where my family is from. And we have
generations and generations of family there; before it was the United States but that doesn’t mean anything because I was the only one that has ever done anything education-wise. I just think though that we just need to push more for education in our community. The African-American population in law school was more or less the same. It was great to see that there were more women than there were men when we started law school. We just need to push more in the Hispanic community for more education and expect and demand more of our youth population.

KEK: What kinds of things are you doing to help in that effort?

SO: Well, during law school I was a little upset that we didn’t have a Hispanic Bar Association, we’re in Oklahoma. So, I did some research and I was shocked, I mean Nebraska has a Hispanic Bar Association, who else, I think Vermont has a Hispanic Bar Association. These are nowhere near Latin America in respect to where Oklahoma is. We are about 600 miles away from the border and that’s a far distance but Nebraska has a Hispanic Bar Association. So, I clerked for the General Counsel of the Oklahoma Bar Association, Dan Murdock. This was back in 2004-2005, I think, and I said, “Dan, why don’t we have a Hispanic Bar Association?” He said, “I don’t know Saul, start one.” And so, I said, “Okay, after the bar I will.” Took the Bar Exam, passed just fine, called Dan, Dan called the Executive Director of the Bar Association, had me brought in. They spoke to the Supreme Court Justice Winchester to see what his thoughts were. He thought it was a great idea and it kind of all just came into play and we have about 50 members right now, more or less, we’re hovering around 50. But that’s people from all over the state. Our goal is to bring a face to the Hispanic community, a legal face for them to see. And it’s not just, I’m really big on attorneys working together and it’s just not me, it’s everybody. I love the fact that if I get a call from Tulsa for a client I can send it to my friend who speaks Spanish better than I do and I know they’ll be taken care of. The point of the association is to promote of course more Hispanic persons in the legal field as well bringing a legal face to the community that they know they can go to these individuals who can help them. And, more than likely speak their own language as well. Being that we are a part of the bar association, we can’t be political or anything so that’s where we stand, we’re almost a section, what the bar calls a section. So, that’s where we are right now, we haven’t had a meeting in 4 or 5 months but we need to have one soon.

KEK: No, it sounds like it. Now, why do you think it’s so important for clients to have an attorney who speaks their language?

SO: Trust is a big issue. Even in the Hispanic community, I’ll be honest with you; we have a large, probably undocumented population here in Oklahoma. If they know that you speak Spanish they feel a little bit better. Sometimes, per court rules, I have to have a translator in court for clients. But when we’re here in my office I can talk to them and they know that we’re on the same page and it’s just understanding as well; that they understand what’s going on. Because for example, in these small counties where there aren’t any Hispanic attorneys, they just get told what to do, they don’t realize there are possible immigration consequences, they don’t
realize they’re going to jail, things like that. So, I would say trust and confidence in your lawyer because we’ve all must have been to other countries where they don’t speak English and it can be sort of scary at times if you don’t know what’s going on, especially in the legal realm where if you’re in trouble, that can be really scary. If you’re not used to the law where you are, but it’s just a trust issue, they feel better. But I’m a big person on them learning English as well but to help them along we also accommodate people that speak Spanish.

KEK: Now, do you, let’s go back to your experiences at OCU, do you remember any professors or are there any other memorable experiences that you want to talk about?

SO: Oh, one of my favorite professors was probably Danne Johnson for Civil Procedure my first year of law school. I really felt like she had such a great understanding of how that worked and could put you in situations or theoretically in realistic situations that would make you go, “Hm, what do you do in that situation?” She’s kind of a spitfire and I really like that about her. We run into each other in the mall, at the grocery store all the time and she always says, “Hi,” and we have a great relationship. I know that she’s someone I can trust and talk to if I ever have a question. Professor Paula Dalley is another just incredible professor who I just felt like I was learning so much from her in Corporations and Agency and Partnership. I had no interest in that area of the law at all whatsoever but she had a way to make it interesting and to where I understood. Who else? Professor MacDougall for Torts, just an amazing person, with such a vast array of knowledge. I was always so impressed/overwhelmed with her ability to just speak the law from memory at that. And I understand that’s from years and years of teaching but she’s just so impressive and who else? A late favorite of mine would be Professor Laity. He taught income tax, I don’t know why I took income tax but I did and actually did fairly well in the class and I understood it. He was such a good teacher, he had a funny if not peculiar way of teaching but you remembered and he made income tax make sense somewhat and that’s a lot more than anybody I’ve ever had to deal with, especially my accountant. I don’t know what she talks about half the time but Professor Laity made it make sense and I’m kind of jealous that he had that knowledge of income tax.

