

So do you agree with the terms of the agreement you just read?

Yes I agree.

Ok. So what is your first childhood memory?

Long Pause...(Pauses Tape)

Ready? Something I remember from my childhood, um, playing with my older brother (laughs) and one time I...we were cutting coyoles, it's a type of fruit, and I was little, I don't remember the exact age, but he was cutting them and was putting them on a plate because he was planning to take them to the teacher. The teacher who taught at the school. And, and I was asking him for some but he didn't want to give me any so I got mad and got a rock and, I was little, and I got a rock and bam I threw him one...I threw it and hit him on the head. His head was bleeding and later he was crying. And he went to tell my mother and my mother came and hit me with a belt. She really hit me. So...its one of the first memories I think that I have.

And how did you like going to school? (2:31)

Well I liked it because the school was...there was only a, a fence that divided one house from the other the school was one house down from the house we lived in so we liked going because even the kids would come to play in the front part of our house, the teacher ate there, and we felt like the school was part of the house, part of the family. So and it was fun because all the kids came and I played. It was nice.

It was a community very...(3:08)

It was a nice environment, it was, it was not like here, like the kids don't want to go or something or don't go, on the contrary, I felt like I was home, to say it like that. it was nice.

And did you get along with your siblings? (3:23)

Yes, only when, kids always have differences, right, sometimes I wanted my brothers' toys or something like that and, and well, sometimes for example, the older brother was five years older, no, and then when one has memory he, I went to the school there but he went somewhere else in Santa Ana because there were no grades where we lived, only until third grade in those times. So he wasn't there anymore. So there wasn't much. But with the other younger siblings well always. There was a sister, a girl, and she was the little girl and sometimes if you just looked at her and she didn't like the look you gave her she would go complain to the mother there and say "Look he's bothering me!" but in general it was a normal life, a tranquil life.

And around 10 and 12 years old, what was a typical day for you? (4:30)

Well it depends, hija, because the strange thing is, for example at 10 years old, I didn't study there anymore because there weren't any classes there. So my father, put me, put me in a school that was called El Resbaladero that was far. On one side if I lived at the house, my dad would take me, I would take a horse to a place to take the bus so the bus could take me, right, to the school. and for some time that's what I did but during the winter it was too complicated so I went to live with my grandparents because there one of my aunts also went to my same school and I would go with her. So from that age well life began to be, well, more difficult. Right, because...well that was the studying part, at the living level where I lived, it was a hamlet, the country, life was nice well because, like I comment to you, one lived in contact with nature, with the animals, in the woods, we would go in those days...depending, well in the country there's all kinds of things, no, animals, fruits, naturals that one has there. There were mangos, there were anonas***, there were pomegranates, there was everything, we would climb trees. We had a life like...here they would call it wild now well in the world we live in but for us it was part of our habitat we enjoyed it. Like I tell you, fishing. And in those days there was no television well, not even electricity where we lived. Can you imagine? The difference, you can have an idea. So we sometimes in the summer for example, in the time of the nice moon and all that we would get together away from the houses, the young people and the kids and we would tell folktales, well stories, because there was no TV right, only radio so the older people told stories, folktales or jokes and we would have fun. It was a way to have fun and in a wholesome way. It was nice.

So you were used to being in a community, to living in a community very, very close. Everyone was close? (6:57)

It's that the place I grew up in was well, like special. Because there weren't many people but the majority of people were like family, the majority, right, we are, well the majority was, let's say 80% of the people that lived in that community had the same last name, we are family. So the other people well, the same they adapted, they accommodated because the religion was the same, right, we all liked soccer, we all shared everything right, there was no violence no problems like that...of discrimination so to say.

And how was it when you went to live with your grandparents, was it different? (7:46)

Well it wasn't for very long, maybe less than a year but it was nice too, it was different, well, because one didn't know the same people, one missed the house and the parents, right, and the friends, well, because there I lived with them and the aunts that were all older. And there were less, less friends. But well, it was a time of sacrifice to continue studying, well, it was a price to pay, being away from the environment where one had developed.

And after you finished school? Did you go back to live...?(8:30)

Then...well in that period, when I was still in that school, I remember, that, well an aunt died, an aunt of ours. That was younger right and my mother was a very sentimental person and she...I remember how she cried when we went from where we lived to where the grandparents lived, there were about 5 kilometers maybe, or maybe a little more, and my mother did not stop crying the whole way. Ah, crying and well, it was, one was, one was little, and well didn't even know why, like, why people feel, express themselves in that way. And after that school because of the same reason that where I originate from there weren't, there weren't any more grades, the school was small, and there were only two teachers, and there weren't students either for there to be more grades. Then I, for fifth grade I was moved to another school. I was there, I studied there until grade six I think, the sixth grade. It was also far. I had to take the bus, I would take the bus everyday and my mom would make me food, she would make me some cheese pupusas with cream, sometimes of beans and I took them, it was, she was always trying to, to, well yes, provide for one, no, to make one feel comfortable, but the pupusas were so good but from eating so many and later I got bored of them and I would change them with my companions for other things. Well that was when I was 12, 12 years old. I was in that school, at 13, almost before turning 13, when my mother died. Ah, that was, everything changed, well, because after that I, it was bad. After that I still studied, for seventh grade I went to another school, it was closer to the city. But that was all I studied. I stopped, I didn't continue, everything fell apart, well the family situation, the home, all that. It was an impact very, very, tremendous.

