

Immigrant Seafood Processing Woman -Interview # 6

Anonymous

23 years old

Female

Seafood Processing-cutter, packer

New Bedford

Salvadoran

Interviewer: Corinn Williams

Transcriber: Corinn Williams

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Immigrant Woman Processor Interview # 6

CW- (In Spanish) Now we are going to start recording- today is it July 29th, 2008
(English) Hello this is Corinn Williams its July 29th, 2008 and I am here for another interview of women in the seafood processing industry
(Spanish) I am here to day to listen to the story of your life, if you are willing to share it, every story we listen to is different , but each story allows us to better understand the experiences of women working in the seafood processing industry and of how government regulations and other factors also affect the lives of women and the lives of their families. This project is trying to reach people whose voices are not often heard, and your lives and stories are not well understood, so your voice is very important to help us understand how the lives of immigrant women who work in the fishing industry differs from those who were born here and have live here for generations, as I said your will not be identified by name or personal information and you are aware that we are recording and that we may use to interview to help us measure the social impact of fishing regulations and other educational purposes, it that o.k.?

I6-Yes.

CW- And if at any time you would like to take a break just let me know- O.K. The interview has three parts:to explain what your life was like before coming here, a bit about how you made the decision to come here and about how you adapted to life here- so it is about your story- o.k.?

To start can you tell us how old you are, where were you born?

I6- Well I am 23 years old and I was born in San Sebastian, San Vicente, El Salvador.

CW- Can you explain about about your family and what life was like there in San

Sebastian?

[02:28] I6- I was born in San Sebastian but later after the war I moved to the capital San Salvador with my two brothers and my mother and father who was a teacher and my mother a housewife. It was very hard during those times because of the crime and violence and the social problems of gangs. It was very hard because our school was very far away from our house and everyday it was something we had to deal with the gangs, the robberies, we grew up with that and learned to live with it because we had no other choice and when we were older we were always in school studying, my mother also became a teacher but it still was difficult at home, we had just what was necessary, there were no luxuries over there. 5 or 6 years ago they introduced the dollar as the currency, before Salvadoran workers earned in *colones* but they had to buy everything in dollars and so the economy was affected by this and after we had a family meeting we discussed that coming here was a way to get ahead and since my father couldn't make ends meet for the family, and so I decided to come here.

CW- What grade did your father teach?

I6-He taught in the first cycle , first, second and up to sixth grade and later he taught high school (baccilerato) . In 1996, my mother became a teacher and she went to a rural area in a small town to teach classes. She suffered physical problems, when she traveled to work she would come across dead people or robbers she had to go to such a remote area to teach classes to earn her daily bread.

CW- Did she travel every day and you stayed at home?

I6-Thank God, our parents always allowed us to study, I repeat we didn't have luxuries but education and the basics. Yes, and my mother traveled every day. She would get up at 4 A.M. To leave at 5 A.M. and she would return home at 7 P.M. That was Monday through Friday and on Saturdays she would have meetings with the parents, but the life in El Salvador is very stressful and fast-paced (*agitada*) you work and work but don't see that you are getting anywhere.

CW- Can you explain this more why you think it is so stressful and fast-paced (*agitada*) ?

[06:18] I6- Agitated in the sense that there are people who work from 7 AM to 6 PM and minimum wage is \$150 a month and for a rural worker (*campesino*) one earns \$5 a day harvesting corn or feeding livestock, cows , horses and to earn for the basics everything everything went up because of the (conversion to the) dollar.

CW- When was that?

I6 During the Presidency of Francisco Flores approximately in 1997 and there wasn't an increase in the minimum wage , wages were frozen, one had to work for obvious necessity , for food , expenses , electricity all that and that's why people have to work every day of the week and your wages stay very low and you just can't make ends meet

for a large family.

CW- How many are in your family?

I6- There are five of us and I am the only girl and I decided to come here and I though I have an older brother and a younger brother, but I felt bad about my home situation, I saw that my mother would cry, and my father would worry a lot, and since I am very close to them and the opportunity came up to come here and I decided to do it.

CW- But how old were you when you left San Sebastian?

I6- When I was 2 years old.

CW- So you didn't know much about the life there or did you visit family there?

I6- Yes my father's parents and my mother's parents live in San Sebastian so that's why I always went to visit them.

CW- How do you compare life in San Sebastian to life in the capital?