KEK: Yes, that is a huge, huge thing to be able to make income tax understandable.

SO: Yeah. I think he’s a Dean now, is he still teaching?

KEK: Yeah, he’s Assistant Dean. I think he is still teaching some, I don’t know what he’s teaching this semester.

SO: I still don’t know why I took the class, I think it fit my schedule better or something and I wanted to learn a little bit about it. I mean it was an interesting, difficult class but I did well and if you studied hard you did fine.

KEK: That’s great. Well, you talked about, you worked while you were in college, you said you worked for a law firm. What kinds of things did you learn there and also you just mentioned that
you worked for the Oklahoma Bar Association, and I don’t know if you had other clerkship or internship type experiences in law school, talk about those a little bit and why those were so important.

SO: Okay, I’ll start with college, undergrad, at the University of Texas at Arlington. I worked for a hospital right when I started college and it was killing me time-wise, I wasn’t studying enough. And so about a month into my first semester of college, I saw an ad for a job at Passman and Jones in downtown Dallas, it’s about a twenty mile drive. So, I called and the administrator happened to be a UTA alum and so I went in for an interview and started there when I was 18 years old at Passman and Jones as a court runner. No experience ever in this stuff, didn’t know what I was doing, in a big firm in downtown Dallas, in one of those big skyscrapers. I just thought that I was it because I was 18, getting paid very well for 1998. I worked there all the way through college and during my time off between law school and college that I took and I am so thankful I worked there because I learned the business side of a law firm. And I learned how to bill clients because that’s, I was the court runner and then I eventually worked my way up into accounting clerk and I worked with our bookkeeper all the time. And so, I did all that and I learned how to run a law firm. I learned the expenses that we have to pay for and billing, I learned how to do billing, which is so important, especially for new lawyers because we don’t know what we’re doing half the time. So, I stayed there until 2003 when I left for law school. In law school I clerked for the Bar Association, for the General Counsel. That was really neat; I got to help in the investigations of ethical violations.

KEK: What kinds of investigations did you get to work on?

SO: Well, I can’t talk about them specifically but anything from stealing from trust accounts to domestic violence to stealing from other lawyers. For example, the case that I worked on, it was a big settlement and a previous lawyer had worked on the case and was fired by the client and it was sent to this new lawyer. Well, they got the big settlement but the first lawyer never got paid for his time. So, he brought an action that was a big mess. So, I think the most interesting one was the domestic violence case, that was actually on a very high profile lawyer here in Oklahoma City and let me tell you, money doesn’t bring happiness because that was a messed up family.

KEK: How did that experience, working on these ethical violations, how has that influenced you?

SO: Well, I know how important it is now to make sure we do everything correctly. Like for example, this is kind of funny. I am in the process of switching banks and I wrote a check out of our old trust account and sent it over to immigration to file for a client forgetting that I had moved funds over there. And so immigration calls me and says, “You just sent us a bounced check.” So I had to call the Bar Association and say, “This was a complete mistake, oversight,” because we are very good on our bookkeeping here but it was just a complete oversight that we
didn’t pay attention to. So, luckily it all worked it, it’s not a big deal and we have proof that everything was taken care of. But, stuff like that scares you because you could get in trouble because your license can be taken away from you if you do stuff incorrectly. Now, in that situation that wouldn’t be the issue at all. And that was self-reported and taken care of; it was just me being completely dumb and not thinking. But I made good friends with the General Counsel, he did help start the Hispanic Bar Association and as a joke one day, probably a month or two after I got licensed he sent me a General Counsel letter that they put in when they send violations and here I was, a month or two out and I was like, “I’m in trouble already, what did I do?” But he was just messing with me. I clerked there for about six months. I clerked for a firm in Dallas my first year summer and I honestly cannot remember the name of the place. But I did a lot of clerical work more than I did anything there, that was about it for that place. The most interesting and fun clerkship I did was in Paducah, Kentucky I clerked for the public defender’s office in rural western Kentucky. And I lived in Kentucky for three months and it was just an incredible experience.

