



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview June 10, 2017

Moreno, Mariana ~ Oral History Interview

Corinn Williams

Moreno, Mariana. Interview by Corinn Williams *Workers on the New Bedford Waterfront*. New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center. June 10, 2017.

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New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center
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Background

Name of person interviewed: Mariana Moreno

Facts about this person:

Age 24

Sex Female

Occupation Fish Processing

Residence (Town where lives) New Bedford

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

Interviewer: Corinn Williams

Transcriber: Corinn Williams

Interview location: Community Economic Development Center, New Bedford

Date of interview: June 10, 2017

Key Words

Fish cutting, cutting machine, skinning machine, cod, haddock, packing, weighing, New Bedford, Guatemalan, *machista*, budget, savings, English, education

Abstract

Mariana Moreno is from Guatemala and has been working at Bergie's seafood since age 16. She has learned all of the job duties at the plant including jobs typically reserved for men like hand cutting fish. She discusses adjusting her family budget to fluctuating work hours. She was recently promoted at Bergie's and is always eager to learn more and take on more responsibilities in the workplace.

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(2:02) Introduction, from San Andres Sajcabaja, Quiché Guatemala. Came to US at age 16 to get away from an abusive family situation. Motivated by the idea that in the US you could make an independent life for yourself. Has a brother and sister who were here and an aunt who first came to New Bedford. There were no work or education opportunities for young women in Guatemala.

(5:12) First job was at Bergie's seafood, still working there. She didn't have work experience, only doing domestic work in Guatemala. Her first job were putting together boxes and cleaning at the plant. Trained by the owner and adapted over time. She now knows how to do almost all the jobs at the plant, operating the cutting and skinning machines, cleaning and cutting fish by hand, weighing and packing. Recently given a promotion by the owner to prepare orders for shipping.

(10:02) A typical day, getting ready with clothing gear and tools. Explains various tasks, cleaning, weighing fish at the scale, preparing the order. Fish packed after cleaned, day goes by quickly. If the machines are not working, she can cut fish by hand. She does whatever is needed to be done.

She likes to weigh fish and preparing orders, doesn't like standing in one place cleaning the same kind of fish for a long time, it can get boring. Explains process of cutting fish by machine, cut then skinned, covered with water and ice to be ready to fill orders. Packaged in 25 or 10 lbs. boxes or in (Styrofoam) coolers with ice.

(16:10) Explains how to cut fish by hand, depends on species, sharp knife V cuts pollack and haddock, other cuts on whole fish from head to tail, removing guts. Differences of machine and hand cutting. Fresh haddock or cut hand cut because machine could ruin the fish or sometimes the machine is broken. Frozen cod is cut on the machine.

(20:16) Looks at fish all day, doesn't like to eat it, just scup or salmon sometimes. Owner is very generous to share. Sometimes works in a group of four women. Or works alone on the machine, or cutting she works alone. Prefers to work by herself. Different nationalities at the plant, Guatemala, El Salvador, Puerto Rico, Portuguese. They all try to get along as best they can. She first learned how to do the job from her boss and now shows new workers different job tasks. People tend to leave the job when there are less hours to work during slow seasons 25-30 hours.

(25:17) New workers come in when there is more work, during the Christmas holydays, Holy Week and Easter when people consume more fish. Less hours August, September, October slower months 25 hours a week. She is able to manage because she puts away money in savings when she is working more hours. She is able to pay basic expenses during slow months. Lives with her husband who is working, but not in fish processing. She has a son, 18 months old. Talks about son's future, she is working hard so that he has a better future but not in the fishing industry. She likes her work and there are good people in the industry, but she hopes for a better life for her son, to get an education.

(29:55) She is hoping to study English, she wants to get ahead and improve her life. She plans to stay in seafood processing, she likes where she is, she has adapted to the workplace. Doesn't see herself changing jobs to start from scratch. She knows her job and her responsibilities but sees lack of better English skills as an obstacle.

(32:57) Advice to new workers is to work hard and to demonstrate that you are capable that will bring your reward. That has been her experience although it was not easy, she has worked very hard and put in a lot of effort into learning all the different kinds of jobs at her workplace. She does everything, even jobs that men do. She earned the respect of the company owner through her hard work. She had been offered another job and she resigned because she was working very hard and not offered any wage increase. She left but she was called back to work at Bergie's, which was unusual to be called back, and given raise. She feels that this experience has shown that she is valued for her hard work at the company.

(36:34) It was difficult to ask for a raise, owner of the company treats men and women equally. The owner gave her the chance to learn how to cut fish which is considered men's work. Sometimes the floor supervisors can be sexist (machista), they resent it that she can do jobs that are typically are reserved for men. She now has a 3rd in charge role that some men don't like. The owner recognizes that she doesn't allow anything to get in her way to not do certain jobs just because they are "men's jobs". She is willing to try anything without obstacles. Other women are different, she is the only woman at the plant who does all the different jobs. One must put in effort to make it happen. Recognizes that there is physical labor she can't do but any of the other jobs that don't require those abilities she is capable.

(45:37) End of Recording