

## **Immigrant Seafood Processing Woman -Interview # 8**

Anonymous  
43 years old  
Female  
Seafood Processing-cutter, packer  
New Bedford  
Mexican

Interviewer: Corinn Williams  
Transcriber: Corinn Williams

Place of Interview: New Bedford, MA  
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### **Corinn Williams Interview of Immigrant Seafood Processing Woman # 8**

[00:00:04] CW-I am here to listen to the story of your life if you are willing to share it. Everyone's story we listen to is different and each story allows us to better understand the experiences of women working in the fishing industry and how government regulations and other factors can also affect the lives of women and their families. This project is trying to reach people whose voices are seldom heard. Your voices are very important to help us understand how the lives of women immigrants working in the fishing industry are different than those who have lived here for generations. And so are you aware that we are recording this and that we can use this interview to assess the social impact of fishing regulations and for other educational purposes like in an archive of oral history interviews. If at any time you would like to take a break just let me know and we can stop the recorder. So are you in agreement with this?

I8-Yes, I agree.

CW- So maybe we can start at the beginning, can you tell us where and when you were born?

I8- O.K. I was born in Mexico, in the state of Hidalgo, I don't know, do I have to tell my age?

CW-Well, maybe the year you were born?

I8- in '65

CW-in '65, in a city or a small town?

I8-No it was in Tolcayuca, Hidalgo its a small town.

CW- Tolcayuca, Hidalgo.

I8- It's in the state of Hidalgo.

CW- And what was life like at home with the family where you were born?

I8- Well, I was left without my father at 13 years old. (begins to get choked up). I don't know of I can do this...

CW-It's very hard to remember these things... so it was hard when you were a child?

(she takes a moment but still tearful)

I8- So, my mother worked a lot

CW- What kind of work did she do?

I8- She was a secretary

CW She was a secretary

[00:02:54] I8- We were always alone at home, I got married when I was fifteen years old, and at seventeen I had my first daughter, and although we were young we were very mature, he was nineteen years old and I was fifteen, it was very hard. He was very irresponsible, he liked all the other women, he never brought money home, I studied at beauty school, I worked to support my daughters. I could never count on him for anything.

CW- I know this must be hard to remember all this, but can you explain a bit what was it like in Mexico in the area you were raised?

I8- Its a very small town. I had a beauty salon, I studied and started my salon, I worked there and my three daughters were born.

CW- And your mother? How many children were in your family?

I8- From my mother, it was the second marriage of my father's.. From my father I have about 25 half siblings. From my father not from my mother . My father liked women very much, he worked and had many positions in the police-he was a Comandante, Chief of Judicial Police, Chief of Transit Police, He was a bodyguard of the Governor of the State of Hidalgo, so he was always armed with pistols always, and so he almost never lived with us, he was always away. We were raised with my mother, but alone because she was always out working. But total we are 25 half siblings.

CW- But how many in your family?

I8- Five.

CW- Five with your mother. And so your mother worked as a secretary and so what was life like with your mother?

I8-She would get up, get dressed get ready and went to work, and we went to school. We'd come home from school, we would clean make the food,and then she would come home. My father would show up once in a while.

CW-Once in a while

I8- Once in a while because he had a lot of households where he lived and other women and so I got married- not really married but we lived together (*juntarse*) with him.

[00:06:01] My life was difficult with him for the same reasons. He was very irresponsible. There were times when he hit me, so it came to a point when I said "no more".

CW- You couldn't take it anymore...

I8-I was 25, and when he was with us he would treat us badly, and if we weren't with him, he would threaten me. He always had guns, he was always armed so that's why I decided to come here.

CW- And how did you arrive at this decision? Because of the abuse and the situation you were in? And you had your beauty salon?

I8-Yes I had the beauty salon and I was doing well, enough to support my daughters.

CW- How many daughters?

I8- Three, I have three. And when the three were in school, for me it was a little more difficult because in Mexico it's not like here. At school you have to buy uniforms, and uniforms for Physical Education it's an expense for everything, a lot of money.

