

Immigrant Seafood Processing Woman -Interview # 9

Anonymous
19 years old
Female
Seafood Processing-scallop processor, packer
New Bedford
Guatemalan

Interviewer: Corinn Williams
Transcriber: Corinn Williams

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Immigrant Woman Processor Interview # 9

CW Thank you for your participation, I am going to say it in English first then, say it in Spanish after and if there is something you don't understand just ask. If I am not speaking clearly or you don't understand some words just tell me, o.k.

Hi this is Corinn Williams it's January 15th, 2009 and I am going to be doing Interview number 9 of seafood processing workers.

(in Spanish) Hello, welcome. I am here to listen to your story if you are willing to share it with us. Every story we listen to of each person is different. And in this way we are able to better understand the experiences of women who work in the fisheries. And it's possible that government regulations are affecting your family and your life. This project is trying to listen to the voices that are seldom heard and you are not often asked about these topics and that is why your voice is very important to this project and because it allows us to better understand the lives of those who are working the fisheries and how your experiences are different than those of people who were born here. And as I mentioned, your name will not be included, it is anonymous, and we are recording this and this will help us to understand these topics. So are you in agreement that we are recording?

I9- Yes

CW- Yes, and if at any time you would like to take a break, just tell me. OK. First can you tell me how old you are?

I9-I am 19 years old.

CW-19 years old, can you say it again (adjusting sound) . What country are you from?

I9- I am from Guatemala.

CW- From Guatemala, from what part?

I9- I am from Quiche, Zacualpa.

CW- Quiche, Zacualpa, very good, so for the interview can you explain a bit about life over there, of life in Guatemala, of your family?

[03:13] I9- Well, life is very hard.

CW- Life is very hard.

I9- Yes

CW- How many are in your family?

I9- There are 12 of us.

CW- 12 are you one of the oldest or youngest?

I9-No I'm the youngest of my siblings.

CW- And are your parents still in Guatemala, what do they do?

I9- They are working in Guatemala.

CW- What kind of work?

I9- They raise corn and beans, only that.

CW-Just that, your father just works at home or does he work away from home?

I9-He works away from home, over there there is a village, Tunajá and that's where he works.

CW- In farming (*la milpa*)-

I9- Yes, raising beans, corn, fruits.

CW- Does he sell it?

I9- No it was just for us.

CW- And your mother? What kind of work does she do?

I9- She works at home.

CW- At home, what kind of work does she do there?

I9- She washes the clothes for my brothers and sisters, cooking, doing the cleaning, taking care of my brothers and sisters, all that.

CW- It's a lot of work, with 11 children.

I9- 11 children

CW- And here it's so different when you wash clothes, what do you do over there to wash clothes?

I9-What do you mean?

CW- Well here you have to go you a place to wash but over there in Guatemala, how it it (done)?

[06:04] I9-My mother washes clothes by hand.

CW- On stones?

I9- Oh, yes on the stones.

CW- It must take all day.

I9- Yes, she would wash all day, she washes dishes

CW- Does she only do housework or does she weave?

I9- No she doesn't know how.

CW- You were the youngest, did you go to school?

I9-My mother?

CW-No, you.

I9-No

CW- Why not , was it too far away?

I9- Yes it was very far away and we couldn't go to school because there was no money to study and also the school was far from where we lived like two hours away.

CW-Two hours, the school? So where you lived it was two hours from the town or two hours away from another village?

I9-From town.

CW- From the town, so when you were little did you go to town very much, or did you mostly stay at home?

I9- Not much, just my father and mother (went to town).

CW- And you would stay at home, so what would you do when you were little?

I9- I would take care of my brothers and sisters at home, doing the cleaning, washing clothes, cooking.

CW-Cooking, what would you like to cook?

I9- We would cook beans every day, just that.

CW-Tortillas?

[09:14] I9- Tortillas, coffee,just that.

CW- Yes, here it is a bit different, but were there other houses close by, relatives or neighbors?

I9- Yes

CW- Are they family or neighbors?

I9-Neighbors.

CW-But was there a road near the house , would buses go by?