KEK: What did you get to do while you were there?

SO: Well, I did research, I went in with the attorneys and advised the clients on their cases, we did preliminary hearings, and I even got to translate once or twice for a judge. And of course back then my Spanish was terrible or rusty so here I was, very, very nervous and translating but the judge was trying to help me lighten up a bit, he could tell I was nervous; it was actually my first day when I started the clerkship in that county. I learned a lot about myself during that time, learned a lot about being a lawyer from those public defenders. I think they’re some of the best lawyers I’ve ever met, overworked completely but they continually try to do the best for their clients. It was an incredible group of people that I met and I still talk to them and I’m very close with one of the lawyers who I clerked for and actually went and saw her not too long ago in Kentucky. Actually, third year Spring Break I went up there to Kentucky to see all my friends and we still keep in touch on the phone and I’d like to go again soon, I haven’t seen them in about three years. It was a great experience, I never thought I would be in rural western Kentucky, clerking. But it just worked out that way, I went to a, what’s it called, ……

KEK: Public interest law job fair?

SO: Yeah, one of those, there’s one down in Dallas every year. I went, I applied for several positions, the Department of Transportation, all sorts of firms, and they liked me and they wouldn’t stop bugging me that second year of law school. And so I said, “Fine, I’ll go.” And then I even applied for the public interest scholarship that OCU had that helped with costs and everything because they weren’t paying very much but it was a great experience, I enjoyed it. I have a lot of respect for public defenders, I think they do great work.
KEK: Why do you think it was so important for you to do all these things, both your job in undergrad, and your job at the Oklahoma Bar Association, and then this job, why do you think it was so important?

SO: I think it led me to where I am now. When I started out as a lawyer, I was with a small firm and it was a six attorney firm and I really wasn’t being mentored, I was just kind of thrown out there. And I have big issues with that because I don’t think you should throw a young lawyer out there to get eaten alive and oh yes I did, by judges because they could tell that I didn’t know what I was doing and I would say, “Look, your Honor, I’m just here on behalf of another attorney, I don’t know a lot about the case, I’m sorry.” And they understood and so it came down to the point where I was worried about reputation. I didn’t want the reputation of the firm where I was at so I thought about it and went out on my own. And we’ve been here since December of ’06 and we’ve been doing pretty well. And I think all those experiences kind of gave me insight to be able to be where I am now. I have lots of colleagues who are asking questions, “How do you do what you’re doing?” And I say, “You just take it a day at a time and it’s difficult, but if you work hard it pays off.” And I just really felt like those experiences in their specific ways helped me see where I needed to go. I could go work for a firm now if I wanted to but I enjoy owning my own business and having clients here at my office and I have employees now so I feel like I have responsibilities. Those experiences kind of helped get me to where I’m at I think.

KEK: Do you have a mentor now?

SO: Yes, I would say I have several mentors. The firm I worked for in Dallas was a medium-sized firm and there were about 25 lawyers and I have several there that I speak to. My mentor in Kentucky, Patricia Burns, she’s an incredible mentor. Here in Oklahoma City I probably have Don Jackson who my friend from law school works for, I can talk to him about questions I have. I’ve always made it a point to meet lawyers that are much more experienced than I am because I do some bankruptcy work for example. So, I personally know three or four of the trustees and I’ve asked, “Hey, can I call when I have a question?” And they say, “Sure,” and I try to keep those relationships in tune. I just have a lot of mentors more outside of Oklahoma than I do really in Oklahoma. I’m a firm believer in working with people, I’m not the lawyer who is going to come in and say, “This is how it is, this is how it’s going to be, if you don’t like it we’ll see you in trial.” I think you can work things out and I think that’s one thing that OCU Law taught us; is how to be a civil lawyer and not civil in civil court but civil as in civil person. Because you can tell who didn’t go to OCU and who did, at least I can. Dan Murdock was a very good mentor of mine as well and there’s another attorney over there at the General Counsel’s office that is very nice.