[09:04] I6- Well it's very calm and peaceful there, and in the capital there is a lot of crime and if you go to a shopping center you have to take a van to get there but in San Sebastian you can just walk there, people are out walking peacefully everybody knows each other, its very different.

CW- But in some ways was life easier in the city, you don't have to cook with wood- how would you compare that?

I6- Well, there are advantages and disadvantages in the city, advantages in the sense that it is easier for women to go to market or do housework for example in town if you don't have electricity you have to iron with charcoal and in the capital you use an electric iron, in the town you cook with wood but in San Salvador with gas so there are things that make life easier and also in jobs because in the capital there are more jobs than in the towns and so that's why people always migrate to the capital to see if they can get ahead.

CW- And so with your mother working so much and you the only daughter did you have to do a lot of housework too or were you too young to help out at home?

I6-Well, my father is a person who taught us our values and our responsibilities, we had rights and responsibilities and part of those rights were to allows us to go to school, to have fun, but our responsibilities as daughter and sons we had to keep the house clean, keep things orderly, to eat as best we could and as the only girl , I would prepare food for my brothers and I would do other chores at home. My mother would come home late sometimes just to eat and we would see very little of her. And as we grew up we got used to it, that life was like that and we understood that it was out of necessity and thankfully it was not that she was going out for another reason, to go out and have a good time. No

we understood that the situation required it.

CW- It seems like that your family was very close-knit.

[12:30] I6- Yes we're very close.

CW- What kinds of things would you do to have fun?

I6- Sometimes I would go to play with dolls with my friends in front of the house, sometimes we would go to a park, to play on the swings and sea-saw and with my brothers we would watch T.V. for fun.

CW- At the park what did you play?

I6- On the swings, seesaws to play and try in that moment to have fun.

CW- Can you talk about a typical day?

I6-On weekdays we'd get up the bathroom would be crowded because everybody was getting ready for school or work, my mom and dad would go to work and we'd go to school and later we'd come back in the afternoon to do chores at home, have supper and go to bed. And the next day would be the same. We would spend more time with our parents on the weekends we'd plan to go to a park or to the zoo or to the beach to be together and enjoy the time as much as we could to take advantage of the two days we had.

CW- And on vacations?

I6- In El Salvador there are various vacation times, Holy Week, the fiesta of San Salvador in the capital .There are a lot of fiestas to take advantage of going to.

CW- So you went to the beach to the ocean?

[14:56] I6- Sometimes we would go to our favorite spot where there was a pool and a beach we go to have fun, to hang up hammocks, have good food.

CW- What kind of food?

I6- Shellfish, fish, fried fish, seafood soup, we'd swim all day and sometimes stay in a tourist center, where there was a pool and beach and we would do all these activities all day.

CW- Did you imagine when you were at the beach eating seafood that you would be working in a seafood processing plant one day?

I6 Never! I never imagined that coming here this is what I would be my job, but I did it to

help my family get ahead.

CW- So there is fishing over there as well?

I6- Yes, there is a lot of fishing over there too, there is the most well-know beach La Libertad where there are a lot of workers who are fishermen who make a living catching fish for people to eat.

CW- Do people eat a lot of fish in El Salvador?

I6- It depends if people have the means to buy fish and just as there are many types of fish at different prices, and if you have the money to buy it but its not something you eat all the time more occasionally.

CW- During vacations?

I6- On vacations or when you have money to buy it.

CW- Like during Holy Week?

I6- Yes during Holy Week its a custom to eat dried fish with eggs and rice.

CW- Although your parents worked, were they very involved in community activities or the church?

[17:57] I6- Of course, my father is a person who participates a lot in social events, and in part because of his education he communicates well with people so he participates in the neighborhood. He is part of a neighborhood organization and we all went to church like all the families on Sundays and when we could we would participate in religious events.

CW- What kinds of things does the neighborhood organization do?

I6- The work of the organization is to keep the neighborhood clean, to create programs for youth to distract them from the gangs for example soccer games, baseball games, fund raising events for certain people who are sick, to keep the neighborhood clean and to keep the neighborhood safe.

CW- Do a lot of people participate ?

I6- Yes there are lot of organizations and unions involved with a president and secretary and a large membership of people who are working to improve the neighborhood.

CW- So the main problem in the family was economic?

I6- Yes.

CW- So from watching T.V, and hearing from others, what ideas did you have about the U.S.?

