

Immigrant Seafood Processing Woman -Interview # 2

Anonymous

27 years old

Female

Seafood Processing-cutter, packer

New Bedford

Guatemala

Interviewer: Corinn Williams

Transcriber: Corinn Williams

Place of Interview: New Bedford, MA

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Immigrant Woman Processor Interview # 2

CW-This is Corinn Williams and I am here at the CEDC on September 20th 2007 at 7:46 P.M. and I am here to do an oral history with a young lady who has worked in the seafood processing industry. We are going to conduct the interview in Spanish.

(in Spanish) Welcome. I am here today to listen to your life story and if you are willing to share a little with us. Each story is to listen to document (your life) so that we can better understand better how the women how they work the resources of the sea and other factors that affect your life and the life of your family. Let us begin.

Where did you come from? Where were you born? How was your life with your family?

I2-Well, I am happy to share in this moment with you. Of the reasons of one undertakes leaving one's country, from Guatemala, it is really difficult because living their one wants to help their family and sometimes you don't have that possibility. To hear that this country has opportunities to work and to get ahead. One sets off on a journey and says "I'm going to the United States" without realizing how many risks there are in the journey. Some may face death, but the plan to leave one's country is to arrive to this country and one risks everything. There is a lot of danger during the trip. The purpose of one to arrive in this country is to work and to help the family so that they can get ahead and to support yourself day to day.

CW-Can you explain a little about life, what part of Guatemala you are from?

[03:03] I2- I am from San Andres, Sacabaja, in the department of Quiche.

CW-How is life over there, life with your family ?

I2-In the beginning when I first got married I lived with my mother in law and it was a

little difficult.

CW-Why?

I2-Because it is not the same living with a person where there is no understanding, it's difficult.

CW-How old were you when you got married?

I2-I would say that I didn't get married because I went with him was when I turned fifteen. I was really young. My mother always told me to study to have a better future but when one is in the stage of adolescence you make decisions without knowing the consequences afterwards.

CW-Were you studying before?

I2-I was studying, how they say it in Guatemala is the second phase of study of the final primary which comes after the basic as they call it there. And I stayed in the first year and afterwards I went with him. At seventeen years old I had my first son and it was really hard, because he came over here, and we got into a bad fight over there, so he was beginning to forget about me. And that was the reason why I said "I'm going to the United States".

CW-So he left to come over here and you were still with you mother- in- law. Was the baby born yet?

I2-No he wasn't born yet. But then I moved to my parents' house but there was always conflict over there at home because my father didn't want to accept the husband I have now..

CW-Why didn't he want to accept him?

[06:17] I2-Until today- I don't really know. But I already proposed that I would go with him and I would spend my life with him until the end, and because of that, when the baby was born, I went to my parent's house. I saw that there wasn't enough help from what he would send me, so I made a plan and told him that if he wasn't going to bring me to be with him over here, that he would never see me again and that is when, I don't know how he took it, and that's how I faced the journey.

CW-Did you hear stories of the United States in Guatemala?

I2-Yes, that over here there is a lot of work, and now I laugh at this because they would say that here you collect a lot of money, because a lot of people here do not value money. But in coming here I realized that it is not like that, and that to survive you need to work. That was my decision to come to this country and I left my son with my mother. She says that I promised her that within three years, I would only be here for three years

and that I would return to make a little bit of money and to survive but it looks like that plan is not like that.

CW-How many years have you been living here?

I2-I remember that when I left Guatemala because I have the date with my son. His birthday is in February so I left on the fourteenth of March. I left him over there at two years old so the year before entering 2008 he will turn twelve years old. From the date that I left there I would complete ten years after leaving on the fourteenth of March.

CW-How did you deal with the decision of leaving your son?

[09:28] I2-It was really hard but one doesn't think about how afterwards there are consequences. To leave a loved one is the hardest thing and the most difficult, but in the moment of dreaming of coming to the United States you don't care about how hard it is or what the consequences are. One doesn't think it through. One comes to reason after the fact when the consequences have already happened. One regrets a lot of times just like I do now. If I would have thought about it I would have brought my son and I wouldn't have thought of the risks and my son would be with me today. But like I said before the emotion let me forget of the person that was most close to me. When I left, I forgot about him when I left, it was as if I was a single person without anyone. But when I arrived in Mexico my son started to appear in my dreams and I cried bitterly but then there wasn't any way back because I had already traveled half way..

CW-Was the situation in Guatemala in difficult because your husband was here and not helping you out?

I2-Yes it was pretty difficult because when my son would get sick I had to fight and figure out how to get the medicine because they were too expensive and sometimes I remember that my mother in law gave me some hens and I remember and it makes me laugh but it's the reality. She would say "Daughter I put your hens here and I brought you the eggs" and then I would tell her "that's fine" then she would tell me "eat them" I would reply "Okay mother in law I'll eat them". What I would do is walk to the store where they would sell bread and sell the eggs to make some money to save. Always I would be doing something to save money for the moment when I would need it.

CW-Apart from the hens did you have any other work?

[12:29]I2-The kind of work I liked to do best was to make straw fans to sell.

CW- How would you make the fans?

I2- Well it's with I forgot how its called, after (you harvest the straw) you take off the leaves one starts to separate the thick stems and split them in the middle and you start to shape them by hand.

They are very useful over there. You can blow on the fire, we use wood to cook and to

get the embers to burn you use the fan..

CW-Did you ever make petates (straw mats), also?

I2- Well, my mother taught me how to make it but I didn't like to make them, it's the truth. They are really hard to make because you have to grab it in a certain way it was difficult because you have to pull it with your nails so it stays really tight and not loose. I never liked to do that.

CW-But it is made with the same materials as the fans?

I2-Yes it is made of the same material but you use the leaves to make the mats and the stems inside are used to make the fans. It all depends on if one has experience in what you make, you can make big or small baskets to get groceries, whatever you like.

CW- Besides these things, did you work outside of the home?

