



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview: 6/2/2024

Name of Narrator: Carlos Morales

Name of Interviewer: Samantha Mendez

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New Bedford Fishing Heritage
Center
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Background Information:

- **Name of person interviewed:** Carlos Morales (this is a pseudonym)
- **Age:** 54
- **Gender:** Male
- **Occupation:** Filleter
- **Ethnicity:** Guatemalan

Interviewer: Samantha Mendez (SM)

Translator: Susan Mendez (S)

Observers: Emma York (EY), Susan Mendez (S)

Transcriber: Samantha Mendez

Interview location: New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center 38 Bethel Street

Date of interview: 6/2/2024

Languages the interview was conducted in: English and Spanish

Key Words: fish processing, job, Guatemala, kids, education

Abstract: Carlos Morales came from Guatemala to New Bedford to find work to provide for his family. He shares his experiences in the seafood processing industry and about his job as a fish cutter. We learn about life in Guatemala and his education there, as well as how it set him up for success in aspects of his job. He closes his interview with his aspirations for his kids as well as for his future.

Notes: Carlos Morales is a pseudonym.

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[00:00] Introduction, background information. Carlos's family, friends, what it was like coming to the United States, and learning about the fishing industry.

[5:19] Carlos explains his roles and walks us through a typical workday.

[10:08] Carlos shares what he learned from and on the job in the fishing industry, concerns about job security and the lack of transferable skills as compared with other industries. He touches on his current job in a different part of the industry and talks about his education and how he studied to be a teacher in Guatemala.

[15:12] Carlos speaks about his education and work as a teacher in Guatemala. He describes how he had to leave that all behind and come to the U.S. to find a job due to the working conditions in Guatemala. He shares how studying in Guatemala helped set him up in some aspects for his job in the fishing industry.

[20:01] Carlos describes the differences between the education in Guatemala versus the education his children experience here in the U.S.

[25:08] Carlos reflects on how his relationship with fish has changed after working with it for many years.

[29:57] End of Audio

Full Transcript

[00:00]

Samantha Mendez: Hello, my name is Samantha Mendez. I am at the Fishing Heritage Center. It is the 2nd of June, and I am with

Carlos Morales: Carlos Morales.

SM: Can you spell out your name, please?

CM: OK, C-A-R-L-O-S. My last name, M-O-R-A-L-E-S.

SM: Thank you.

CM: You're welcome.

SM: This interview is part of the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center's *Casting a Wider Net* project. The audio recording and transcripts from this interview will become part of the Center's archive and the NOAA Voices archive, and may be used to develop future programs, publications, and exhibits. For my first question, could you please introduce yourself?

CM: In English or Spanish, because I'm comfortable in Spanish.

(Spanish)SM: In Spanish.

Emma York: What you're most comfortable in.

(Spanish)CM: My name is Carlos Morales, and I live here in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

SM: Describe the community you grew up in.

(Spanish)Susan: Describe the community in which you were born? That is, where you grew up.

(Spanish)CM: From here in New Bedford or from my country.

(Spanish)S: No, here in New Bedford.

(Spanish)S: Oh, it could be the country too? It could also be the country.

(Spanish)CM: Well, actually I was born in Guatemala. And when I am a certain age, I travel to New Bedford. And here, more than anything here, I have lived almost half of my life. And I have also worked in fish houses.

SM: Did you grow up with any connection to the fishing industry?

(Spanish)S: Did you grow up with some fish house system.

(Spanish)CM: No, I didn't grow up, but I did work with fish for a few years.

SM: Has anyone in your family been a part of this industry before you?

(Spanish)S: Has someone in your family been in that industry working before?

(Spanish)CM: Family members, mostly friends, have worked there. So maybe that's the reason we started working there too.

SM: Can you describe your friends for me?

(Spanish)CM: My friends, well when I came here the first time, one of them was called Andres. Almost well doing the same country where I come from. For that reason, I met that person. And during that time, he took me to the site of the fish houses to start working.