I6- Only the people who hadn't been through the experience of being here, you think that in the U.S. you have everything- you have rights, you have money and that is the purpose for coming here so that the family can get ahead, to have pretty clothes, shoes. It is a desire that the majority in my country, El Salvador wants to come here because of the poverty there and the crime and social disorder that there is there.

CW- And as you mentioned that there was an opportunity that presented itself to come here , what was that and how did you decide to come?

[21:57] I6- Well, I starting my studies in Chemistry and Pharmacology at the University. And thankfully at the National University you didn't have pay much to go- I paid \$6 a month to attend and so it was affordable for my parents and the opportunity presented itself for me to go.

CW- How old were you?

I6- I was 17 -18 years old and I studied 2 and a half years until I was 22.

CW- You completed your *bachlllerato* (1 year more than U.S. High School) ?

I5 Yes I completed the *bachlllerato* and then was a degree student at the University, but I had some adolescent problems, not to say I'm so old now, but I was young much younger than I am now, and when you are young you get distracted and one of the problems was a family problem, after having such a close-knit family there were a lot of problems later.

CW- What kind of problems?

I6- Family problems because my mother was an alcoholic, she got that vice, and I as the only daughter and my mother let go of her responsibilities, after being such a close family, she became an alcoholic and so all the responsibilities fell on my lap. For example, cleaning the house, paying the bills, many things, I went out to distract myself too and I had to have an operation on my skin. I was very distracted and so I had to quit the University that for me was an enormous downfall, it really is painful because it was something that I wanted to do.

CW- Was Chemistry a very hard major ?

[24:06] I6- Yes, Chemsetry and Pharmacology. I really liked it.

CW- And the operation?

I6 It's a hair that is ingrown in a pore and the pores caused an infection, and so I had two operations and I got further behind at the University and I felt powerless. My brother had

a girlfriend who lived here, my older brother. And so my sister-in-law (girlfriend) said that she had won the *condina*, (pooled funds-each contributes \$100 and winner is able to withdraw what has been collected) which is what is done with certain people,

CW- To save money?

I6- Yes, and so she had half of the money, and if I wanted to come she would lend me \$3,000.

CW- Was your brother here too?

I6- No, he was in El Salvador but she was here with her family but she was in touch with my brother, after I told to my father that she lent me the money and he said that what I decide he would support me because he suffered a lot with my mother due to her alcoholism. And I was feeling so powerless because I couldn't pursue my major like I wanted, so he borrowed money about \$3,000, \$3500 so that I could come here, Within a few weeks the trip was arranged and I left El Salvador.

CW- Did you leave alone?

I6- Yes, I left alone but I had a guide the so-called *coyote*. The journey was very hard, to leave behind your family, your dreams of being someone in your country, and the situations that came up on the journey. I traveled to Guatemala by bus. In Guatemala to Mexico I traveled 14 hours by open motor boat (*lancha*) .

CW- In a *lancha*?

[26:42] I6- In a *lancha*, not a boat or cruise ship, there were about 30 of us.

CW- Did you go by way of El Peten?

I6- In Guatemala from Limn to Salinas Cruz in Mexico to cross the border it was very difficult to be in the open ocean for 14 hours where anything could happen- it was terrible . In Mexico we went by car thinking about our families but also the with the desire to be here the the goal of coming here to get ahead to do whatever you need to do. And Thank God I arrived on July 6th of 2006.

CW- Two years ago?

I6- Yes two years ago. I arrived in a poor physical state due to the journey and emotionally it goes without saying.

CW- Did you also have to travel by foot?

I6- Yes I walked some too but not too much . It was hard but when I arrived it also was a relief for my family, and I knew what I had to do.

CW- So you lived just with your brother's girlfriend?

I6- Yes, she was the only person I knew here, no one else.

CW- She lives in New Bedford, so you came here directly to New Bedford?

I6- Yes to New Bedford, I came with just a little bag with just a couple of personal things, that's all, and very tired from the trip. To finally arrive it was very emotional to finally arrive, it was unbelievable that I'm here in the United States.

CW- So it was this time of year- in July?

I6- Yes in July, I thought how pretty it was , it was very hot, and I was in the United States, that's what I had wanted!

CW- So to get from the border to New Bedford is wasn't too difficult, did you travel by bus?

I6- By bus and by car and van . From Houston I was taken to Boston, it took three days by van without moving, just one time a day to eat, you were hungry, thirsty and tired it was hard, bu the sacrifice was worth it to be here.