[14:41] I2- No, because there you can't find work except as a domestic but few people need people to go to their house to clean, wash clothes, and iron clothes. There are few who need help. The ones who do come from the villages, those that have money. There isn't work like there is here. You come here and you can go to a factory and work but over there you can't.

CW- You can only do home-based-work.

I2-Just home-based work. Except for from what I am told, there is a place in the capital of Guatemala that you can go to work at a factory I hear. But it's about six to eight hours away from where we lived.

CW- So you had'nt ever been to the capital before coming to the United States?

I2- No, I never got to know the capital because I never had the opportunity to go. I only went once because my father took me but it is really difficult because I realized that there was a lady who had a business and then the thieves came, and she fainted and they took all her money. Another was knifed in the neck and another was robbed with a gun. That place is really tough.

CW-So you stayed in your town?

I2-Yes we just stayed and tried to survive. Maybe some would plant tomatoes or other vegetables to sell and things like that but we needed money for the pesticides so that the worms wouldn't eat them and so that the tomatoes come out fine. You need to take care of them.

CW-You have to buy fertilizer and everthing. Do you have a big family?

I2-No, we only have four members. I am the oldest and I have one sister and two brothers. We are not a big family.

CW-Was your father already here when you decided to come to the United States?

[18:02}I2-He was already here.

CW-And he has been here for a lot of years?

I2-Yes.

CW-What about the life in Guatemala, can you tell me a little bit about the customs, fiestas, how you celebrate on holidays?

I2- Well, I can't tell you much about how they celebrate because I didn't participate too much. But one of the ones they celebrate over there is the fiesta of Santa Catarina and San Andres and those happen I think on the twenty second of November, and they celebrate until the end (of the month). There are more fiestas that they celebrate but I don't know which ones.

CW-Would you go out (to celebrate) ?

I2- No, I wouldn't go out (to celebrate) because always I would be with my mother and she never left the house so she never let us out either. If we went out late it was always with our mother.

CW-Since your father came to the United States what did your mother do to support the family?

I2-Well what she had some land where she would cultivate the petates (straw). She would harvest them and give them to the women that would make them and later on when they were finished she would sell them and with that we always had our savings to be able to eat.

CW-How do you cultivate petates?

I2- Well it's a herb that is planted in the ground and you clean them off and take off the straw. Afterwards when its time, you rip off and cut off the silk because they grow some sort of flower and then you put them to dry in the sun. Then, you wet them and dry them again. After that you bundle them and you take them to the house. All that is done at the river. At the house you fix them by putting them in bigger bundles and you pick out the biggest stalks ones and they start to get smaller and smaller. You take out the smaller ones. That's how you make it and you make it for bundles of the biggest ones, only three bundles and of the smaller ones only four bundles.

CW-How much is in a bundle?

I2-Well I wouldn't know because the workers that were hired at the house made them. It seems like a bundle has about 70 sticks and its pretty big.I'mnot sur how to explain it.

CW-What is the petate used for?

[22:46] I2-Many things-it's good for sitting down. Let's say if you are going to a place that is all dirt you put it underneath. It's for a lot of things. If you make them from the bigger ones some make a tent. Over there everything is dirt so it has many uses.

CW-So that's what they specialize in San Andres?

I2-That's the work over there unfortunately because its a shame, they only pay seven (quetzales) and that's nothing and when one goes to get groceries they spend up to one hundred and seven (quetzales) if you get that from working once a week, seven (quetzales) is nothing and it gets difficult.

[24:08] CW-Was it because of the lack of opportunity that you felt the need to come here?

I2-Yes because like many others they decide to come over here because over there they say there isn't enough money but if one has money its being watched by the thieves. It's very hard.

CW-Over there do the women use the typical Mayan dress?

I2-Yes they use the typical dresses and it its so expensive. Looking at the point of view with one living there, one having to spend three hundred (quetzales) I see it as too much. Including the time that I have been here, I was surprised that my mother tells me that they cost five hundred to six hundred now. I'm shocked because it didn't cost that much when I came here.

CW-And are they made from hand woven cloth?

I2-Yes, there have been a lot of training for people who have the opportunity to study and weave their own dresses. But you have to buy the equipment and the material and big poles for weaving the outfit (traje) so for that you have to have money. A while ago I wanted to learn but I never had enough money, because the amount they wanted was three to five hundred (quetzales) no wait, eight hundred (quezales). I didn't have that amount of money so I never took the course..

CW- It was for the equipment and the material?

I2-Yes for the course. In other words they teach you and if it is possible if they come out winning they give you that equipment. There was that opportunity but unfortunately I did'nt have that much money. Because if had taken the course, I wouldn't have made the

decision to come here because with that you know the material and I can survive because if someone comes up to me and tells "Weave me a skirt (corte) and make it like this, and I want you to sell it to me for this price" , you can make money over there like that.

CW- So the women who know how to weave they can survive because they have their business?

[27:18] I2- Yes they have their business, but if they get to buy that material that works because there is a lot to it, I don't know- I have only seen one weaver, that she travels around.

CW- The looms that are buy hand or the mechanical ones?

I2-I don't know how one does it but one weaves by hand but, like you said there is one mold that costs about four hundred queztales.

CW-But is it a machine or made of poles?

I2- Right now I don't know how they but I know because one time I had the opportunity to see them in a project that they are these poles when one sees it doesn't look any good but even so , they still weave the dresses.

CW-Is there a possibility that you can sell them here?

I2-Yes there are a lot of people who wear the dresses.

I2-From wearing dresses all the time and coming here did you have to change what kind of clothes you wore, what was that like?

I2-It was difficult, because when I came here there was a time that I wasn't accustomed and everything was different for me, but afterwards there was a time that my mother sent me a dress but I never had time to wear it because when you wear the dress there is something that ties it in the back and I didn't feel comfortable in it. I felt like it was choking me. After having my baby I got used to wearing it again because before it felt so tight like I was choking me and it was difficult change.

CW-When you were in Guatemala did you ever hear about people going to New Bedford to work with fish? Did you have experience or an image about working with fish?