CW- A lot of expenses

I8- To start with they want you to buy a lot of things, books, many things so it wasn't easy. And so I asked him (husband) to help me but he said if I wasn't with him, he wouldn't help us. And if he was with us it was the same -he didn't help me he would only threaten me. "If you leave me I will kill your mother- I'll kill your siblings" or me, many time he would put a gun to my head. So for that reason, above all I decided to come here. To put some land (distance) between us. I came here alone and I worked a lot when I was here by myself for one year. And a year later I sent for them (3 daughters ). I got some money together and sent for them. For that reason I managed to come here. I borrowed to pay the *coyote*, to work hard in this country, so I worked to get money together, and a went back to get them. Here it has been very difficult too for my mother. And so at school it was very hard for the girls too because they didn't know one word of English. And for me it's is so painful.

CW-How is it that, with these stories that are so painful sometimes people don't realize how much one has suffered and endured to make the sacrifices to be here for your family.

[00:09:09] I8-For them! One doesn't come here to take anyone's job away, nor to harm anyone. One comes to work to get ahead for your children. So they went to school and learned English. I have been here 17 years and I don't speak much English because I have been working all the time. So it's been very hard, because the salary you earn is not enough to maintain an apartment. That's why many times we have to live together with a lot of people in one apartment.

CW- To share the expenses

I8- To pay rent, bills every month and with three little girls it's not easy. And as they grow up they need clothes, shoes, it's not easy. And so when I arrived I first worked in a jewelry factory for six years.

CW- In jewelry -a factory?

I8- I learned how to make necklaces, I learned everything.

CW- Here in New Bedford?

I8- No in Central Falls.

CW- Central Falls , Rhode Island.

[00:10:35] I8-I was there working three years after I moved to Bristol, Rhode Island because my oldest daughter started High School and I couldn't pick her up and I was working always and the school was far away so I couldn't do it. In the summer she could walk, but in the winter it's hard to walk. So in Bristol a friend told me that there would be a bus for her there so I moved to Bristol. But it was far not too far but far but with the gas I couldn't make it because it was just me working, and my check was just to support my daughters and to pay for the apartment. Many times I would go to the second hand store to buy them clothes, shoes. I couldn't buy them new things. So, after, Immigration came to the jewelry factory where I was working in Warren (RI). Immigration came, I don't know why, this was 11 years ago. Then we were all arrested but thank God that same afternoon they let us go. We were given a court date, but my daughters were alone, I said "If they take me -my daughters are alone at home in the apartment". That was 11 years ago.

CW- It's like what happened here in New Bedford.

I8- More or less, so she (oldest daughter) is now 23 years old, 11 years ago she was 12 years old. So they were all young minor children. And I was so afraid of what would happen to my daughters. So thank God they let me go and I had a court date. I went to the court dates, I didn't have any money to pay a lawyer-because-how? I went and I was ordered deported. I went to all the court dates to Boston, I found out how to get there and I went. But it was for nothing, the judge told me that I would have to go. They sent me a plane ticket to my house, but just for me. I didn't leave because how would I leave the girls here? I didn't have any money to leave so the next day I went to look for work. And that's when I started at the clam company.

CW- To this company...

I8- Of clams not fish.

CW- Still in Rhode Island?

I8- The company used to be in Bristol but later they moved here. I have been working there 11 ½ years. There is never a set hour to go in or to leave. Sometimes you work for 2-3 weeks, or up to three months we work every weekend. You work according to the season.

CW- According to the fishing.

I8- According to the fishing , the weather, if it's windy they can't (go out).

[00:14:12] I go in 15 minutes before 5 in the morning. But I never know when I get out, and they tell us hours before if there is going to be work or not. One never knows. Thanks God we have had some good times and I know how to adjust to that. But I have a lot of responsibilities. I started there doing cleaning, cleaning the floors whatever there was to do, I didn't care what I wanted was to work to support my daughters.

CW- Well just to get back to the subject, can you explain a bit about Hidalgo and the area you lived in, was it near the sea?

I8- No.

CW- It has nothing to do with the sea? None of your family ever worked in fishing?

I8- No, never.

CW- never?

I8- It was here that I learned what are clams, quahogs, steamers, mussels, oysters , lobsters all that.

CW- All that was new to you?

I8- All of it.

CW- And do you have any good memories of being in Mexico?

I8- No.

CW- Not at all, just bad memories?

I8- That's why I never went back to Mexico.

CW- Too many painful memories.

I8-Now its very hard although one is working, and you keep to yourself, the situation is difficult, economically it is very difficult.