I9- No, no buses.

CW- And how would you go 2 hours, by walking?

I9-Walking.

CW- So it was far-

I9-Yes

CW- How often would your father go to town-every week, every two weeks?

I9- My father would go every week or every two weeks to go shopping.

CW- But he didn't work outside of farming at home. So now you are working with fish, but did you know about fish or the sea when you were in Guatemala?

I9- No.

CW- Did your family go fishing maybe n the river?

I9- No.

CW- So you didn't know about fish at all?

I9- No.

CW- But there are rivers?

I9- Yes there are rivers. There are fish but they are small.

CW- Small ones but do you eat them?

I9- Some people ate them but we didn't..

CW- So to know more about life over there, would you get up very early in Guatemala?

I9- At 6, 5:30 AM

CW- To make food?

I9- Yes.

CW- What kind of food would you make?

[12:04] I9- Beans, just beans because we didn't have money to buy meat.

CW- Did you have animals?

I9- Animals, yes.

CW- What kind of animals?

I9- We have two hogs.

CW- But you didn't have them to eat?

I9-No.

CW- Just the hogs, any hens?

I9- Oh yes, hens.

CW- To have eggs, so you would get up at 6 AM to make the beans, what else would you do to start the day- cleaning?

I9- Cleaning, making tortillas, washing a few clothes.

CW-Every day you would wash clothes?

I9- Every day.

CW- Did you have water at home?

I9-No.

CW – Where would you get water? Did you have to go get it in a bucket?

I9- Yes we would have to go get it in a well about 15 minutes away to go get it, 15 minutes down the road.

CW- You would go with your brothers and sisters?

I9- Yes with my brothers and sisters and my mother

CW- And at home how did you cook, it's not like here to turn on the stove right?

I9-No, I don't know what they call it..

CW-Is it with gas, or wood?

I9- With wood..

CW- Where would you go get the wood?

[15:07] I9- In the mountains, we'd have to go look for wood and I don't remember how it's called, it's a big thing but I don't remember what it's called.

CW- What do they use it for?

I9- I don't remember.

CW- There is something these like a candle for light?

I9- Oh yes, that.

CW- They are on the trees, you went in the woods to look for those, you only went during the daytime in the woods?

I9-Just in the daytime.

CW- At night the animals come out?

I9- Yes, the animals come out.

CW-Have you seen some sometimes?

I9- I haven't but my father has.

CW- What did he see?

I9- Bears.

CW- Bears, really? But they didn't come up to the house?

I9- Wolves, just that

CW- No monkeys?

I9- Not monkeys.

CW- Because it's cool over there, is it cool?

I9- Yes.

CW- Is your house a little high up?

I9- Where the house is on a mountain, that's where we live.

CW- And it's always cool?- And do you miss it sometimes?

I9- Yes, I miss my parents, my siblings, aunt and uncles.

CW- Have you been here a long time?

I9-It will be going on four years.

CW- Four years, you must have been very young when you came here.

I9- Yes.

CW- How old were you ,like 15?

[18:00] I9- Like 16 years old.

CW- So you are going on twenty now?

I9- Yes I'm going on twenty years.

CW- Just 16 years old and your mother and father, did they go to church?

I9- No my father didn't go, just my mother.

CW- Just your mother, where is the church, in the town?

I9- No, where we live their is a church, an evangelical church and that's where my mother goes and my brothers and sisters and me.

CW- Was it far, or not too far?

I9-No, not too far, like a half an hour.

CW- Half an hour walking?

I9- Walking.

CW- And when there were fiestas in the town did you go?

I9- No, because we didn't have any money to go. My Dad would go to sell corn, oranges, fruits.

CW- He had land to grow food? Did you celebrate Christmas and birthdays?

I9- Yes.

CW-How did you celebrate like Christmas at you house?

I9-Well, I don't know how to say it-I almost don't have these memories.

CW- You don't remember how to explain them?

I9-No, what happened is that I had a problem when I was little.

CW- What kind of problem?

I9- A problem that I don't know if I can say...

CW- What problem?

I9- A terrible problem.

CW- What happened?