[30:50] I2-Well, over there I never imagined coming here to work with fish. When I arrived I had the experience in working with fish and it was a little difficult because , you have to use boots because of the water, and you have to use gloves and you have to wear a net , so your hair doesn't fall on the product. Everything is really different because the most difficult thing working with fish is in the winter season because the fish is covered in ice, and yes , sometimes I think for a lot of people it's dangerous because if you grab the ice and then you wants to warm your hands, you wash them in hot water and with

dealing with the fish you wash your hands and your hand can freeze. It's bad to wash your hands in hot water after dealing with the iced fish. I saw a change when I stopped working with fish. My hands would turn really green and I would say how ugly they are! One doesn't want to grab the fish because they are really cold. Well, it is good to try new things and see.

CW- Can you talk a little bit about the trip to come over here? I knew that your husband lived here in New Bedford, but did you know anyone else who lives here in New Bedford? The most important thing was to see your husband?

[33:29] I2-Yes it was important to come and see my husband to see what was happening and before anything my desire was to come and get to know and I don't know, when one is over there you imagine, even I would imagine the houses over here you know big like palaces and when I arrived I thought to myself "I imagined something more beautiful!". On the journey one thinks that you're coming because you have the opportunity so you say to yourself " either I go, or I lose this opportunity " because one comes with people that bring you. They call them the *coyotes* to make that money, you have to pay a certain amount of money, and this person that is already here sometimes for that money they risk it because sometimes they steal it. Everything happens on this trip. It's really dangerous because a lot of them get raped but when its about coming here to this country you don't care what happens or how many bugs bite on the way. It's really dangerous because when I came I found myself amongst snakes in the desert and the coyotes in the night one starts to cry its fearful.

CW- Did you travel in a group?

I2-Yes in a group of women. When I first came I had the opportunity to meet someone. I told them please don't separate from me. She was an older woman and I stayed right next to her.

CW-Did you keep communication with her?

I2-Not anymore because since they grabbed us right then we stopped seeing each other and I don't anything about her.

CW-Is she from Guatemala too?

I2- Yes she is from Guatemala but from another town. She is from Joyabaj . It was really difficult but the goal of one is to arrive and you don't care what happens.

[36:37] end of part 1

Immigrant Oral History 2 part two

CW- Hi This is Corinn Williams and I'm here again for the second part of the oral history with a seafood processing worker she was relating her story of how she came to New Bedford but unfortunately the tape recorder broke the last time so we are going to do the

interview again, this is September 24, 2007. We will record the interview in Spanish and continue the story we began to talk about a couple of days ago. (in Spanish) As I said last time, this is the second part of the interview and you were explaining a bit of how you arrived here, you were in the desert, crossing the border and what happening when you finally arrived in the U.S. ?

I2- Well, what happened when I was coming, what that I was caught (by immigration) and I was in jail, it was very hard for me to be locked up but, what I did was I contacted my family here to look for a lawyer, and that's how they were able to allow me to be released so that I came here to this state.

CW- Where were you caught?

I2-At the border of the U.S.

CW- As a group (detained together) ?

I2-Yes a group, they locked us up and asked us so many questions , we didn't want to say where we came from, but they found a way to make us give us information. They told us in a way implying that we would be given work permits, and that's how we fell into it to admit where we came from. And with the great desire to come here, and to work, well, one would say anything . So that's how it happens to us.

CW- Were you detained for a long time?

[03:24] I2- No, only 22 days

CW- 22 days! But were you thinking at that time that you would be able to be with your husband and your family here?

I2- Yes, my idea was that and the others said that is you get a lawyer that you could be released on bail, but the bail I received was \$5,000.

CW-\$5,000 and who paid for that?

I2-Well my family that was already here, they paid it, but they didn't pay that amount, I went back to court and later I had a woman judge that was a woman that many said that she was the only one who reduced bail, but the others didn't have the same luck as I did, they denied their bail or they left it at \$5,000 because they were men. So yes, it was very hard but at the first appointment with the judge I was granted bail and released soon after.

CW- But was there a confusion with your age?

I2- No, it wasn't a confusion with my age, they always asked me if I was a minor, and I told them that I wasn't and they kept questioning me and I said "Why would I lie about this its the truth". They insisted but finally, many people told me that the lawyer who

helped a lot of people gave me her name and with her help and the help of my family I was able to hire this lawyer.

CW- And after you were released how did you get here?

I2- When they let me out we didn't know what to do, because the moment come and they let you out but you don't know what to do now they can't keep you, because there is the court order that says that they can't keep you, so when they let us go, it was the day to celebrate Mother's Day, when I heard my name called that I had to report to the office we threw our stuff together at us and we ran out.

CW- You left with everybody else?

[06:34] I2- No just with another person , a young girl, And then I realized we were in was in the woods, we dropped off outside of the jail they told us “you can go-do what you want -you're free” it was very hard we didn't know where to go, I didn't want to call the lawyer.

CW- Why not?

I2-Because a lot of people told me that if you are going to call the lawyer to come and get you it will cost more money. So I said, “I'll leave and see where it takes me”.

CW- But you had no idea where you were going?

I2-At the detention center people were allowed visitors and there was a woman that came who was a visitor we were sitting under a tree because the girl I was with was supposed to be picked up right there, and the two of make a pact that we wouldn't separate from each other we wouldn't leave each other that was the plan.

CW- Was she Guatemalan?

I2- No she was from another place , but we met there (in detention) and we became friends and when she saw that we were in the woods , she got scared because she was so young. So we sat under that tree, we waited for her family to pick her up, it was about 2 in the afternoon and a woman came up to us and she spoke to us and said that they wouldn't let her in to visit because she was wearing shorts, they just let daughter in to visit , And so she chatted with us and asked us if we we going to stay there and the sun was setting and what were we to do? So she told us that she knew of a place where they help the people at a place like a convent it was a refuge for people to allow people to stay overnight to sleep without having to pay, and she gave us the advice that we shouldn't mention anything about lawyers because they wouldn't give us a hand . So what we said is that we didn't have a lawyer because that is what the woman warned us.