CW- What was your first impression of New Bedford?

[30:11] I6- On television I saw different places, some very beautiful and elegant cities. And I said, " Is this the United States" ? The houses were so different, there were a lot of people of color, others who looked Salvadoran. All kinds. And they explained to me where I was, what street, people who we might know from our towns back home, that was my brother's girlfriend who got me oriented- "here is where the Hispanic store is- her is where another place is- if you need to go here this is where it is, for doctor's visits you go here".

CW- So she gave your an orientation, did you live with her?

I6-I lived with her for six months, sometimes when you are alone your problems follow you, I was living with a very respectable family I like them a lot, but I had some problems with her, and I thought that it wasn't fair to be all alone. And later another cousin came from El Salvador on my mother's side, so we decided to share an apartment to be with a family member , to have someone who was related by blood who wouldn't want to harm me.

CW- So you felt isolated living with your brother's girlfriend?

I6- Very much so.

CW -Who do you live with now- still your cousin?

I6- My cousin was deported in the Michael Bianco Raid, he was in jail. I also was in jail for six months in Cape Cod, for six months.

CW- You were also in the raid you worked at the backpack factory (Michael Bianco facotory)?

I6- When I came I first worked in seafood processing and later I worked in the backpack factory.

CW- So can you explain a bit your first job?

[33:01] I6-My first job, I was so overjoyed-"I'm going to have a job!" and I first earned \$7,00 I was happy, I would be able to pay off my debt of \$6,500, I didn't think about my debt just my desire to work. I worked at (company name) its a job that you work for a season but other times not, and it's very cold there, there are freezers where they freeze fish.

CW- It's where they process herring -what's the name in Spanish?

I6- It doesn't have a name.

CW- And mackerel too?

I6- Yes, I had to wear three sweaters, glove for the enormous cold, it's 30 degrees or sometime 40 degrees inside all night long. We worked 12 hours..

CW- How did you get the job?

I6- The mother of my brother's girlfriend, her nephew worked there and so he got me the job, It was a tiring job, 12 hours, cold, freezing, my bones ached a lot, There was a dangerous gas that escaped that could kill you,

CW- What was the job specifically?

I6-There are many areas, one of them is sorting fish, it the fish was no good or cut, you would take it out and throw it on another line, or the small and big fish were sorted, The other was an area that normally women worked on where you had to place the ice in a certain form. For example there would be ice blocks that come by on a convener belt, that can be controlled and the ice blocks would come out to be packed, So its a long distance that the ice block travels on the belt, so you have to make sure that the block is positioned right for the people who are going to pack them. So you are on your feet, it might look easy but it's very tiring and with the cold, you get drowsy and that's what's difficult about it. And to have a job like that for the first time it was even more difficult for me.

CW- You had only worked at home at in school so it was that much harder?

[36:28] I6- Yes it was very difficult, very different.

CW- Was it a shift that you went in 7AM or could you be called in at anytime when the fish came in?

I6- Well sometimes when the boats would go out they would only bring back a little bit of fish, so it depended in how much fish the boat brought in to know how much you could work. If there was only a little you would work 2 or 3 days, Sometimes you worked 12 hours sometimes 8 hours depending on the fish brought in by the fishermen.

CW- When there wasn't any fish what would you be doing?

I6- I would do housework at my brother's girlfriend's house, cleaning, cooking.

CW- Did you get paid for it?

I6- No, I was living at their house, so it was a way to earn my keep.

CW- So they helped you out?

I6- Yes they helped me, they were very good people about that, they understood my situation.

CW- So that was during the time you lived with your brother's girlfriend?

I6- Yes and later when I lived with my cousin that's when we decided to apply at the Michael Bianco factory. And when I got the job I thought that a least I won't smell like fish! It seemed like an easy job.

CW- Did you know how to sew?

I6- No, but when they asked me I said yes because I needed the job, I needed to pay my debt, I wanted to get ahead that was my goal, I said yes but I had never done it before. They tested me before I got the job and luckily I did it well. And so I got the job. And it was employment that helped me a lot although being Hispanic, there were other people who didn't understand you so it was kind of hard by because of the need to be there to work there until the day that immigration came and took so many people away it was very difficult that day March 6th. I remember so many people just like me who were just trying to get ahead who had to go back to their countries to face the same poverty because we didn't have a way to stay in the country to get ahead with an immigration reform. I was six months in jail.