I9-When I was 12 years old.

CW- But what problem happened?

[21:05] I9- A problem, I'm not sure if I can say it, it's a problem when I was in my country. When I, when I was 12 years old, a man abused me.

CW- I'm sorry.

I9- And that's why I can't remember.

CW- Because you don't want to remember those things.

I9- Yes.

CW- Yes, how awful, was it someone you knew?

I9- What happened was that when I was 12, I went to the Capital to find work to help my mother and brothers and sisters. And it was there that the man of the house...

CW- You were working at a house?

I9- Yes, I was working at a house, after a while he abused me.

CW- I'm sorry, you went by yourself to the Capital?

I9- Yes, I went alone.

CW- And you found work at a private home?

I9- Yes a home.

CW- And after that you went back home?

I9- Yes.

CW- How awful, you just wanted to help them, your idea was to help your family.

I9- I went because I wanted to help my brothers and sisters, sometimes my brothers would get sick and there would be money to buy...

CW- So you only worked a short while?

I9- I worked in the Capital about 2 ½ years.

[24:04] CW- 2 ½ years, starting when you were 12 years old?

I9- Yes.

CW- So you stopped working there when you were 14?

I9- No, 15.

CW- So life in the Capital wasn't so easy.

I9- No.

CW- What was work like there?

I9- There the work was hard, you had to clean all day, if not, and you didn't do it well, the lady of the house would scold you and hit you.

CW- She would hit you?

I9- Yes, when I started working I didn't know how to do anything. I didn't know how to iron clothes, and the boss lady taught me how to iron clothes and once she said to me "today it's your turn to iron". I couldn't iron clothes. And what she did was burn my hands.

CW- She burned your hands- and you have the burns on your hands still (shows the scars).

I9- That's what I remember.

CW- She burned you with the iron?

I9- Yes with the iron.

CW- How awful, you can see it still (showing the scars).

I9- It's all here (showing scars on forearms), it was when she was showing me how to iron, what she was doing was ironing and she said "Today, you are going to iron". And I couldn't iron, because...

CW- You didn't know how?

I9-Because she told me in Spanish and I didn't understand Spanish, I didn't know what she was saying, I was there with her and she was showing me how to iron and she put the iron on my arms-yes.

CW- Just to scold you?

I9- Yes

CW-That's s so awful.

[27:00] I9- Yes it's awful.

CW- And how did you leave there, to leave that place did you have to escape?

I9-No I didn't leave the job just for that, I left because her husband abused me, it was two years later he abused me. That's why I left, I had to leave.

CW- Do you think that this happens to a lot of young women?

I9- Yes it happens a lot, to many girls out of necessity.

CW- For the necessity, I'm sorry, and that's why as I said many people have no idea about the experiences one has and being here in this country people don't realize what one has gone through and suffered.

I9- Yes

CW- It's very sad. So you returned home after working in the Capital, and how was it that you decided to come here?

I9- Well what happened is that I got married, a man fell in love with me.

CW- Was he from Zacualpa?

I9-No, from a village.

CW- From a village in Quiche?

I9-Yes, Quiche. He fell in love with me, he said 'let's go far away from here,there is no money and there are a lot of thieves, gangs’.

CW- And did he work in the Capital too, or did you meet him in Quiche?

I9- I met him in the Capital , because he was there going to school, that's where we met.

[30:01] CW- So he fell in love and told you “let's go over there”.

I9- Yes he said that, but when we met I told him “ I'm not a virgin”.

CW- What did you say?

I9- That I was no virgin, I'm already a woman. “It doesn't matter” he said. He fell in love with me.

CW- But you still felt bad from what happened?

I9- Yes

CW- But it wasn't your fault, you know it wasn't your fault. But you still felt bad.?

I9- Yes

CW- And you were just a young girl. So when he fell in love and told you that he wanted to travel (to U.S.), he didn't want to go alone he wanted to take you with him, he wanted to go with you?

I9- Yes.

CW- Both of you would go. He didn't like the Capital because of the thieves, gangs and all that.

I9- Yes.

CW- So you decided too come?