CW- So she brought you there?

[09:33] I2- Yes she took us in her car by that time it was already night time, and they were looking for the girl at the other place (at the detention center) and when they came (her family) they scolded her because she didn't wait there , but she said “I can't just be waiting there in those woods, I had to go with her “. So I stayed there about a week, you have to help cleaning you had to work as a volunteer to make food

CW-Where there a lot of people there?

I2- There were a lot of people who stayed in the rooms , I stayed one or two weeks there, then I got in touch with family here and they sent money to the people who ran this place and they bought a ticket for me and I came by bus to here (New Bedford). And then I realized where I was caught, when I passed by it I remembered , including passing by the immigration checkpoint again and I kind of laughed at them (to myself) “Now they can't get me “ and I was happy that immigration stopped the bus and they asked for our documents , and I showed them my release with the signature of the judge and they told me “you need to go to court, you have an appointment “ and I said yes I am going to go, and on the journey I met people who told me “ you shouldn't continue with your case because its too difficult” others said to pursue my (immigration) case others said not to, so I was undecided I didn't know what to do .And finally when I got here what I did was I went (to court) but the lawyer didn't send my file (to Boston) and the files were left in Texas so when I went they said that “you not registered here, you have to go back there” and I said “how am I supposed to go back so far away! I'm not going back there”. So I decided that no, I would drop the case and I decided that if it is God's will that I'm here and I wouldn't get caught again because they warned me that they could find me because they had my photo and my fingerprints and enormous photos of me in the computers . But I trusted in God , until the moment arrived that I was caught again. But that had been after approximately 10 years , 9 ½ years . So when I got here I needed to start working because there was such a large debt on top of me -the debt from the *coyote* and the debt from immigration.

CW- How much was the debt?

[13:38] I2- \$2,500 from immigration and \$3,000 from the coyote.

CW- So you arrived to see your family?

I2- Yes I came to be with my family.

CW- What was that like to see your husband again?

I2-It is something that I wouldn't like to remember -there were good times but at the same time a lot of sadness and pain and problems because we really didn't understand each other, I suffered a lot but my decision was not to leave him although there was yelling, mistreatment, insults but as time passed during the first year and in that year I couldn't stand it I didn't know what to do . Someone came to the house an older person who came from Guatemala , I don't know I asked for advice “what should I do? I want to leave my

husband , I'm sorry I still love him and if I leave and I still love him it would be a shame
“ I told him and I told him everything how much I cried from the abuse, he gave me a beautiful answer, he told me “there is a solution to your problem , but it all depends on you-the solution is the hand yourself over your heart to Our Father Jesus Christ- but you have to seek this with all of your soul” he said “and if you have that ardent desire in your heart to serve him, only he can change your problem” and that stuck with me , while I was suffered I asked God “where are you?””Do you exist like I was challenging God , “you say you are here but where are you?” “I want to know you” I always cried and it was in that moment that that person came who told me what I needed to do.

And it was over time , I was invited to church service and I wanted to come along and I had my first Christmas at church, peacefully – this was a big thing that happened to me - and then it was the year 2000 that is where I spent New Year's Eve but just as a visitor . But then in January something in my heart awakened like I had a feeling that there was something very special there

and I went home and I said to my husband " I know we have problems but I respect you as my husband , and I want you to give me permission for me to go to church" -and to him he thought it was a joke and he laughed at me , and I told him I went to church . I told him that I was so sad and that I almost fell into alcohol problems but now I understand that alcohol is not a solution to problems, the Lord is the solution , but you have to look into your heart to find it , so today I have given my heart and I serve God and I did it the way this person told me how , I saw how things were and how my situation has changed , now I'm at peace, happy but to serve God its hard because there is an enemy who doesn't want you to , that you do good things .

CW- During that time that you were recently arrived you had said that you had a big debt, how soon after had you gone to work? How did you find work? Where did you work?

[19:17] I2- When I arrived I went to work in seafood processing at a company that paid very little , I was cleaning fish, taking the dirty parts off and placing it in a plastic tub , you had to clean then and rinse them it was a process.

CW- How did you get the job?

I2- From people who worked there and my husband worked there ,my father worked there too, through them I got the job .

CW- Was there a lot of work?

I2- At first there was a lot of work but over time the work slowed down sometimes we would go in at 6 AM and we would leave at 9 AM . I was very little that we earned , so I decided to go to another company it was a backpack company, it was a small place , and later I was was offered another job working in Boston

Cw- What kind of work was that?

[21:20] I2- The job was packing fish , fish that was soaking in a solution. I don't know ,

we packed it in small boxes, there was different jobs.

CW- So you traveled everyday from New Bedford to Boston? What time did you leave in the morning?

I2- We left very early 4 AM , sometimes at 3 AM, there was a lot of work I took advantage of that opportunity to work .

CW- Were there a lot of workers who went to Boston

I2-No just about 10 people , but it was there that suddenly I had an accident, I fell on the ice . I went to the doctors but in that accident there were many things I hurt my back because I was carrying a bag of fish that was too heavy for my strength.

CW- How much did it weigh?

I2- I don't know but it was a wet sack and I didn't calculate how heavy it was and it really damaged me and I got a compstura (hernia?) from that you can get very injured, when you carry too much weight . There is really no cure for it with doctors but if you know that is what you have only if you go to a midwife/traditional healer (comadrona) . I went to a lot of doctors and had a lot of tests and they didn't find anything and each day it was getting worse and worse until I was out of work for more than a year because of that.

CW- What did you do when you were out of work? Who were you living with at home?

[24:02] I2 – I lived with family , cousins who helped to support me and later I recovered , although I had lost hope , but God helped me recover.

CW- Did you go to the midwife (comadrona)?

I2- Yes I found someone who could massage my stomach who was able to reposition the hernia but she said that I had to rest for 40 days without doing any heavy listing of exertion , so that's what I did.

CW-So the midwife isn't just for pregnant women?