SM: What brought you to New Bedford?

(Spanish)S: What brought you to New Bedford?

(Spanish)CM: A relative. He has been like a cousin of mine, but he didn't exactly live here, he lived in another state. And with his information, we came here to New Bedford for that reason. I came to live here.

SM: Did you come with your parents?

(Spanish)CM: Yes, it was a relative. He was a cousin of mine.

SM: How did you find your job?

(Spanish)S: How did you find your job?

CM: At that time, when I arrived here, there were offices where they took people. They know where there is work, they send us to work there.

[5:19]

SM: What was your role in the fishing industry?

(Spanish)S: What work did you do at the fish company?

(Spanish)CM: In my first job in fish, I was mostly a fish cutter. This is when we cut the fish and also cleaned it. We did everything. First, we cleaned the fish, then processed it, and then packaged it. And it was a process that we did every day.

SM: Can you tell me about your first day on the job?

(Spanish)CM: For me it was a little difficult because since you have never done that in your country, once you get here, the work is all difficult because since you have never seen it, seeing it was a little complicated. But at least there were bosses who also taught you it for the first time. But you do learn to do everything. Clean fish, cut fish and also pack it. It was a process every day.

SM: Did you learn quickly?

(Spanish)CM: Normal.

SM: How many years did you work for this?

(Spanish)CM: I worked there for at least maybe eight years, in that company. But since in New Bedford most of it is a fish market, then almost, if you changed jobs, it was almost the same process in another place.

SM: Can you walk me through a day at your job, like from when you woke up until when you fell asleep?

(Spanish)S: If you can, tell us about a day at your work, from when you arrived at work until you went to sleep.

(Spanish)CM: Well, back then there was too much work in those years. You had to get up so early. At least we are talking about four thirty in the morning to get ready. Later, since the company was close to us, sometimes we would walk for 15, 20 minutes and work would start around five thirty, six. And it was all day. I finished work around four or five in the afternoon. Getting home is the same, it's just taking a bath, changing, and preparing food to make dinner. And it was always a process, so it was every day. He sometimes rested only on Sundays. They worked five or six days a week.

SM: Who are people you worked with at your job that you respected?

(Spanish)S: Who are the people you worked with that you respected at work?

(Spanish)CM: Well, I had to respect the bosses and the owners. If sometimes the owners came there, then it was always to be respected, and respect other people too. I mean, we didn't have to disrespect each other.

SM: What was the hardest part of your job?

(Spanish)S: What was the most difficult part of your job?

(Spanish)CM: The most difficult thing is when the work sometimes piles up, it's quite a bit. So sometimes there is a process of having to get the work done early, because like that work

sometimes has to be done at a certain time, and you have to get it done, then you have to work a little faster to get the work done.

SM: Why did you stick with it even after this difficulty?

(Spanish)S: Why did you keep working, even though it was a bit difficult?

(Spanish)CM: It was for the same reason, that since we only had work, we had to do it, because it was a job that we were doing and it was part of the job.

SM: Have you faced any inequalities in the fishing community?

(Spanish)S: Was there any type of inequality in the fishing community?

(Spanish)CM: Inequality?

S: Inequality. Or were you disrespected at work.

CM: Of all the fishermen they lacked respect. Well, that didn't happen to me almost always. They treated me well. They didn't disrespect me.

[10:08]

SM: Has this job taught you anything? If so, what was it?

(Spanish)S: If the job taught you anything, what did the job teach you?

(Spanish)CM: How? Can you repeat the question?

(Spanish)S: So, if work taught you something, to this day, what do you feel work taught you?

(Spanish)CM: Really, what fish cutting is, that one learns from doing that work, is generally not a profession that one earns, that is, one that will be useful in the future, but rather it is nothing more than a job like supporting the day, but it is not that one has any experience left. Because if we have experience how to prepare fish, but for one's benefit it has no benefit, because the fish market is a season sometimes, it is not all the time. It is not the same as construction or painting. If you learn that profession, in the future you can work anywhere and you will have a job instead of the fish cutter. You can learn to cut that fish, but only there, and if it stops working, we are always out of work sometimes. So, a little complicated.