CW- Six months?

[39:41] I6- Six months in jail. Every day was very hard, I had a lot of chances to leave (to go back) but I wanted to stay in this country. I wanted to stay because I remembered the journey and what it took for me to get here, and I said that it's not easy to get here and although they wanted to send me back, I thought that it wasn't fair I want to get ahead, but having patience and faith it's very and to be locked up in one place.

CW- Was there anyone helping you on the outside?

I5- Yes there was a person, a friend who later became my boyfriend he respected me a lot he came every Friday to visit me in jail. He was there for me when I wanted to talk on the phone, he took my calls (collect) and that raises one's spirits, but still it's hard to be in jail, difficult, the food. Thank God the people working there treated us well, they knew we were normal people, we weren't criminals, it was just that we were considered criminals by the country because we broke certain laws, but we were treated well, we waited everyday for some news that they wanted to pass immigration reform, we prayed everyday for that, every moment we thought about the reform, but for reasons that some people think very differently, who are very selfish and it's not fair because this country is getting ahead because of many Hispanic people a lot of hardworking people, people from Central America, South America who come here to work . So one day I was transferred from the jail six months later and I was told I had to got to a court date. And I said " What" ? And they said , "you are free to go"- " I'm Free! I'm Free! Wow " ! After not eating well not sleeping well, to bathe with hot water, to be able to talk whenever you wanted with your parents.

CW- You couldn't talk to your parents then?

[42:40] I6- I had a \$25 phone card in jail and I had 10 minutes to make a call. My boyfriend sent me money to buy the phone cards every three months. When I was there my grandfather died on my mother's side , other friends died, it was very hard. But God...when one has faith to get ahead it doesn't matter the dark days, locked up in a jail cell but your desire to get ahead, to achieve your goals it gives you strength to strive for what you want, That day when they said that I was free, I didn't believe it- I cried, I jumped for joy. And I called my boyfriend to come and get me, because he was the only one I could count on . I and two others, of the thirty six of us women who were in jail there were released and the rest were sent back to El Salvador.

CW- Some were sent back quickly?

I6- Some were deported soon after (the raid). They didn't allow them to fight and some couldn't take it for long there it was too hard for them there and so they left. I was released.

CW- In what month?

I6- I was released in September of last year, I looked at the sky, the people, I was so thankful to given another chance, and I thought I could be back in my country in 12 or 15

hours (If I were deported) and I thought of the 22 days that it took to come here, it's so unfair, it's so unfair. But not even jail or immigration would stop me from continuing to struggle to get ahead and I continue to do the same today.

CW- So you are still going to court?

[45:05] I6- Yes I'm in a legal process.

CW- And is it possible for you to get a visa or a work permit now?

I6- Well Thank God, through the legal process I have been granted a work permit.

CW- Oh that's great!

I6- I was so happy because after suffering so much at the hands of immigration to be in jail and all that, Thank God.

CW- How was it that you were given a work permit?

I6- Immigration knew it was obvious that while we in the process we would need this permit, we couldn't just stay home doing nothing, we have debts, we have to eat, and as part of many circumstances that immigration there has been action against the company so several people have had the chance to obtain the work permit. And I am appealing an application for political asylum because of some of the problems my brother had and I was part of this. And my lawyer who is such a good person.

CW- From Boston?

I6- Yes, wow-it's good to know that in this country there are good people like everywhere, and bad people but there are many good people who want to help people and they are so good that you wonder how you can repay them and they are people who really want to help and thanks to these lawyers we were able to achieve something., there are such good people and I'm so grateful to them.

I got my work permit in April, I had lost hope I thought it wasn't going to come, but it came and Thank God, God does everything. And in certain respects it allows you to get a better job.

CW- So from September to April were you just at home or working?

[48:06] I6- I was working.

CW- How did you find work?

I6- I worked in the cranberry harvest for the season.

CW- What was the work like there?

I6- The work is very easy, tiring but easy. You are sitting down sorting out the berries that are bad from the good ones, it was a nice job but it only lasted for the season.

CW- You worked for a temp agency?

I6- Yes a temp agency and they too take their cut, so for example, if I earned \$100 they would take \$10, that's how it works. They found the job for me, but I have to pay for the person who works for the temp agency. And being undocumented I couldn't be hired directly . And later I got the job where I'm working now.

CW- How did you get that job?