I2- No, there are different types who are knowledgeable how to cure people . Thats how it was that I recovered , so then I started to look for work again , and that's when I went to work again at the backpack company (Michel Bianco).
(pause in interview)

CW-Can you tell us a bit about your husband's work-he always worked at the same company in seafood processing?

I2- Yes.

CW-And the others who live in your house, do they work in seafood processing?

I2- Only one other person.

CW- You were explaining that you were recovering from work and that you were ready to go back to work, but your husband was always working in seafood processing?

I2-Yes.

CW- Was was work like for him?

[27:04] I2- Well, at first he worked with frozen fish, they had to prepare the fish to soften it.

CW- Did they come in blocks of ice and they had to work with the fish to defrost it?

I2-That's it, I remember when he did that job, but now he works driving a forklift, that's his job now, his hands used to be scratched up from the cold-yes-his hands would be bloody from the fish.

CW-And when you worked there were most of the workers Guatemalan?

I2- Yes the majority are Guatemalans and one American woman some Portuguese but very few, there are only Guatemalans working there..

CW- And the people working there, your friends, did you know them from Guatemala or did you meet them here?

I2-No, mostly I met them here just two people I knew from there but the rest I met here they were working there but now it seems there are a lot of people working there from my town

CW- But during the time you were working there there weren't as many Guatemalans working there?

I2- Back then there weren't many Guatemalan women working there, there was only five of us.

CW- And now they are all Guatemalan-how many?

I2- I'm not sure because I really don't go by that place, but I know there are a lot of women , many Guatemalan women working there.

CW- In Guatemala did people already know how to work with fish or was it something new?

[29:40] I2- It was something new because where I grew up there weren't big fish, it was a surprise to see such enormous fish . Over there no, what we have as fish when you get them at the river are tiny ones, so here you have to cut the bones-its so different, what one would want is to have money any it didn't matter of the work is hard .

CW- Did you ever bring fish home to eat?

I2- Once in a while they would give us some fish to take home but to look at it all day you do'nt feel like eating it .

CW- And you still don't eat much fish?

I2-Not much, not much, but if someone makes it brings me some, I love to eat it.

CW- Just is someone one else makes it (laughs).

I2- Yes, so you don't have to look at it and the oder is enough!

CW- So you were at home resting and after a year and you wanted to go back to work? How did you find a job?

I2- Well I went by (the factory) because I worked there before I worked in Boston the supervisor at the backpack factory begged me to stay, and know I think I was punished because I wanted to make more money so that's why I went to Boston, I was making \$8.50 but (at the factory) I was making \$6.25.

CW- But did you have to pay for transportation to go to Boston?

I2- Yes we had to pay for transportation.

CW-How much?

I2- \$45 a week.

CW- Were you working overtime?

I2-Yes, there was a time were reached 70 hours a week, you would get tired by happy to see a \$500 check it was something to rejoice, to have like \$1,000 in two weeks, if you are able to save it but if you don't you don't see anything from it and the money can disappear.

CW- With those checks, you explaining before about your debt, had you already paid this off by this time, and you have your son in Guatemala, did you support him in Guatemala?

[33:31] I2- Well, that decision to leave him in Guatemala , I confronted his father , I told him "I raised him, I suffered when he was sick, so now its your turn" and now he

supports our son so that's how we arrange it he sends money to him

CW-Every week?

I2- Every month.

CW- And your son lives with your son?

I2- Yes, that's the way it is.

CW- But are you in touch with him? Do you talk on the phone?

I2-Yes, always I suffered a lot , he always would say “come back I want you to be here with me I want to see you (and father) ” (plural you). This is something that is so difficult when he says “come back” “when are you coming-what day, what date are you coming? There was a time I don't know, my mother told him that we were coming back in 2006, and that made him jump for joy “My folks are be coming in 2006!” and he started to count the days and the months, when the time came and we didn't go, he got very disappointed , and now to him it doesn't matter if we are there or not, if we go or not. At first he wasn't like that he always said “come- come-come”

CW- And what do you think now- are you thinking of going to see him?

I2-On the one hand I'm afraid, in my heart, I know that children need the affection of their parents , sometimes it's not just money that is everything but If you think about it, one sometimes has to sacrifice because of the ones we love, because over there if it happens that he would get sick, what would one do? And over there if you borrow money, they charge you 25%. So what can you do? That's the way it is. That's how things are.

CW- Getting back to the theme of work, you went to work at the backpack factory because you worked there before?

[36:33] I2-Yes but it took five or six times I insisted that I wanted to work there but it go to a point where I said, “I'm not going anymore, I went so many times and they haven't offered me a job”, but I had some friends who worked there who knew me, and they know how I work and they brought it up with the boss, and they said “you know how she works, you think she doesn't know how to work” so they spoke for me, they said” Why don't you take her, why are you hiring other people who don't have experience?” That's how it went and (one day) I was in a deep sleep, and when the phone rang and they said “get ready, because tomorrow you will start work” and I said What! And I dreaming? I jumped out of bed and woke up – and my friend called and I said-it is true? And she said are you stil sleeping woman! It's late- it's already 8 AM and I would say I'm not doing anything so I might as well sleep, so that's the way it was that I started working there again at the backpack factory.

CW- What kind of work were you doing?

I2- At first I worked at the table labeling the fabric dividing up the work for the people, and I liked to hurry, I never got into trouble because I always got people the material they needed for work .

CW- So your back wasn't still bothering you- you weren't in pain?