KEK: Why do you think civility between attorneys is so important?
SO: That’s a great question because at the end of the day, no matter what happens, we’re all on
the same team, we’re all lawyers. I just feel like you can get more with honey than you can with
vinegar. It just doesn’t make sense to get angry at another lawyer when you’re going to see them
a few weeks later on a completely different case and if that lawyer doesn’t like you just for the
fact of what happened between you all then there’s a chance that there’s not going to be a
settlement or there’s going to have to be a trial but, not to say that that’s not going to happen
anyway. You can be as nice as you want to and there’s just some lawyers and some firms that
are just terrible and it’s not they’re good lawyers either it’s just that they’re completely, I don’t
know what they’re doing sometimes. As I said, you can get more bees with honey than you can
with vinegar and I think that’s paid off for my office. Being the President of the Hispanic Bar
Network I’ve made so many contacts in different areas where I don’t practice and I can make
phone calls and say, “Hey, …” and likewise they can come back to you as well. And so, it
should be stressed in law school, in all law schools but I think OCU stressed it quite a bit and I
was glad for that.

KEK: Yeah, well that’s good to hear. Well, I see we’re about halfway through so let’s stop and
then we’ll continue on with our second half.

SO: Okay.

KEK: Hi, this is Karen Kalnins again, I’m a reference librarian at the Oklahoma City University
Law Library. It is still Thursday, April 9th, 2009 and it’s about 25 minutes or so before 11
o’clock here in the morning. I am still here with Mr. Saul Olivarez in Oklahoma City,
Oklahoma. And in the first half of the interview Mr. Olivarez detailed how he came to go to law
school and some of his experiences, some of his work experiences, and I wanted to ask you Mr.
Olivarez, what were your plans after law school?

SO: Well, my plans were probably to go back home to Texas and work for a firm. Of course,
the more time I spent in Oklahoma, the more I realized that there were no Hispanic attorneys
here or very little and it was a great business opportunity to stay here and help the community in
legal representation. So, third year I bit the bullet and decided to stay and joined that small firm
I used to work for and then shortly after there, I wasn’t there more than four months and then I
went off on my own.

KEK: And tell me about going out on your own, what kinds of things did you have to do, what
was the whole process like?

SO: Well, I was very, very scared and I think that’s healthy to be scared about going out on your
own. Of course you had to go file Articles of Organization and you had to get documents from
the bar association to give to the Secretary of State. You had to find office space, had to buy
computer equipment, went and got a small business loan; luckily that was before the credit
markets tanked. We found this place in December of ‘06, where we currently are at, and been
here since then. And actually we’ve grown, this is actually, the room where you used to be, that
used to be another attorney’s office. He partnered with me originally but decided that he couldn’t handle being his own boss so he left. Our office used to be three rooms and now of course it’s not, it’s quite a bit bigger. Yeah, that’s basically it, we’ve just been here; lots of insurance you have to buy. There’s lots of expenses that you don’t think of when you’re starting a business, that suddenly are important. It’s just expensive but if you do it and you plan adequately, you’ll be fine. And you have to be a go-getter, you can’t sit here and expect people to walk in because what is this? This is just a building in downtown that everybody sees, no one knows what’s inside. You have to go network and so that’s what we’ve been doing and we’ve been doing fairly well.

KEK: How do you go about getting new clients?

SO: Well, I will admit that I do have a little bit of an advantage because of the Spanish capabilities. I advertise on Spanish radio and in Spanish media which is primarily a Spanish attorney guide that is put out by El Nacinato which is a Spanish newspaper here in the city. When we first started we advertised by sending letters to defendants in criminal court. There are specific rules about how you do that and we got a few in that way. But luckily, I made good impressions on my clients at the firm that I was at so a lot of them followed me. And, I have just been here ever since and word of mouth. If you do good work, people will come and learn about you and that’s what we strive for here in my office is to do not good work, but great work and at a fair price. Word of mouth has been very good. Of course, you are not going to please everybody, there are some people who hate me to hate me. But, that’s because they have issues. There’s just some people that you cannot please no matter what you do.

KEK: What have been some of the challenges for you in setting up your own firm?

