



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview January 21, 2017

Calil, Tomas ~ Oral History Interview

Corinn Williams

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New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center
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Background

Name of person interviewed: Tomas Calil

Facts about this person:

Age 33

Sex Male

Occupation Supervisor, Bergie's Seafood

Residence (Town where lives) New Bedford

Ethnic background (if known) Guatemalan, Maya K'iche

Interviewer: Corinn Williams [CW]

Transcriber: Corinn Williams [CW]

Interview location: Community Economic Development Center, New Bedford

Date of interview: January 21,2017

Key Words

Fish processing, cutting, packing, fish cutting machine, pallet, orders

Abstract

Tomas Calil is from Guatemala and is a supervisor at Bergie's Seafood. He has been working at Bergie's for 15 years and knows all aspects of production at the plant.

Index

[00:00] Intro; from Guatemala and came to US in 2000 to join his brother who was working in seafood processing already. Brother found him his first job and helped to teach him. Brother still works in seafood processing but works elsewhere.

[05:21] In Guatemala worked in agriculture, corn and beans. His current job is to prepare orders for customers in New York and Boston which involves packing fish and putting them on pallets then wrapping the pallets. Begins work at 6 or 7 AM depending on how much work there is and how much time they will need to prepare the order on time. Process is unloading the fish from the boats then the fish is cut the next day. Fish cutters put the fish the machine then it is packed. Orders are divided buy the kinds of fish of different types in an order.

[10:15] Company truck delivers orders to customers. Workers are in groups, some cutting, some packing, putting ice in the boxes or cleaning up. There is a group of 25 workers who work well together. Many have been working together for 15 years, it is like a family. Uniforms are white coats, hairnets for hair and beards. They use gloves and knives to cut the fish, then the fish is put through a skinning machine.

[15:00] Compares work to agriculture in Guatemala, likes this work better. He works 40-45 hours a week but 30-38 during slower months. Work increases in February, March and April when there is more demand for fish during Holy Week. Best fish cutters have the most experience and practice to make sure there is no waste to lose product.

[20:01] He works with about 10 people who have a lot of experience cutting fish, 2 work on the machine and another group on the packing line. All in his team are from Guatemala but from different locations in Quiche. They speak Spanish, some speak K'iche with each other. Difference in men and women's jobs.

[25:06] He has worked at the same company for 15 years; was recently arrived from Guatemala when he started and was a little afraid but gradually learned how to do all the jobs required at the company. It took about 4 years to learn it all. He likes working at his company and doesn't look elsewhere for work because he knows how to do the work. The advice he would give to someone starting is to have patience and practice you will learn the job.

He has 3 children 10, 8 and 6 years of age; not sure if they will work in the fishing industry or another field. He plans to continue working in seafood processing in the future.

[31:37] End of Audio