I2-If I was on my feet a lot it would start to hurt, and one day it hurt so much I was desperate and I said (to myself) "I'm not going to work anymore" but what I did, I saw a machine and I watched a girl sewing and it looks easy , real easy. And I spoke to the woman (supervisor) and I said "give me the chance to work on the machine" but she said "but you don't know how to sew" "but I can learn" I told her , "one isn't born knowing these things but one can be shown how to do it, and it depends if you have the desire to learn" and she simply told me "no-no" and I with that pain from being on my feet and I , in despair cried in the bathroom "My God why won't this woman give me the machine to work on? And after I cried, I said "My God I can't take it anymore", my feet were in pain and my back was hurting from being on my feet, and over time I said this will be the last time I will ask, and if she says no I'll have to quit because I can't stand it to be on my feet, Then she walked by my work table, and I said "come here, what's up, you are not going to give me the chance to learn the job"? Then there was a machine that was the easiest to operate and there was a lot of work all piled up, because the other worker was working between two sewing machines, and the other machine had a lot of work as she worked on one machine the work would pile up at the other, and if she went to work on the other machine the work would stop at the other, And I was so sad , I keep doing my job labeling the work, and I look up and the supervisor said "come with me" and I said "Is this a dream? " and she gave me a machine and I started working with her and it had a computer on it, and you had to program it, just put the cloth under it and then start it with both feet, and the good thing was that you could work on this machine with both feet it was an easier movement working with both feet, and that's how I started working there, I stayed working on the machine , and the work I did well, I did it fast, in no time, and when I finished I went back to the table so there was never a time I didn't have work to do, I would go on my own and nobody said "who told you to do that" or any scolding.

CW- Was your husband still working and at that time you didn't have any children here, it was just the two of you so when did you get pregnant, were you still working at the backpack place?

[42:38] I2-Yes I was working at the backpack place, but when I got pregnant then by back problems went away, I was really surprised because I thought that it was a more difficult problem, but I always prayed to God , I had already been to doctors, but they didn't give me anything to help me, it was better that I pray to God and unexpectedly I became pregnant, and later I remembered that I didn't have any pain anymore everything was normal and I said "this problem would be lot worse being pregnant" but over time I spoke to the doctors and they said that maybe you will have more pain when the baby grows and the baby weighs more but no- I never got the pain again while I was pregnant,

and later I asked for maternity leave, and I was out three months until the baby was three months old and I went back to work .

CW- So you asked for permission to take maternity leave how long before the baby was born?

I2- It was only two weeks before (due date) and I didn't want to be at home, and so I took two weeks and unfortunately it was only one week I rested because the following week I was at home the baby was born

CW- (laughs) because you were walking so much !

I2- Yes I came by here I walked to your office and it was the next day that I had the baby.

CW- So you were on leave three months and then you went back to work?

I2-I went back at the end of July, and I was working eight months when that happened was had to happen.

CW- So are referring to when immigration arrived at the company on March 6th

[45:30] I2- Eight months and I was so happy I would have never imagined what would happen, including my plans were to help an aunt I have in Guatemala who is going to school , and my mother told me “Your Aunt needs your help” because she is a single woman, and she has no one to help her , she is sacrificing all by herself to get an education.

CW- She is in Guatemala? What was she studying?

I2 She was in her fourth year of high school and when you get to that grade it costs more, so my mother talked to me, and I have the heart that sometimes I don't care if I don't have anything, I could give what I have to someone else, and I promised my mother I told her “ I'm going to help her but please don't tell her who gave her the money for her studies, I'm going to get some money together, and I'll send it to her and she would get the money when you give it to her from your hands”, that's how I left it with my mother. And that very week that I was going to get my paycheck, that check was going to be sent to her. So I said “This week, I'm going to work all week and not miss any hours of work so that I get a good paycheck , and I was very happy in addition, because I got a 50 cent raise without even asking for it, although I had said to the supervisor at one time “ you can even give me even a 5 cent raise”.

Cw How much were you earning?

I2- I was making only \$7.25

CW- So you would have made \$7.75

I2- Yes and I was so happy because I would get a little more, maybe just \$5 or \$10, and I said "I'm going to work without absence, and I went to work on Monday and Tuesday, I work up without the desire to go to work, and I said to myself "what's wrong with me?" it was a premonition of what would happen. There was a point that I might have avoided it, because I said "I better not go ". I felt my body so heavy, like I had been beaten up, but the problem was that I get a ride to work and the girl who takes me had a broken cell phone, so there was no way for me to tell her not to come and get me. So I had to grab the baby, drop her off to get my ride, it was incredible, some days before, I had felt my machine and my body tired it didn't want to work right, and I said "Why do I feel my body so heavy?" and I couldn't do my normal production which I could usually stitch 150 backpacks a day, and I calculated that it took me 20 minutes to do one, and I said "How strange I'm only stitching two, what's wrong its not working right" it was like my machine wanted to stop. And I said " Why' ? I told the woman its not working I said, I don't know if it was the machine or a premonition of what would happen, the I said "I'll just work slowly, looking at it, and after I concentrated and all of a sudden I heard "STOP YOUR MACHINES!" the secretary said I said " What's happening here? And everybody started to run except me, I stayed there observing and they (immigration) surrounded us, they grabbed the men, And I said "What are they looking for? "Because they didn't say they were immigration they said ICE and we didn't know what that meant.

CW- You didn't know?

[51:01] I2- No we didn't know who they were, Oh God they looked like ants, surrounding here and surrounding there, they said "don't move" Why? But all the worker started to run, and the girls said that when they ran, another group found them. And I just stood watching and I said "What's happening" are they looking for someone because I, in my head I said "are they looking for drugs?" Because to see that great quantity (of immigration agents) some were armed," where they looking for drugs "I said. After what I did was take out my cell phone and I called the woman where my baby was and I told her I didn't know what was happening and then I shut off my machine, and when I heard "Everybody stop" "and those who have papers make a line here, and those who don't form a line here" Someone asked me " Do you have your papers?" I was going to say yes, but I knew you would have to show to prove it.

CW- And you didn't have any?

I2- And I didn't have any, "No" I said and grabbed my purse, and we formed a line and the girl who realized started to faint those with babies, started to cry and I said "What's happening?" it was like a dream to me and I was stiff like a tree or a stone and I'm the type that if I see someone crying like on TV see someone crying I feel the tears come down too but in that moment no one taer fell.. I still do"nt know why I reacted that way, I saw the mothers crying bitterly for their children and in that moment I forgot that I even

had a daughter and I told the others “Don't cry God will help us “ And my heart was jumping with joy but I said “What is this? ”I saw a woman crying in front of me and I was like a stone- it was so hard, and even worse when we were handcuffed with our hands in back of us and the person who tied me up seemed like he hated us he was tightening it hard and I said “You are squeezing it to tight!” and since I said that he tightened it more so I shut up and didn't say anything. And my left hand was getting purple like the blood was getting blocked off.