SM: Were you ever scared of losing your job because of this?

(Spanish)CM: For that reason, one is a little nervous because when sometimes one works in the fish cutter, it is a season, it always happens like that sometimes because one grasps that experience only right there. But you can go look for another job somewhere else, it is practically not competitive for another type of job.

SM: Can you tell me about your current job?

(Spanish)S: Yes, can you tell you a little about the work you are working on now?

(Spanish)CM: Ah, well right now I'm almost there, I mean, it's a store. But the work is also different, that is, it is like organizing products, it is also another type of work that is not comparable with fish.

SM: Would you want your kids to work in this field?

(Spanish)S: How?

SM: Would you want your kids to work in this field?

(Spanish)S: Would you like your children to work in fish?

(Spanish) CM: No, not really. For that reason, sometimes it is better for children that they study, that in the future they have a job or that they have a title or something so that they can defend themselves because in the fishmonger you do not gain experience. It works, but it is only temporary.

SM: Did you get any education in the United States or in Guatemala?

(Spanish)CM: Only in Guatemala.

SM: Can you tell me about your education?

(Spanish)CM: In Guatemala I graduated as a teacher. It is the teacher teaching the first or sixth grade child. But it's in Guatemala, here, well, I don't have one. I studied a little, but I don't know, just English for a few years. But not too much. Because of the work situation, no, I mean, I didn't dedicate myself so much to studying.

SM: Did you ever learn anything from your students that you take with you this day?

(Spanish)S: What did you learn from the students you taught that you still remember to this day?

(Spanish)CM: Yes, I remember.

(Spanish)S: What did you learn from them?

CM: That I am here in the United States.

(Spanish) S: No, no, no, from the students, but you didn't get to study, did you?

(Spanish) CM: No, I studied here, but a little, not much. But in Guatemala I came to teach. Nothing, I only taught, but I only gave my internship for only six months. I just finished getting my degree and I came here again because of the situation that no, there was no quick work to be found and also the situation was difficult to start working quickly.

EY: I'm curious, what did you like and not like about being a teacher in Guatemala?

(Spanish)CM: Teacher is fine, but the thing is that it is also difficult to find work. And if he finds one, he has to send them away from the place where he is. And he doesn't pay very well and what they are going to pay him is almost not much. For that reason, I just got my degree and came back here, to the United States.

[15:12]

EY: How did it compare being a teacher in Guatemala to your job and jobs here in the US?

(Spanish)CM: From here I think one would have to speak English well and compare [translate] your job title to see if one would quality, but it would also be a bit of a process to study.

EY: Do you, I feel like (this might need translation) do you feel like your role as a teacher ever translated into your work here? Or did you ever take on a teacher role or skills here?

(Spanish)S: Like yes, the work of a teacher, if you did it here, like it helped you do something?

(Spanish)CM: Yes, it helped me somewhat, because yes, I mean, I defended myself when I tried to speak English, but I knew it was what you have to do to survive and I was able to do that. In that way, yes, my education in Guatemala helped me.

S: He's saying that it did help him because he became a better person and how to help other people and stuff like that.

EY: Did you ever support someone else at your job?

(Spanish)S: What did you do to help people in your work?

(Spanish)CM: Yes, more, yes I helped a few, because also in my country there are many people, in my country there is a lot of dialect, many people who speak, they barely speak a little Spanish, so there are many people who speak a dialect. And since I also know how to speak [that dialect], I helped them more or less.