CW- But did you have the idea when you were in the situation with your husband that was impossible and for that reason you made the decision to come here and that it was a way out, what ideas did you have about the United States. Did you have an idea from other people who had come here?

I8- Yes, one of the brothers of the father of my daughters had came here. He came when they we giving an amnesty here, he has his residency he went back to Mexico all the time.

CW- He traveled back.

I8-Yes he traveled back and forth because he could come and go. So I saw that it was going well for him, he had enough to get a house, he was single but he built a house and helped out his mother and everything, and so to leave it was very difficult, I didn't want to leave (my daughters) behind but I had to do it.

CW- And so your daughters stayed with your mother?

[00:17:24] I8-Yes I left them with my mother, and the next day after I left their father went and took them to his mother's. To me she was like a second mother, my mother-in-law. Because she loved me more than her son. She would always defend me so I wasn't

worried about that and I knew that they would be o.k. with her.

CW- Well I know it is hard but can you tell us a bit about the journey as it was your first time?

I8- Yes, when we left Mexico, it was about 11 AM. We left by bus up to Nogales, Arizona we were on the road for 38 hours. It was very hot, I came here in May. The heat was horrible, we had to put up with the bad smell of the bus that had a bathroom in it. The bathroom was horrible. But during that time it was very easy to get through. Now it is very difficult. But we arrived in Nogales, Arizona and the *coyote* put us in a hotel.

CW- Before getting across?

I8- Before we crossed, he put us in a hotel and after a car came and we crossed. I didn't even realize that we had crossed or what time it was when we crossed and when I realized it we were already in Arizona. Because it was easy, it was a night time and I didn't know the area, but for me it was easy to get across. But when I went to get my daughters, the it was harder.

CW- More difficult.

I8- We had to walk more, but it wasn't too difficult 17 years ago, it was easy to cross near Nogales.

CW- Did you go alone or with people you knew?

I8- I went with a brother of the father of my daughters and others I didn't know who they were. But it was easy.

CW- And so when you arrived in the United States you were in Arizona, where did you go after?

[00:19:59] I8- We arrived in Arizona and from there we boarded a plane and we arrived in Pawtucket to the aunts house of my daughters, the sister of the father of my daughters is where I arrived.

CW- She took you in.

I8- Yes she took me in.

CW- How-what did you do to get accustomed to life in the United States being here for the first time?

I8- It was very difficult. I arrived and I remembered that there was a taxi there and I that that the thing on the top was a police car and I was very scared- I thought "Oh no they are going to take us away!". But "no" my brother-in-law said "Its just a taxi- don't worry." During the time when I came here, there were very few Hispanics there weren't many. So they (relative) were in charge of getting me papers to work with, I didn't know anything, I came here on a Sunday, and on Thursday I started working that same week.

CW- At the jewelry factory?

I8-No but like the jewelry factory, we made Christmas ornaments to put on Christmas trees. I was there only a few days because I paid someone to give me a ride, but a friend of my sister-in-law found work at the jewelry factory, it was close to where I was working and I walked there and I got the job there. Thank God I learned how to do the work and the boss trusted me and one day he gave me some cases of pearls that I took home and I worked at night at home.

CW- And so you could earn a little more, and during this time were you in touch with your daughters?

I8- Yes, I worked from 6 AM to 6 or 7 PM, it didn't matter. One time we worked until 2 AM. Because what I wanted was to be with them (daughters). One year for me was a long time and for them it seemed like more. She was 5 years old and she came when she was 6 years old (youngest daughter is in the room during the interview).

CW- At the same time they were with their father?

I8-He still kept threatening me. He is a person that the day I married him he held me at gunpoint so I would sign the marriage license.

CW And you were only 15 years old and he was forcing you to sign?

[00:22:55] I8- In Mexico there is no justice. It's all about money and (with money) you can do anything. Everyone sells out and everyone puts up with it so there is no justice for women there, it's as if you are a piece of furniture.

CW- And so now, you were in Rhode Island, and you came here (to New Bedford) because the company moved here?

I8- They moved.

CW- So when did you move here to New Bedford?

I8- The company has been here like 11 years. We were only about 6 months over there, 6-7 months.

CW-In Bristol.