SO: Just the stress of finances that you have. You’re responsible, that’s incredibly stressful and especially when you have employees and you have to pay taxes. Thankfully, we’ve never had a problem with that but we’ve gotten close and when you get close is when you get nervous. You really have to implement, especially for young lawyers or lawyers who are about to graduate, you really have to implement a stress management tool in your life to assist with that. Because the bar exam is stressful, probably the most stressful thing you ever do, but running your own business is a continuum of stress. It never goes away. For example, I can be out of town in Texas or wherever and I’m thinking about clients or I’m thinking about my office. You have to learn to either exercise or have a time to yourself to just alleviate that stress, it’s so important. What else? Don’t count your chickens before they hatch. Of course it’s an old, old saying but especially in the law. Don’t get excited if you do a consultation because you don’t have the client yet until they lay down that money or those payments. People come to find who has the cheapest price, that’s not necessarily the best lawyer but the cheapest price and those are issues you have to deal with. Be prepared for people to make appointments and not to show up. Everybody has that problem, it used to drive me insane, I thought it was so unprofessional, completely rude and wasting my time and everybody’s time getting ready for you to come. But
the most important thing I think is stress management. If you want to do it, go for it, in this economy, why not? I have some friends who actually approached me, “What did you do to do that?” And I said, “Well, I just take it a day at a time, a lot of optimism. Network, get yourself out there, meet people.” Don’t go to some meeting and sit there in the corner, go shake hands, give them your card, because you never know when a client can come from someone you met. It’s amazing how I’ve met people years ago and somehow somebody they ran into needed a lawyer, that person remembered me, happened to have the card, and viola, you have a new client. So, it’s very neat and interesting how you can in essence plant a seed and it may not come for a year or so but then you get something from that. Always put your best foot forward. And there’s going to be times when it is just dead. For example, this was a trial week I believe and our phones are dead this week. But next week we’ll probably be insanely busy. When you first start out a business it’s going to be highs and lows, it levels out after about three years and this is going to be the third year so hopefully it starts to level out. But yeah, stress management is the most important thing because you can drive yourself crazy.

KEK: It sounds like it, it sounds like it. And what kinds of cases do you handle here?

SO: I would call my practice a general practice firm but mainly I do criminal, family cases, and bankruptcies. We also do immigration, we also do personal injury, and we do workmen’s comp cases as well. Now, in immigration and in workmen’s comp cases I work with other lawyers who primarily do those areas of the law and the advantage there is myself and my staff speak Spanish, the lawyer has the experience. And so we do some sort of fee arrangement between them and us. That way, and it’s kind of a positive as well because the client feels they have two lawyers working for them, not just one. And at the same time, the lawyer who doesn’t speak Spanish is learning Spanish words and I’m, who don’t practice workmen’s comp all the time, am learning slowly how the system works and it’s very advantageous. Back in 2007 when all the immigration stuff was red hot here in Oklahoma and the legislature wanted to send anybody brown back to Mexico whether they were a citizen I did a lot of immigration compliance for some companies. Those are my big clients there; they are multi-million dollar revenue corporations, just two or three. The problem is the economy hit one pretty hard so I don’t know what they’re doing actually. But I have a roofing company that I have a very close relationship with and I assist them and it was just because of the immigration scare that I got that client and actually how it works out, that planting the seed thing just going back to that quickly. I think at a Cinco de Mayo parade or something, one of those guys, workers there got my card, showed it to the boss, the owner of the…..the CEO and sure enough the CEO called me in and I spoke with him and boom, I got a very big client. They just wanted to make sure that they were in compliance with the law. I feel like we’re on the heels of another immigration issue with English only and we’ll see what happens. Sometimes laws like that just make me want to move to another state but I have to wait for my reciprocity to kick in too. Yeah, I would say family, criminal, bankruptcy.
KEK: Now, you’ve been here about three years, from 2006 to 2009, have you had any memorable cases so far, or any cases that stand out in your mind?

SO: I’ve been working on a case for over two years now, we’re set for trial next month but we’re actually….. This has stuck out in my mind because it has gone on for so long. It’s an overtime case. I forgot to mention this, yes, we do Federal Fair Labor Standards Act cases in regard to overtime pay for usually illegal immigrant workers. Federal law completely protects them because if it didn’t it would encourage exploitation by not paying overtime. Anyway, we’re set for trial but we’re actually having a settlement conference on the 23rd of this month so I think we’re finally going to settle. This case stands out in particular because the defendant in this case is a downright racist and does not care. He says my clients don’t deserve overtime.