I9- To come here.

CW-And what were you thinking when he told you that he wanted to travel over here? What were you feeling when he said “let's goto the United States” ?

I9-He said “ let's go to the United States and we will work over there ,it's peaceful there, over here there are thieves and gangs, I don't want to be here”

CW- Were his parents here?

I9- His mother and father were here

CW- Here on New Bedford?

I9- Yes, so I said “O.K.”

CW- So you were ready to travel. So what happened when you had to tell your mother and father that you were going to leave, how did you tell them?

I9- Well , he went to speak to my mother, “I want to take your daughter to the United States” he told my mother and she said it was O.K.. And so I didn't say anything..

[33:25] CW-But were you sad to go?

I9- Yes

CW- You were a bit sad. But you didn't have any of your brothers and sisters who had come here or any family members who were here?

I9- He did.

CW- Just him but did you have family here?

I9- I had a sister and a brother (here).

CW- They came here before you?

I9-Before.

CW- And do they live here in New Bedford or in another state?

I9- Here.

CW- Here in New Bedford, so you had family here before you left?

I9- Yes..

CW-And can you explain a little bit about the trip what it was like ,the two of you left, but with other people?

I9- Yes with two-four others.

CW- With four people, did you leave from Quiche or from the Capital?

I9-From Quiche.

CW- Did you know the other four people- were they relatives?

I9-No just acquaintances..

CW- And from Quiche how did you go on the trip?

I9-I don't remember..

CW- You don't remember , you don't want to remember, was it a difficult trip?

I9- Yes very difficult, one has to walk..

CW-How long did you have to walk?

I9-How long?

CW-Days, hours?

I9- It took about a whole month.

[35:58] CW- It took a month? You left Guatemala and you had to go to Mexico by bus or walking?

I9-No by bus and after were in Mexico we went on foot..

CW- On foot, and how was that during the day or at night?

I9-In the daytime and at night.

CW-But it was a bit difficult?

I9- Yes.

CW- Were you able to cross the border easily, how was that?

I9- Well, I had to cross a rough river.

CW- A river, could you sleep at night?

I9-No

CW- Did you go with a lot of people?

I9- Yes, we were seven total..

CW- With the first group of four and others?

I9-No just seven.

CW- All Guatemalans?

I9- Yes.

CW- When you crossed the border did you cross by walking or by car?

I9-During the day, I don't remember, walking.

CW- And when you crossed to the United States, how did you get to New Bedford?

I9-In a car.

CW-How many days did it take by car?

I9-Like ten days.

CW- Ten days, I imagine you were very tired. What did things look like, what month was it?

[38:59] I9- I arrived the 21st of September of 2005.

CW- It wasn't too cold yet?

I9-No

CW- How did things look to you here?

I9- Good.

CW- And the food?

I9-Good.

CW- You liked it when you arrived here, so you arrived at your husband's mother and father's house?

I9- Yes.

CW- And how did you get along with your in-laws, you had just met them?

I9-Yes I met them here.

CW- And they were happy?

I9-They were happy to be with their son and with me too.

CW- So you got along, that's good. So had your in-laws been here a long time?

I9- Yes, like fifteen years.

CW-Fifteen years, so they were very used to living here.

I9- Yes.

CW- So did they help you, show you things?

I9- Yes.

CW- Do you still live at their house?

I9- Yes

CW- And what is it like now at home, how many live at your house?

I9- There are five of us.

CW- Five, who- you, your husband, your two children and your in-laws?

I9-My mother-in-law.

CW-Just your mother-in-law?

I9-Yes ,my father-in-law doesn't live with us anymore,he is living in another place.

CW- How is living at your house now, is it o.k.?

[41:55] I9-We are very sad now because work is very slow, it has slowed a lot, and we have to pay rent and bills, everything, food.

CW- And you work on seafood processing and your husband too, and your mother-in-law?

I9-Yes them too.

CW- So the three of you are sad because work has slowed down?

I9- Yes it's very slow, there are days there is work, other days there is no work.

CW- Can you explain about your job -what is it that you do now?

I9- What I do is clean scallops.