CW Was it like a plastic tie?

[54:55] I2- Yes those, and then as you would move more it tightened more-it was so difficult. We were all day without eating they didn't let us eat the lunches were brought with us to work, nothing. We stayed all day like that standing and some from immigration laughed at us , and the other workers there were crying and I said “I have a baby what will happen to me?” “Wait, wait ”they said, and it was all day like that. At noon I spoke to my husband and I said “This is serious” I said “ Immigration is in here, take care of the baby girl” and he was very said “No its not true” he said “Yes its true” I only spoke to him then and later I couldn't communicate with him again until they next day at dawn . They took us away , hungry , They took us in a bus and I said probably they would deport us and I said my goodbye “ Adios New Bedford” I knew that for them I had committed a crime that I didn't show up for court . I know its a crime and I'm willing to confront this . I went calmly, the girls in the room with me were very sad , But I said “ Trust in God's will that it will be resolved” and I said let's pray and all of them were released except for one of the girls I don't know what happened to her.

(pause for an interruption)

CW- So you were with the woman praying...

I2- We prayed and then rested but when we were going to fall asleep they got us up and they took us in the cold to fill out lots of forms and they took fingerprints but my baby finger wouldn't take the print and I enjoyed that I laughed and the girl who was fingerprinting me scratched her head and I wanted to laugh and she put my smallest fingers together to make one big one but it took about an hour and a half to do it because they wouldn't print and I said “Wow how strange- why”. I laughed and the girl was getting mad and smashing my fingers hard and when it didn't come out “I'm sorry” she said . They brought us here and they were asking for so much information . They told us to sign a form and I signed something that I didn't know what it was but I remembered that I should'nt sign anything so the other papers they gave me I didn't want to sign . I told them “ I'm not signing these papers they are in English”. They tried to explain them to me in Spanish but her Spanish wasn't very clear and I didn't understand anything she said and she said “ what ever- what ever “ and over time by 2 AM they started with the medical attention and checked us for illness and then my breasts started to give me an enormous pain that I couldn't contain myself and I started to cry and cry and tears flowed out there were four of us that were taken up to the second floor and I kept crying and I couldn't contain myself . “What's the matter?” they asked “My breasts hurt “ I said and a

felt that my daughter was suffering it was a pain like a premonition.

CW- Was that the time your daughter would be getting up?

[01:02:24] I2- She would wake up to breastfeed at that time I said "what time is it?" I saw my watch they didn't see it so they didn't take that away because they didn't find it and I thought "My daughter must be crying" and she must be looking for me because we slept together and she would know if I was near and she would look for me to breastfeed and I could quickly even if I was sleepy I could breastfeed her. But it was a horrible pain. And one of the doctors said "What's the matter with you woman" and I said "I'm in pain and I feel that my daughter is suffering a lot this is the time she feeds she must be crying" "Help me" I said.

"I'm sorry, we are not doctors" she said we can't do anything.

And there was another one who was stone faced she gave me a chair and told me to sit down and I calmed down a bit and another person, I'm not sure if it was a man or a woman, when she saw me cry talked to me and I saw that she was a doctor and she said "give me your information, I'll see what I can do for you" She wrote my name down on her book and went downstairs, they I didn't see her then they brought me to be with the others but I didn't want to cry in front of them, I cried upstairs there were only four women there but the other I was consoling and I didn't want them to see me cry because it would get them worked up again, and the woman came back and said "I wish you the best" and they called my name -"here I am" I said Come-they took me in another room to be with the other mothers but what is incredible is that they made the others prove that they were lactating but they didn't make me prove it and my cousin couldn't produce milk, how could she, if she didn't drink anything all day or eaten all day, milk is produced when you have liquid in your system so they accused her "You're lying" they said.

And so they gave my papers to an official and they said that I probably would be released, and there was a girl who had a three month old baby she was so inflamed they had compresses on her breasts to alleviate the swelling. So I was there contented and peaceful thinking that I would be let go but over several hours they said that they would keep us there until 3 AM and later they told us at 4 AM but then they saw a note in my file, they asked me I had ever been detained or any problem and I didn't want to say anything but when the official mentioned fingerprints I said "even if I say no my fingerprints will say yes".

So I admitted it and the official said "Woman-you have a problem" when the official read it in the report her face fell in sadness and she told me "I know you have a baby" but when she saw that my situation was a little more difficult her face fell. I said "I know what you are talking about, but don't work it's not your fault". "Let me see what I can do" she said and another hour passed and my papers went to another room where there were 3 officials, one took the papers and brought it out to another for about an hour this went in and I said "what are they doing with my papers up and down?" and all of a sudden she came back and she started to smile and I said "Glory be to God" and she stared at me and I jumped with joy, she didn't give me the news just yet but I had seen by the look on her face and I knew it was good news and I was smiling and then she said "I have the news that you are leaving" I said "I knew it I felt it in my heart with happiness"

so I knew it was good news because when something bad happens I feel it right away its a sadness . And that's how we were released.

(pause phone rings)

CW- So they said you could leave...

[01:11:54] I2- Yes we were taken out, and they brought us back to the place were we were arrested and so they bought me a coffee (beck in New Bedford) and I told my husband. "I'm coming back home" and he said "Its not true" and I said "yes it is"and he was surprised.

CW- What did it feel like to come home?

I2-I felt happy to see my daughter , but the next day I suffered thinking about all that happened to me I suffered and cried for all the others and I remembered how we were treated and I said " We are not criminals why were we treated in that way?". It was o.k. to have been detained but to be handcuffed like that was the hardest for me and to see those mothers crying it was such a suffering for me and even now it hasn't been erased , it has affected me so much and I understand how much these mothers suffered because sometimes we just hear about these things but to live in real life we feel the suffering of the others . So I feel that there is something very dark inside of me I've tired to forget but I have those memories of it.