I6- I have a friend working there who knew I needed a job, and she asked me if I could do the work, and I said I could . I think in life you have to say "yes, yes, yes" , you have to be positive of the things that you value or that you know you can do. Because if you are negative, and say "no, no", you won't get to do anything. You have to say "yes I can, I can". And yes, the first days are very, very difficult. I was hired at first by the temp company because of my situation, and later I was switched to the company after. And at first I looked at the work and said "What is this?" with the smell of fish, but it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter.

CW- Can you explain a bit about what this job is like?

I6- The job that I do is after the fish goes through the machine where the fish is split in half, and we who are working- it's only women, we clean the fish. Sometimes they have us working with the type of fish I called *bacallau* (cod) . So we have to take the worms off, clean them off perfectly.

CW- By hand?

[51:01] I6- Cleaning by hand and with a knife. A very sharp knife that sometime you cut your fingers, you get callouses on your hands. It's very dangerous.

CW- And it's all women?

I6- All women because they learn well and you gain experience as you go along with more ease with the work.

CW And are your earnings pretty good?

I6- I started at \$7.50 and later, at first it was hard , I couldn't clean the fish well, I was scolded "no don't do it that way". But with experience I learned from the other Central Americans. In workplaces like this I have seen very few Americans, very few. All of us speak the same language thankfully, I work with people who have the same dreams and goals to get ahead, so I was given advice on how to do my job better so that has made it

easier. You find the little worms and in time you learn how to do the work well. The work is tiring and certain respects dangerous. You are working with sharp knives, you can cut yourself badly, it's dangerous to get a very bad wound on your body. There is industrial safety inside the plant, but people and supervisors don't comply with it because it's easier not to take the precautions because there are people who don't want to do it.

CW- Do they explain these thing to you?

[53:24] I6- Where I work, no they don't , to tell you where emergency exits are- no, you are there but you don't know anything they just say be careful. You are on your feet , you start at 7 AM you get a break at 9:15 later at 12:15 for lunch, and back at 1 PM to continue working. Sometime you finish at 5 or at 3 depending on the quantity of fish. To be standing all day makes you tired. But sometimes when you are working, cleaning fish, you start thinking of your father or sometimes your mother and you think “ I'll send my check this week for this (back home)” and you are always thinking about your people. Thank God this year I moved in with my boyfriend , now we are a couple and we both have the goal of getting ahead.

CW- Is your boyfriend Salvadoran too?

I6- Yes he is Salvadoran.

CW- Does he work in seafood processing too?

I6- He used to work in seafood processing a lot but now he works in a place that is far away in Brockton, and when we met I knew that he understood that his family has needs just like mine. So I send one of my checks every month to my parents for family needs and for his family too. So we both have this understanding, if I don't have it he helps me out.

CW- Do you live by yourselves at home?

I6- Yes we live alone. We used to live with his family, but they didn't like me, so it was another thing, I said “why don't they like me”?

CW- What family was it, were you the only woman in the house?

I6- They were his brother and his sister and I said "no, no one should humiliate me or make me feel less than, I'm worth something". So it happened to me again, why? But he ran into someone who said that "no- she is a good person", so we decided to rent a place in our own. So it is going to be a year that we are together, getting along, he has his job and me cleaning fish, trying everyday to get up early. I walk but he takes the car. I walk everyday.

CW- Do you live in the South End?

[57:12] I6- Yes, from the South End I walk to work, sometimes it's raining, sometimes a good person will give me a ride. At work there are bad smells that can get you sick to your stomach, you get wet, in the cold season it's very cold. In the summer it's very hot. As in any job there are advantages that you get paid every Friday and the disadvantage to get up early, to be in danger of getting cut, for some, thankfully not for me, but for the others immigration can come.

CW- You don't have that pressure anymore at least.

I6-The final point is to obtain something to help out your family economically.

CW- But do you work full weeks or is work slowing down?

I6- In some seafood processing companies, work picks up this time of year. But where I work it has slowed down. You work everyday but for fewer hours. For example, you work from 7 AM to 12 PM so you only work 25 hours. And thankfully when the law passed that they have to pay \$8, I got a raise, and later when I learned more, I was given \$8.50, so now I earn \$8.50 an hour, so if you work 25 hours or 20 hours depending how much work there is. So these days it's been very slow but from September, October on work picks up a little.

CW- Do you work only on cod or other kinds of fish?

I6- Only cod.