I8- I lived in Bristol for 6 years and I traveled (to work). When they moved they had another owner and he associated with another owner and so the new place only had the new owner. The other owner (in Rhode Island) I don't know what happened, they split. So the owner is the one we have had for the whole time here now.

CW- And so your life now living in New Bedford, what is a typical day like? Do you know whether you have work every day, or generally when do you go to work?

I8-I work every day. I work on salary and so I go in every day Monday through Friday, I'm there. And if there are clams Saturdays and Sundays I have to go in as well. So I have to go in every day.

CW- How many people work there?

I8- We are 50 people there, it is a small company, not very big.

CW- And the product is sea clams?

I8- Yes.

CW- From the boats?

I8- They bring clams from New Jersey, New York and from here, Massachusetts.

CW- What it is you do at work?

I8- The clams come in the shell, live. There are 14 cutters there they take the meat out of the shell. Everyone works by contract (piece-rate) of what they do. From there they go to the women who cut out the stomachs- you know- parts go to salvage, the insides, from there also by contract they go to another machine.

CW- When you say for contract, how it that- they are weighed?

[00:26:08] I8- . By the bucket they are paid \$1.90 for each bucket. Each bucket weighs 40 lbs.

CW- So they remove the meat from the shells, then...

I8- Yes, the men remove the meat from the shells and put it in a bucket, from there the meat goes into a machine to wash the meat and it goes on to a belt where the women clean them. Its hard work, difficult. Your hands get swollen, it hurts.

CW- Its all done by hand?

I8- Yes by hand. The men work with knives but the women work by hand.

CW- And in the cold....

I8- Yes many times, now the clams come in frozen and the legs are frozen and its tough. They go to another machine, and they are cleaned the meat goes to one machine and the salvage goes to another machine and they are cleaned then go to packing. They are packed in bags or in gallon tubs.

CW- But is it all raw meat?

I8- Yes, all raw

CW- And its sold to restaurants?

I8- Yes a lot of people come to the office but I don't really know what goes on because I work inside. Its in the office where they make the sales with the others, I don't know how much they cost, I don't know the process.

CW- But does the salvage go to another factory- who knows how do they use the salvage, but the product is sold to supermarkets or restaurants?



I8- Yes, I have to put the names on of all the clients. They have a lot of orders and a truck goes to Boston at 10 AM. That goes to various clients, to restaurants, to places where they resell the product to intermediaries I imagine. But I don't know much about that , it's the driver who knows or the boss who sells it. I know the processing side inside.

CW- And you work now for salary because you are a supervisor? How did you come to be a supervisor as you were explaining all about how to clean the product?

[00:29:20] I8-Yes I started by cleaning the floors, the machines and after each day I was given more duties, the boss would say "Help me label there buckets". I was one of the people who worked by piece rate, I labeled the gallon tubs. I started cleaning in the afternoons after the work was done. One day the boss asked me if I could come in the next day at 10 AM, he wanted me to help him label the gallons and he showed me how they cut the clams, how to pack and every time he told me to come in at 8 AM , then 7 AM until at one point I was going in at 4 AM. And when that boss left, she got sick and she left and I didn't know how to write down anything (in English) but I had to learn how to do it, because she left and didn't explain to me how to do it. I knew more or less but I didn't know the paperwork. And another boss came and one used to come in drunk and he would fall asleep at the desk and I said "what are we going to do?". There were a lot of bosses that the owners hired, maybe because the work is very hard and they were not used to the hours that you had to be there very early, at 5 AM , 4:30 AM. They would come for 2-3 days and then they quit.

CW- How many people are in the area where you are supervising-are they all women?

I8- They are women and men about 20 people more or less. It's not easy because I didn't want to do it because its not easy, there are people who are very difficult.

CW- Are all Hispanic ?

I8- Yes, there were Portuguese and Americans but they quit, it's too early, too hard, dirty, I don't know why they don't stay. No one treats you badly, the owner is a good person and the general manager is too. And I don't like to treat anyone badly either.

CW- Because you had been working there too before you were the supervisor, you worked on the line too.

[00:32:53] I8- I did it all, washed the floors, all of it just that the boss would give me more to do until one day I had to do it, to tell these people to do this and that. Its not easy because sometimes people get mad at you or they don't want to do something, you need a lot of patience. And I don't like to treat anyone badly or to yell.