Why? “Just because.” Okay, that was on the deposition that we did about two months ago and it was shocking to hear that. What else? I’ll never forget one client, and this was out in rural western Oklahoma, I forget what county it is, maybe Roger Mills if I remember right. In a felony bogus checks case, I think about a week before we were going to go to court to plead him out because we were going to fix it all, he died of a heart attack. I’ill never forget him because we happened to talk on the phone and he said he had been feeling real tired and sure enough, a few days later he passed away. But it was down to the wire before I had to go to court because I had to get a death certificate and the judge was going to make me come out there if I didn’t have it. And finally I got it at the last second and I had it. Real nice man but stuff happens.

KEK: Yeah, I’m sorry to hear that that he passed away.

SO: We kind of joke now that some of my clients died to get away from the crime.

KEK: Well, that’s not why they died but yeah, yeah. Now, you, just a moment ago or several moments ago expressed some dissatisfaction with a pending bill on making the English language the official language of Oklahoma. Do you do, I guess I don’t know if you have time to do, but do you do any sort of political lobbying or any sort of, are you involved politically?

SO: I would say I’m a very big liberal Democrat, very much so. My two large clients, one of them is now has some issues with the economy, I don’t know what’s going on there but they did approach me about lobbying to change the law in regard to subcontractors getting paid and we talked about it; we never really decided to go with it or not because the economy tanked shortly after we had that conversation. I’m a big supporter of equal rights for everyone but as far as lobbying, no. I do have some relationships with some of the legislators out there but no I’ve; I actually picked up an application to be a lobbyist but I haven’t done anything with it since and that’s more or less because of the economy. It’s very interesting how it just stopped everything.

KEK: Exactly, exactly, and has the economy affected your business?

SO: Yes and no. It’s affected my business in getting clients to pay immediately and we have to do a lot of payment plans which, that can be difficult at times because I can’t tell the landlord of
this building that, “Oh, I’ll just pay you in payments.” No, we’re still having a steady stream of people coming in. Criminal cases tend to stay the same, actually kind of get a little worse during bad times. We haven’t had many divorces lately and that’s just, it affects everyone because when you’re divorced it can be disastrous financially for people and so they just kind of suck it up and stick together until things get better and then they’ll divorce. Yeah, I’ve seen an effect, my accounts receivables has increased significantly and we’re having to make phone calls. But, with that said, our bankruptcy practice has increased. I think our practice is going to increase significantly this year just because with the economic situation. We’ll see, we take it a day at a time.

KEK: That’s all you can do. Well, Mr. Olivarez, is there anything that I have not asked you that you would like to say or that you would like to talk about?

SO: Reflecting on law school I kind of wish that there was some way they could show us the reality of the practice. I think a lot of individuals, myself included and lots of my colleagues and other practitioners, we’re all kind of like, “This is not what we thought this was going to be.” Yes, I’m an attorney, you’re an elite few if you will, I don’t even like saying that word elite, I think that’s terrible to use. I don’t feel any better than anyone else. But I feel like sometimes, “Is it worth it?” Looking back now I’m kind of like, “Wow, medical school might have been the right choice.” It’s not too late, you can always go back but I don’t know I just, I think the profession in Oklahoma really needs to pony up if you will. I feel like we….. because that was my issue with the small firm where I was at, my salary was ridiculous; I can be a restaurant store manager and make the same amount. My point is if you pay low like they do generally here in Oklahoma then you need to expect low, have low expectations. I mean you’re just not going to have them. Going out on my own is probably the best thing I’ve ever done financially. And I’m a firm believer in paying employees their worth, not what the market says. I think if you want to create loyalty and if you want to create great employees, you need to take care of your employees and I really feel like that wasn’t happening. And I understand the big firms pay not what the state pays, but better, but of course they do a lot of work too and I know the small firms here have different economic situations than in other cities but I think that would create a better atmosphere. I mean honestly, DAs starting out is making $36,000.00 a year; that’s ridiculous. You can’t pay student loans back with that. The public defender is doing the same thing, it’s good that you’re helping people but you can’t help yourself.

KEK: Right, I mean how can you put food on the table with……? And again the issue with the salaries is what if the person has a family and so on?

SO: Yes because it’s a privilege to be a lawyer. Are you an attorney as well?

KEK: Hm, mm.