CW- Is it fresh or frozen?

I6- Frozen, all frozen, in the hot weather sometimes the fish goes bad, it's an unbearable odor that can give you a headache, stomachaches, but you don't work with fresh fish just frozen.

CW- And so the product is shipped out thawed?

01:00:21] I6- Yes thawed, the process is that there are a large amount of tubs, from a pallet and after we work with 20 tubs of different sized fish and we follow the same procedure- we pick off the maggots, ensure that there are no bones, get it really clean, and there are others who are in charge of packing, and others who load the trucks.

CW- As you mentioned, you are working but always thinking about your family. Are you still in communication with them?

I6-My family like everyone else is very important to me, and above all your parents so we are in communication but now in El Salvador every time you talk by phone, you are charged 4 cents a minute. And so the phone cards last a little longer.

CW- How often do you talk to your family?

I6- Every 15 days every 8 days it depends on the necessity. If it were up to me, it would be every day, but it is another expense, so my parents understand. They are sad because their daughter is over here, but glad that I am getting ahead and that I'm well. And I am happy as a person, as a woman doing what I want in a country, where I'm not from here but I'm working for my family. There is always poverty, a lot of poverty everywhere in the small towns. It's up to me to help my parents, my grandfather economically, because my grandfather is sick, he had a stroke, he can't move and he has a lot of expenses.

CW- Is he at home or in a nursing home?

[01:03:13] I6- He is with family in the town and many of them are uneducated which impedes them from getting a good job. So I feel good to be able to help them a little. So at home there are no luxuries, but we have food thank God, but in other families there is a lot of poverty and they have great needs. The governments in our countries care about others things besides poverty. So my family Thank God are well, every month they receive some money from me, and they always have something to eat, they are in good health too. They are just getting older, but they give me strength to help them with the help of my boyfriend too.

CW- Hopefully someday you can visit them ?

I6- Yes hopefully- you can never be the same as who you are with your family. When you are sick or have problems, so you are never alone when you occupy a space in someone heart and it has been hard for me here but with a purpose and drive you can get through any difficulty. Nothing is impossible if you really want to, you have to strive, if you set your mind to it, nothing is impossible. It's hard to get ahead sometimes you fall, but you get back up again and you may fall many times, but if you are really fixed on what you want- you can achieve it. I never thought that I would ever be legal here. I had to endure a great sacrifice but I achieved it, thank God. You don't know what is ahead but you live everyday, go to work to keep going. You might get sick or have problems, but life goes on.

CW- So what are your goals to get ahead for the future?

[01:06:13] I6- My goal as a woman is to be a mother, because all women want this. But for now, I know it's not possible because to bring a child into the world is a great responsibility. I want to cover my needs, my expenses, to be able to help my parents. I feel that I won't be able to have many children. And my boyfriend already has been here 10 years. So since he wasn't married before, he was single so he bought land in El Salvador in our town San Sebastian. So our goal is to build our house. I know that I'm not from here and at any moment they can send us away.

CW- Does he have his residency?

I6- He has Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and he wants to apply for his residency, but

time will tell , things are getting harder every day, but if we build a house we can also have a business that can support us to earn our dally bread, to be at peace in our country. Although there is poverty and crime there, but we would be in our own country where nobody can say anything to us because we are from there. Unfortunately, there are no sources of employment, the population is high and you can't earn much from the work that exists in all of Central America. El Salvador its such a small country with a large population and that's why people leave. But I as person wants to feel what it is to have your own home and to have a family.

CW- But could you possibly achieve this goal here?

I6- Yes, I wouldn't count out that option, to have a family here, to get ahead. But God will decide. One thinks about the situation here, if there would be an immigration reform you could really gain a lot, it would be a great victory for so many people who have been here a long time. Some have been here 20 years and their stability here is uncertain as an immigrant .It would be a great help, I think we need to think about reform. In the sense that we are all human beings and many were immigrants (in this country), god willing it will come to pass soon.

CW-How do you think a reform would affect work in the seafood processing industry? There are many Central Americans working in seafood processing- would a reform change that?