CW-What kinds of problems are there when someone gets mad?

I8- There are some people who don't like being told what to do. One time there was a woman who told me that she wasn't used to taking orders , in her country she only gave orders and so she didn't want anyone telling her what to do here. But I said "this is my job and I need my job, and so I have to tell you because it's my job". So at times its not easy.

CW- It is a lot of responsibility. But in general are the conditions good or bad?

I8- Work now, it is bad there is very little , we are only working 3 days a week or two days.

There are clams only 2 or 3 days a week. I don't know what is going on I don't know if the company will survive. I don't talk to the owner, I can't speak much English, I understand almost everything, but to speak I can't. That's why I'm studying now.

CW- So work is very slow?

I8- Yes it's very bad, but its like that everywhere, I don't know if it's just here because there are no fishing for the boats, I understand that they allow a certain number of pounds that they can harvest.

CW- It's a quota with sea clams there are pounds per year it is a bit different than the other fisheries and so things are difficult and its very slow now.

I8- About two weeks ago we worked for two weeks steady but now its slow.

CW- How do you adjust to when work is slow, where there are not many hours from week to week, how do you adjust with the family when work is slow?

[00:36:00] I8-Well its not easy -you mean how we do with the money?

CW- Yes.

I8- You do what you can, you get together to see what to do, its difficult. I think that's why a lot of people are leaving.

CW- You find that there a lot of people leaving?

I8-They are leaving because there is no work.

CW- Are there a lot of Mexicans in New Bedford?

I8- I think so but really I don't know, I'm at work so much, but at my company there aren't many. There are a lot of Guatemalans, the majority are from Guatemala, some from El Salvador, Honduras and Mexicans and one Portuguese man. The Americans are in the office

CW- But you notice that people are leaving?

I8- A lot of people are leaving, my mother tells me that over there in Hidalgo a lot of people are going back. Many, many people in all the countries. If they are not going back on there own they are being deported .

CW- For the problems that are going on now. But is Hidalgo a place where a lot of people emigrate?

I8-Lately there have been a lot of people who have come here but now they are going back.

CW – But they are going back, but can you comment on your mother how is she doing there-is she o.k.?

I8- Yes my mother is o.k. she is old she is 76 years old now, we try to send her money for

her medicine and she is alone and has been widowed for 30 years. Now one of my brothers lives nearby and my sister is there, but she lives in Mexico City and my mother lives 2 ½ hours from the city. My brother sometimes visits but he has his own house but really she is alone.

CW- Have any of your siblings or half-siblings come here too?

I8- In total four have come here, I was the first who came, a sister came later and after two brothers and after another sister came, the oldest. Two went back and so now there are three of us here.

CW- Here is New Bedford?

[00:39:15] I8- Two of us are in New Bedford and one of my sisters is in Louisiana and we are working and struggling.

CW- And what mentioned about the purpose of this study about the fishing regulations, do you talk about that at work or do they explain anything about this?

I8- About what they are allowed to fish?

CW- yes.

I8- No I really don't know much about that, I know they are given a certain quotas and when they are finished they can't fish anymore. The owner is in charge of that and we are in charge of processing the meat to get it to market.

CW- Does the product come from another factory?

I8- No from the ocean, mostly from New Jersey come from New York and the rest from Massachusetts now. They are small boats they have enormous cages on them.

CW- Wasn't it one of those boats that split in two a few years ago, it was a sea clams boat that sunk?

I8- Maybe yes, because during the time I have been working I have heard of many accidents where people have died

CW- Yes it is very dangerous-and is it dangerous at work, using knives?

I8- Yes, the men cut themselves and get hurt because in addition to it being hard, one has to work as fast as you can because let's say you are working 5 or 6 hours they have to shuck as much as they can just to sustain themselves, right? They have to sustain their families as they get hurt badly, their hands get swollen, when the shells are broken, they get cut by the shells, I have even learned how to treat these injuries to help them because its not easy. And for the women too it's not easy their fingers get swollen their hands get numb.

CW- And its work standing up-right?

[00:42:13] I8-Yes the whole time standing and its dirty, because sometimes (the clams ) have a lot of sand or mud. It's a very dirty job, cold- It's not easy. None of it is easy.

CW- But you prefer working there, have you worked in other seafood processing places, or just there?