SO: And it’s a privilege to be an attorney. What are we? One quarter of one percent of the U.S. population or whatever, that’s what they tell us in law school anyway. And, we have a great
duty to our clients and to the country, the oath that we take. I’m not saying we should be compensated for that, I’m just saying that we should be able to take care of our families ourselves and I think that’s Oklahoma City’s problem. Maybe not so much in rural Oklahoma because there are just not the cost issues that you have in larger cities but I know when I start hiring associates I’m going to do my best to make sure that they stay. And that I reward them financially for their work because honestly, if they’re not doing good work, then why do you need them? But if they are doing good work and they’re making money for the firm, of course they should be compensated for that.

KEK: Absolutely. Do you think that those low salaries here in Oklahoma, do you think that those discourage attorneys from staying here and practicing here or not so much?

SO: The low salaries in Texas, they’re usually about $45,000 or $50,000 which is not much better. And the problem with Oklahoma is, because honestly I’m probably going to be leaving the state when my reciprocity is up. Yes, I want to help but I have the conundrum, my business will probably be doing very well then, and I’m going to think, “Am I going to start over?” But, we’re not a walker friendly city, everything is so spread out. Luckily I live in downtown and going to Penn Square Mall is about as far as I need to go but there are people that drive from Chickasha to work in the city, I just think it’s ridiculous. I don’t know, I think the city is growing, it’s changing, it’s a lot better from when I first got here. When I first got here I was dead set on going back home to Texas. I don’t know what it is exactly, it’s just, the politics of the area too make you want to leave. You hear things that are like, “Wow, we do have a constitution the last time I checked.”

KEK: And especially if you are not in agreement with the majority, I think it can make it very difficult.

SO: Yes, and I just, I’m a firm believer in diversity and equal rights for everyone and I just don’t understand some of the things these legislators spout off. You know those unscientific polls they do on the news that kind of scare you about how far right this state is. And I really think that it is hurting Oklahoma too because businesses don’t want to come here. Businesses want a welcoming place and when you have legislators on T.V. going, “If you don’t like it, leave,” I mean you’re shooting yourself in the foot. If you want more business then you have to be more open-minded, that’s just a fact of life I would say. Tulsa, for the Hispanic community, oh my Lord, those people are just scared up there. And I myself, I’m a U.S. citizen and my family has been here for generations and I’ve been followed driving around. And I’m a little ticked off about that at times because I’m like, “Really?”

KEK: So, you have experience with sort of profiling?

SO: Definitely.

KEK: So, in your general life?
SO: Yeah. Oh, when you have a suit on it’s completely different. But, I’m the type of person that I don’t like to wear a suit all the time. I can be comfortable in slacks and a dress shirt. I’ve been driving in my SUV, it happens to be a Lexus for that matter, and then here I am being followed by Joe cop for five miles and I’m just like, “Wow.” You can tell he’s checking me out, he’s typing in my tag, it’s nerve wracking, it’s weird.

KEK: How has that type of experience affected you as an attorney?

SO: It annoys me quite a bit. And honestly, in the legal aspect I’ve never had that issue. I was in a small, western county once and the judge was like, “Who are you?” And I had to explain who I was but he just didn’t know who I was; it’s a small county, all the lawyers know each other. But, when you have the power suit on you’re completely fine. When I’m in shorts and a T-shirt walking down the street, I blend in quite well. But that’s about it, I don’t really…..it saddens me to think that Oklahoma claims to be this God fearing state or whatever they claim and it’s just a lot of bigotry and racism, it’s very blatant. I’ve seen it and I’ve said things to people when they’ve said things to other people like, “What’s your problem? You don’t say that to people.” I’ve been speaking Spanish to a client, walking down the street and will get a dirty look from somebody because we’re speaking Spanish. That makes me say, “Wow, you’re ignorant.” It’s things like that that make me say, “Is this place going to change?” Because sorry, Oklahoma is getting more and more diverse and I know people don’t like that. It also scares me that we have the KKK down by Ada. Stay away from that area of town.

KEK: Right, exactly.

SO: It’s okay, I think it’s going to get better. People don’t like change. We’ll see what happens.

KEK: Absolutely, absolutely. Do you have anything else Mr. Olivarez?

SO: I don’t. I just hope that if anybody ever listens to this that they learn something from it hopefully.

KEK: I’m sure they will, I’m sure they will. And thank you so very much for your time today. I know that you are a busy person running your own business so, …..

SO: Thank you very much, I appreciate it.

KEK: Great, thanks.