[01:09:59] I6- I think that many company owners are taking a risk because the majority of Americans, I don't know-they are educated, but many don't get ahead, many don't work and they won't do the kind of work that a Central American will do. We are grateful for whatever kind of work we are given, we are not in a position to make demands. They say that we all have rights and of course we do- but if there were to be an immigration reform in the United States, I think that the companies, whether they be in seafood processing or stitching or any kind of workplace, it would mean that the owners would also be more sure of their workers, and the workers would have more rights and gain more benefits. One wouldn't be afraid that at any moment immigration could come. I think it would be a big benefit in every sense. In labor relations, because the workers wouldn't be afraid and there would be more jobs for people who can't work now because of the same reason of not having papers. And obviously this would help out the economy of the country, more exports and income, it would be a big help, but it depends on those above us, if we had the right to vote that would be wonderful, we would have made it possible years ago, but god willing it will come to pass, that's what all of us are hoping for.

CW- Do they ever talk to you at work about the topic of the fishing regulations, had you heard anything about that?

[01:12:] I6- Well to be honest this is the first time I am hearing about the regulations, what they say or what they have to comply with. When one goes to work, they don't explain anything to us. I know there are rules at work that one assumes, like you

shouldn't be eating at your work station, what to do with the fish and how to discard the parts of the fish, but I have never heard about the fishing regulations. I imagine that the supervisor knows about them, and others but they don't talk to the workers about that.

CW- Perhaps at your company where they process frozen fish it is maybe different than in the herring company that processes fresh fish, it has to do with the quantity of fish that can be harvested. It's an important topic because it means the difference between a 49 hour work week and a 25 hour work week that in turn the income earned has an impact on families.

I6- There are many companies that work with frozen fish and other that work with fresh fish, they take the fish directly from what the fishermen catches at sea, like the herring company that works like that. And in other companies it depends on what kinds of fish the fishermen catch and the weather has an effect too. And sometimes I have had the chance to talk to fishermen who are Salvadoran or of other nationalities about their fishing trips and they say "it was very dangerous" or that "there was a big storm out there", and about how hard the trip was. And I think, thanks to them we have our jobs, if they didn't take the risk, if they were not brave enough to go fishing then the people working at the companies wouldn't have work- it's all like a chain. Were it not for their bravery and desire to get ahead just like us, we wouldn't be working. The work of the fisherman is very hard and very risky.

CW- Are there a lot of Salvadoran fisherman?

[01:15:34] I6- Yes, I know some and some Honduran fisherman too and they are helping out there families. They earn a good income but they take a big risk with all the danger that is in the sea. Sometimes we don't value the work that they do, if not for them we wouldn't be working. The people who clean the fish all of us, those who eat fish at restaurants, we wouldn't have work otherwise. We should value them because thanks to them they contribute a lot .

CW- In general has working in seafood processing been a positive experience or a negative experience?

I6- For me, it has been very positive because it provides me with an income and income for my family. And to acquire knowledge about something new (is good) in this life you can always learn something. I learned how to do the work and I've met people who work with me who are also striving to make a better life for themselves and we do the best job possible. It's been a good experience because you are working with your people and we are all striving and as (undocumented) immigrants or those who already have a work permit, but we all have the same purpose to earn money to be able to send to our families, so it has been very good. There are advantages and disadvantages in terms of dangers like getting cut, you put on a band-aid and the next day it's like nothing and you go back to work . So it has been good, to learn how to live and to learn how work.

CW- And the disadvantages?

[01:18:01] I6- The dangers, to be subject to immigration, the dangers of getting cut or getting sick from the cold or from the odors. But it's good because of the income and what it provides for so many families in our countries.

CW- And here too.

I6- Here of course that goes without saying.

CW- Is there anything else you would like to share?

I6- No .

CW- We talked about a lot of things, it was a very interesting perspective.

I6- Thanks to this interview that there will be different points of view, the thoughts of each person is different-the experiences and lives are very different, but from this we can compare. "wow- that happened to me too, I worked like that " one compares with other experiences and it helps to motivate people. "Oh that was nothing" or "to be in jail is easy" it helps to know that there are a lot of people like me, that we had to leave behind our families to get ahead and to reach our goals and dreams that we all have. You just need the desire the strength and the courage to do it and to have faith that God is with you, and if God is with you , nothing is impossible, so I hope it helps others too to not give up easily.

CW- Thanks so much for sharing your story with us and your voice is very important.

I6- Thank you for allowing me to express myself about my experiences and a little about my life. (I hope) that this will serve a good purpose and to remind you that we are worthy despite our position as immigrants and that we all have rights but sometimes we are not aware of them. But it is good for us to know our rights to make it easier for us to be here. Thank You.

[01:21:13]