S: He's saying that in Guatemala they speak a lot of dialects. So, he knows a little bit, so he helped because he speaks that, but they have like seven or eight, so they have to translate. And why he said that to be a teacher over there, they don't get paid a lot, and also they have to go to small towns, sometimes they have to walk, sometimes they don't even have a car to go, not even transportation. You know, the worst part they give to the new teachers. That's why he came here,

because the money wasn't, and he only did the bachelor and he worked six months, but the six months that he worked was like to get like the mask, they give you like a couple of months that you have to accomplish to get the title. So, he accomplished that, but then he didn't find a job, so that's why he came here.

(Spanish)CM: It was difficult to find a job quickly because as well as if one had acquaintances in politics or where a situation that gave them work gave them a job. Even if you get your degree, you don't know if they don't give you a job.

S: He says you have to know politicians or someone that's higher than you to get a better job, because if you don't know nobody, actually they don't help you. If you have a title, they don't help you.

EY: Do you feel like that was the case in the industry here? Did you need to know someone to get the job, or was there other ways?

(Spanish)S: Do you feel that when you came here to the United States to work in the fishing industry you needed to know someone to enter a place, a factory to work?

(Spanish)CM: What if I need someone? Oh, like someone I knew. Yes, I knew a man.

(Spanish)S: So that's why they sent him to work.

(Spanish)CM: That we needed it.

SM: Yes, he said, yes, yes.

EY: Did someone help you get that first job?

S: Yes, he said a guy helped him.

(Spanish)CM: He worked there, so he said he needed staff, so he took us to work.

S: He said that he worked there, he said he needed a person to work for him and that's how he got in.

SM: Would you say your education went to waste?

(Spanish)S: Do you think that your education was lost, how come you didn't take advantage of it?

(Spanish)CM: Well, I really didn't take advantage of it since in this country I imagine that one has to speak English well, write so that perhaps one tries the way to, perhaps get a job that is a little more compatible in the teaching branch, I think it is a little more complicated.

[20:01]

EY: He has children who went to school here in the US?

S: All of them.

EY: Yeah, I was going to ask how your kids' experience of school in the US has been and how it's the same or different from your own experiences in school.

(Spanish)S: How do you feel about the difference in your education to theirs? What do you feel has changed?

(Spanish)CM: No, here the education of children is more advanced than one's country.

S: He says it's more advantaged than his country.

(Spanish)CM: They haven't entered first grade yet and sometimes they are already teaching him how to do numbers, how to write and on the other hand it's hard. Aya has to be at least in first grade or second grade and he's learning little by little.

S: He's saying over there from seven or eight, that's when you start learning letters, words, but over here it's more.

CM: But already at an age of seven to eight years.

S: Yeah, he's saying it's like seven or eight. It's like over here they start in preschool, and they learn more.

EY: I know you said you wouldn't want them to be in the industry. What do you hope for them?

(Spanish)S: What do you want for your children?

(Spanish)CM: For me, I want them to have a career, although not a big one, but at least they know the value of their work and to value themselves.

S: He wants them to acknowledge and to prepare themselves for not something big, but at least something that they don't have to go through the work that he has been.

SM: At the time, what were your aspirations for the future?

(Spanish)S: At that time, what was your aspiration for the future?

(Spanish)CM: Well, at that time, my future was only to work for a season and return to my country, but the truth is it did not happen like that.

SM: Would you say you are proud of where you ended up?

(Spanish)S: What?

SM: Would you say you are proud of where you ended up?

(Spanish)S: Do you feel proud of where you are working? No, no, right now. Right now, where you are, do you feel proud?

(Spanish)CM: Well, for me right now I am also working as, not proud because anyone can do that job, but I know that you don't need much experience to do it. I also know that it is not a career that one has or that one is worth, but that it is like any job, it is normal, that is, it is not doing good work. Just from organizing the product one will not have much experience in that either.

SM: Would you say you still have aspirations for your future?

(Spanish)S: Do you have aspirations for the future?

(Spanish)CM: No, not much, but my aspiration is to return to my country.

SM: Why do you want to go back to your country?

(Spanish)S: Why do you want to return to your country?