I8- Only there I don't like to change jobs, I try to be as responsible as I can, to (*echarle todas las ganas*) work with enthusiasm.

CW- And at home is it three of you?

I8-No with her (daughter) the other daughter and the two grandsons.

CW- And your other daughter is going to Mexico?

I8- No she is in Providence, she is married she lives alone with her husband. She is the one going to Mexico (daughter who is present at the interview). She wants to go to Mexico because she has been here for a long time and she doesn't know what Mexico is like. She came when she was 5 years old and she doesn't remember.

CW- And so at home you manage the family budget, and you help out your mother sometimes?

I8- She (daughter present) works too and we pool our money to pay the rent and the bills, for my mother because she is an old woman and she can't work and she is always sick- if it's not one thing it's another and she takes a lot of medicine, so we have to pull it out of somewhere to help her because she is my mother.

CW- So in general do you think it has been something positive to have worked in seafood processing?

I8- Yes , because thank God the job has allowed us to eat for many years and my daughters graduated from High School but she couldn't continue in school because of her papers without a Social Security number.

CW- And if you would have stayed in Mexico what do you think your life would have been like there?

I8- Oh I don't know- maybe I would be dead already! Because the father of my daughters is a very violent man who threatens everyone with weapons, so many things, it's not easy.

CW- Have you ever thought about returning to working in a beauty salon again?

I8- It's been so many years, just with my daughters, I cut their hair, give them permanents -how do you call it?

CW- Permanents.

I8- So it's been 17 years that I haven't practiced that.

CW- You would have to get a license again so it's complicated.

I8- No it's not easy here because of the language and the names of the products , so I wouldn't want to leave anybody bald! (laughs) It's not easy to get a diploma to be able to

work here and that's why I didn't work in that here, but for the language more than anything.

CW- What are your hopes for the future- for your family, your daughters?

[00:46:38] I8- I don't know, my oldest is separated from her husband and she has two kids, her husband was the same, an irresponsible man. He was very irresponsible and treated her very badly and she didn't want to be with him anymore and so we helped her because who else? We are family. And she (daughter present) is single, I don't know what she thinks but I hope she gets married and finds someone who knows how to value her. My other daughter is in Providence and she is working.

CW- What kind of work does she do?

I8- She works in a supermarket, but if (the economy) continues to be bad she may go back to Mexico too.

CW- But in Mexico...

I8- She will be going to a another state, her husband comes from Morelos in Michohacan and so if she were to go she would be in a different state than where she used to live but she would be in her country because here it's not easy, you live hidden you can't go out- it's from work to home, home to work- that is what life is like here. Work and there is no diversions, there is nothing. For the same reason, if you get stopped by the police and you don't have a license, you can't drive, and now it's worse, immigration shows up for anything (in Rhode Island).

CW-- But did you think that this climate will change?

I8- It depends, because work is so slow so the boss says that if things continue maybe in December the company will close.

CW- In December?

[00:49:00] I8- In December. But this week they said that will continue as we are until June of next year to wait to see if it will pick up again, but if not they will have to close. So for us if there is no work then we will have to go back to Mexico because here it's not easy because the days go by and the rent and bills are due and you have to pay. In our country, my mother has a house that's hers. I hope not because I wouldn't want to return to what was before and that's where their father is. And although he is remarried and has another family but he is a man that is there always and so I wouldn't want to go back. But if not- the situation is so difficult now.

CW- But if you were to have the opportunity to change your situation with your papers?

I8- I would hope that there would be (*Ojala*) but it's very difficult. Hopefully with the new president things will change for the better for everyone. For everyone because even the Americans who live here are complaining-those who are in their own country, and imagine for us it's worse. It's not easy.

CW- Is there anything else you would like to share with us in the interview?

I8- No I believe that's it- I'm sorry

CW- No don't worry, I know it's hard to tell this story and all that you have lived through.

I8- At first I said no that I couldn't do it but my daughter told me that it's o.k. There are people that think it's so easy, but it's not at all- but here we are -I'm sorry.

CW- No, no not at all, thank you so much for your courage to tell your story although it is so painful.

I8- I told her (daughter) Let's go because thank God we have enough to eat , clothes in our country we wouldn't have that. Here we know that working at whatever hour that you will have a plate of food on your table, it's very difficult.

CW-Thank You