CW-Cleaning scallops.

I9- Cleaning, packing, weighing.

CW- When did work slow down?

I9- Last year.

CW- Last year it started to slow down.

I9- It slowed down and now they are only giving 20 ,15 hours

CW- 20, 15 hours a week.

I9-They are giving only 15 (hours per week).

CW- And you can't get a job somewhere else, have you tried to find work at another company or factory?

I9-Well the way we are without papers they won't give you a job.

CW- And your husband, what kind of work does he do, does he work at the same company or at a different company?

I9-No at a different company.

CW- He works in seafood processing?.

I9-Yes.

CW-Does he only get 15 hours?

I9-No he is not working now, there is no work.

CW-No work.

I9-When he works there is only 2 days a week.

CW- Its very slow, and your mother-in-law also?

I9-My mother-in-law is working. She is working 40 hours.

CW- So of the three, two of you are working very little, and she is working more, do you help each other out?

[45:04] I9-Well, when my mother-in-law is not working, and when work is..work is...how can I explain it, when we are working more, we can help my mother-in-law. When we are working less, she is able to help us out. Yes.

CW-Yes it is a help.

I9- Yes.

CW- You have two children, was your daughter born first?

I9- The girl was born in 2006 and the boy was born in 2008.

CW- He's little, what month was he born in?

I9-September, he is four months old.

CW- What was it like to have your children here?

I9-It was a little hard because now there is no work, and it is hard to have them here because they need to eat and if you don't have it, what are they going to eat? Nothing.

CW- It is very difficult now.

I9- Yes.

CW- And what kind of seafood processing does your mother-in-law work in?

I9- No she does cleaning.

CW- In houses?

I9-No in a seafood processing company.

CW- And the company you work at, is it big or small?

I9-No it's small..

CW- Hopefully it will pick up when there are more fishing boats going out?

[48:15] I9- No, now work hasn't picked up.

CW-It hasn't picked up, what a shame. That is very difficult.

I9- Yes it is..

CW- And are you paid in check are you working directly for the company?

I9- Yes.

CW- You don't work for a temp company?

I9- No.

CW- How much do make an hour?

I9-I make \$8.00 an hour. \$8.00 an hour.

CW- How many people work there?

I9- All told we are 15.

CW-15, almost all Guatemalans?

I9- Yes all of us, but there are some Portuguese and Americans.

CW- So the scallops come already in bags or do you have to clean them?

I9- No we have to clean them and pack them.

CW-And do you like to eat scallops?

I9-Yes, I like them.

CW- Sometimes they give you some to take home?

I9-They give us some.

CW And what I mentioned about this study, do they explain anything to you at work about when the fishermen go out to fish, when they can fish or not fish, do they talk about this at work? That work is slow when the fisherman are not going out to fish?

I9-The men?

CW- Yes the fishermen who are not going out to fish and that is why work is slow?

[50:54] I9- Well yes, what they are saying that we are not getting any scallops to clean because there isn't any.

CW- Why are they saying that they are not allowing the fishermen to fish?

I9-Because they say that no one wants to buy.

CW- No one wants to buy them and there are no orders in the restaurants, that's why it is so slow too.? And at home are you able to call your mother once in awhile?

I9- Yes I talk to her.

CW- How often, every week , every 2 weeks?

I9-No, they way it is now every fifteen days.

CW- And you help them when you can?

I9- Not now, I can't help because work is slow and there is not enough money.

CW And you have a sister and brother here?

I9- No my sister went back two years ago.

CW- She went back.?

I9-Only my brother is here.

CW- Does he work in seafood processing?

I9-Yes he works in seafood processing.

CW- Is work slow for him too?

I9-Yes.

CW- Do you think that this is affecting your family back in Guatemala because you can't help them?

I9-Oh yes, we can't do anything because work is so slow.

CW- You are the youngest, but of your siblings who are in Guatemala, are they going to school?

I9- No they are not going to school.

CW- Because the school is too far. So do you think that working in seafood processing is good or bad, how do you see it, the work?

I9- Well, bad because (tape ends) [54:06]