(Spanish)CM: Because really here in the United States it's work all the time, so it's almost not life, and you reach a certain age and you can't put up with work. So, what one needs is to rest or have a little house to more or less sustain oneself. Well, in the mind sometimes you think, but sometimes in reality it doesn't come.

SM: When you came to the US, did you have the American dream in mind?

(Spanish)S: When you came to the United States, did you have the American dream in mind?

(Spanish)CM: Yes, I had.

SM: Would you say you met that dream?

(Spanish)S: Was that dream completed?

(Spanish)CM: No, not yet.

EY: I wonder what are you thinking when you were thinking of the American dream? Or what were you envisioning when you came here?

(Spanish)S: When you came to the United States, what did you imagine? What did you think it was going to be like in the United States?

(Spanish)CM: My dream was to come here to the United States, have a good job and earn well, and help the family, because in my country that is not possible. You work, but you don't have enough to help your family. So, you had to do something and fight for them to have a small home to live in.

[25:08]

SM: What do you hope people learn from your story?

(Spanish)S: What do you want people to learn from your story?

(Spanish)CM: Well, the people who hear from my story, well, you just have to keep working and fighting. And this is the way that if you can have a better job, it is much better. Because even today things are more complicated. In other words, the entire economy has risen and there is not enough money. Although you earn well, it is always spent.

SM: Is there anything you would change about your years here in the US?

S: Yes, something that you would change over the years here in the United States. How was it? What would be something you would change in the years you have lived in the United States?

CM: Yes, maybe if I had started, maybe I would have had the opportunity to study. Study, have a... most of all, speak English well. I speak it much, but not much. I know that the main basis was to speak English well and then you can he get a better job, that's what I thought.

SM: Would you like to share anything else?

(Spanish)S: What else would you want to share? One more story?

(Spanish)CM: Well, really the story, well I know that just as I have been here, well, New Bedford has always been a fishing town. And there has always been, the most that remains of us, the close company, which is all about fishing. And for that reason, sometimes if you don't have transportation, you can go far from getting a good job. Because the company sometimes has to travel a bit for you to get a good job.

SM: That's all my questions. Thank you.

EY: I'm curious, I can't understand everything, so

S: Oh, you do? OK

EY: No, I can't.

S: Oh, you can't, okay.

EY: So maybe this was already discussed, but it sounds like he's no longer in the industry.

S: No, he's not.

EY: Do you still have friends or past co-workers who are still in the industry?

(Spanish)S: You're still in contact with people who work in the fishing industry, right?

(Spanish)CM: Yes, but we talk to each other, but not close, close.

S: No one close, but friends. No close friends.

EY: Do you hear anything from them about how the industry has changed, or did you notice any changes in your years?

(Spanish)S: Have you found that I now want changes in fishing, in the fish factory?

CM: At the moment, since I haven't been working for almost a few years now, it's almost not the same type of work, I have almost no idea if it is like before or not, but I do hear that the fishing business has dropped. Every year more, it seems that they have cut jobs because there is not a lot of fishing as before. Before, there were many companies which places you go and they give you work and part of that is that there are not many types of fish in New Bedford.

EY: Did working with fish change the way you eat or cook with fish? Do you eat or cook with fish?

(Spanish)S: Do you cook fish at home?

(Spanish)CM: When I was working on the fish, I didn't cook. I didn't eat the fish every day.

S: No, he didn't. Every time he saw the fish, he got home and he didn't want to eat fish.

(Spanish)CM: For now, yes, sometimes yes.

S: Now he does, but before, he didn't. It's a little bit hard. When you work all day, you saw fish, sometimes you can't eat anymore.

(Spanish) CM: But now, it's different.

EY: Do you have any other questions?

SM: No, that's all I have.

EY: Well, thank you so much. (Spanish)Thank you.

CM: You're welcome. (Spanish)You are welcome.

(Spanish)SM: Thank you very much.

(Spanish)CM: You're welcome.