CW- Do the workers from other places like in seafood processing feel afraid now also?

I2-I know so, because this was so unexpected and also if you haven't made any plans to go back (to Guatemala) just yet, I think if they said we will arrest you and deport you right away but the saddest thing is to keep people locked up within four walls and one would say- "but what did I do- I didn't murder anybody" and those thoughts bother people and many have gotten sick. Like a girl who called me who has been here less than one year she is just paying back her debt and she says "I can't stand it" -they tried to release her (from detention) but they couldn't do anything for her and she doesn't understand much Spanish (she speaks K'iche). She has been detained four months , five months "now I'm sick" she says .

CW- She is in Texas?

[01:15:58]I2- Yes and now she has stomach pains , they gave her some pills but nothing helps and when the Ambassador came to see her he ordered them to release her immediately because she couldn't take it – and that's why workers are afraid now , especially those who have families , children and they don't have plans to go back. But for those who already have plans to go back it doesn't matter but they should let them go back right away . Now so many have been detained for months horrible things come to their minds , if they don't want to give them a work permit they should just send them back..

CW- Do you think there is a solution to those who are working without papers and that is a crime, what solution is there?

I2- Now there are just so many people, including now the workers at the backpack factory who were hired, they are capable of working but they don't want to work. I think that when they have not suffered and their parents have given them everything so they don't value it (the job) on the other hand, when you have suffered you know how to value it, it doesn't matter if the job is hard, one does it to save a little money. It's difficult because so many complain that we have come here to take jobs away from others but if they don't want you do the work then others will do it. One come here not to take away jobs but because of the hardships in their countries they come to a place that there is some prosperity and possibility and they confront the journey because I (they) want to work to help my family it doesn't matter what kind of work I do.

CW- But are you able to get a visa to allow you to come here?

[01:19:14] I2- Its difficult- sometimes over there there are people who tell you "I can get you a visa" Get me X amount of money and I'll get it for you and you all excited say o.k. I'll go to the States without suffering. So you say "I'll go in debt" and the person robs you. That's how it is now over there how many people has that happened to? They tell them that they have gotten visa for so many other people who are interested and they say "I'll get myself into debt" like so many have done and from the little they have at home they mortgage their homes and with this money taken by these people. So you really have to know who you are dealing with. I know this happens in every country.

CW- But if you had a way to get a visa to stay here would you?

I2-It's hard because what one wants to do is work, and people say "I'll just stay as I am", but if one doesn't take a risk to find out if you can get your papers, but with the law as it is it's difficult to be covered and so there is that fear that is with you all the time, "I'm afraid that I will be deported and I want do this, achieve that before I go" but this doesn't become a reality because now its been such a difficult time that even if there is an opportunity you can't even avail yourself of it at all. Many people have felt this fear and know they see how things are difficult but they might not want to risk it to win or lose. It's like how I am know where I have said its better that I just go, but many people tell me, why not you should dare to fight it again, like someone advised me, you are already into the middle of the situation, "All you have to lose in the money" he said. "But if you don't dare to try, then you never know if you would have won or lost, that's how it is-ever you win or lose, but the situation id that you decide if you dare, and in the end you will get the answer". That was his advise, and that's how have been encouraged, because sometimes you don't see things clearly and you get confused as to what you can do.

CW- But would like to be able to stay permanently, what are your greatest hopes?

[01:23:32] I2-Well, my dream is not to stay here, but if I could stay and also return to my country. One knows that there are things over there that are not over here, so that's why one says "I'm going back to my country" because there are people there who aren't allowed to come here and you really miss your family and you really want to see them, so the greatest desire of everyone is to get a paper that would allow one to be here, but to allow one to travel because if you had to stay here all the time, people need to get away, to see your family to find out how they are doing, so that is my desire, but if I don't make it, I don't know, we'll see what happens.

CW- We'll see what happens in the future.

I2- Yes, because what affects me the most, sometimes I think "I'm doing fine over here" but there is someone I love so much, some day he might reproach me to my face that he is my son, because I think it's different with your mother, father or siblings than a being whom you bore and that's what I think about and I don't know what to do. I have (a child) here and one over there and I don't know what to do- I can't split myself in two, so I have to sacrifice something and sometimes I'm terrified and I pray to God that he won't reproach me because it is a sacrifice I am making because at first, I didn't even know what adolescence was, at first I didn't know what youth was here I learned about adolescence, youth and childhood so I said one of the questions that I asked someone who had studied a little and I asked "Why do people fall in love at 12 years old" and he said "That is not love, it's just the human hormones". "What-that's not love?" I said, "No" he said "it's just nonsense" he said "Love comes when you are about eighteen years old, when you begin to mature" he said, "So that is true love". So imagine as a child to feel love, that's not love, that's why I worry because when you get to that age and you don't know what you are doing and when you become more mature and you find that you have wasted your youth. So I worry about my son because he is going into that age when he needs more support from his mother than from his father, more understanding, that's my worry right now because I'm not with him and children need to ask for advice because sometime they don't trust their parents as much but a lot depends if one allows them to trust you. Yes, that is my fear because I came here and now is the time that children may take a wrong turn, and I'm afraid because I say "it's not the same to be with your grandmother than to be with your parents" because if you respect your grandmother it's ok, but if not, they would say "she's nothing to me". That's what worries me because I wouldn't want to take a wrong turn, because many children I have heard of that their parents have come here and they feel resentful of their parents and they don't appreciate their parents even though they have everything. My mother tells me "Daughter- money isn't everything there is also your family" and so I would like to have wings to fly but my husband says "while everything is doing well here- don't go" but my son says "come" so what can I do? It's so hard but only God knows how this all works out.

CW- Well thank you so much for sharing your story, and I wish you all the best, Thank You.

{01:30:44}