And you weren't there, you weren't at the house when that happened? Were you somewhere else? (11:30)

No I was at the house. I went to school but lived at the house. But she, she like had gotten sick my father had taken her to the hospital, she was in the hospital, she died in the hospital. The day that she dies, I was at school, I didn't know, they came there to tell me. And, and it was pretty strange because, well aside from the loos and the feelings and that...they came to tell me at the school so that I could accompany another person to, because I knew where my grandparents lived, they had gone to live in another place very far, near the port of Acajutla. Ah, it was far it was more than an hour by bus, hour and a half I think, and after that you had to walk still and we had to go tell them and so they could come back at night so they could come to the vigil. Because people, well, no one knew. There were no telephones, there was no way to communicate in those times. And, and well, we came back to the house in a taxi because well, it was winter, it was pouring that when we came back that taxi driver didn't even want to go in because the roads were bad, right, all that mud and everything. Mudflats everywhere. We got to the house almost at nine, ten at night, and there were so many people all there. **AND...** and I was doing due diligences, right, instead of like, like a kid whose mother was...crying, instead of grieving, there was no time to grieve because one was doing things that should be for a person, a child, no. But that's how life is sometimes.

So you didn't have an opportunity to grieve? (13:26)

Ah, it's, it's, that I was so young that I didn't, at that time, I didn't comprehend the consequences of the loss and all that. Well maybe I, since we talk about my mother, I, before my mother, two months before, my grandfather had died. That had been another problem, that I wasn't...well after my mother died, well I felt it. The sad part came after, after everything passes, the movement and the people and all that. the emptiness that I felt at the house, I felt like, even though we had our grandmother that was our refuge, but we still felt the...and I remember that sometimes at the house, I felt strange at night and I would go into the woods and I would sit down and remember and think...about my mother and about...well I didn't feel like being at the house, well, it felt empty, right, so it was bad. Well...that's how it happened and well time makes things, makes you forget and erase things. But it was hard. I was, I hadn't even turned...I hadn't even turned 13 yet. No, it was something every impacting.

And you said everything began to fall apart, after that happened, in what sense? (15:06)

In every aspect, because, for example, well we were a united family, in which my father was, well, the community leader. And because of the same type of society we lived in, well the father the man is, let's say he was, but my mother was the one that controlled the house. Without her there it wasn't the same. My father was busy with his things and no one, no one controlled us. We had, how can I say, we had more liberty and having more liberty, well, one is more exposed to things. Negative things. Ah, well because my mother was very strict, she, one bad word that she would hear from you, she would slap you well, like for you to not say that. And out of respect and fear, tried not to do or say things we weren't supposed to. Instead without that, my father, like I tell you, sometimes I wouldn't see him. And aside from that, my father, it was like the death of my mother affected him very much, he also changed. He tried to immigrate to the United States, the first time he came back and had only gotten to Mexico, no more, and I don't know what happened on the way that he changed his mind and came back. Ah, he came back talking about the pretty touristic places in Mexico. He talked about El Tenampa where there are mariachis and things. And he came back but a few months later he tried again to come, that time he go to...he crossed the border but was caught and got deported. Well, that was such a short period he came back about a year after and he got married and formed another family. So well, everything happened in less than a year. And I well, it was like that...

How did you feel that everything changed so fast and that he started a new life so fast? (17:24)

Strange, well strange even though at the house well, we lacked nothing because my grandfather, my grandfather sent one of my mother's sisters to live with us to help us with the housework and to take care of us, right, so she could help Mama Yanda with making the food and the housework. But when my father got married, well it was different because his wife was a young woman and well, I felt strange. It was...by that time I was fourteen years old but at that time I was doing things I shouldn't have been

doing so to say. Because well, I had liberty, like I said, mi father well, to him his religious things and his things, of the, community and he was, he was interested in those things and well, no, I think maybe it was about ignorance, I don't know, but it was like he didn't care about the day to day of his children so to say.

And do you think it affected you to see how my grandfather was more focused in religion instead of you [and your siblings]? (18:50)

For me, yes hija, I think it affected me so much that, that today that I am an adult, I'll honestly tell you that I'm not, not I don't see religion as something good or bad, but I don't feel the need to go. In a way I feel a form of rejection. Because he in his way of seeing things or thinking of those things that...he obligated us to read, to be involved and when it is obligated in a bad form, well, it isn't the same as when its something you're born with and it's something you want to do. So I feel rejection and I don't even go to church.

And if you want, like fast forward a few years, like why did you decide to come to the United States? (19:55)

Well I don't know, if you want we can go to that or...

Oh no, go on if you want...(20:16)

No that's why, I will tell you, since you want to know...for example when I tell you that in those years at fourteen years old I was doing things I shouldn't have been doing, at that age I started smoking, and because I would interact with adults, they would give me beer, they would give me drinks and I didn't know, I thought it was fun. I played soccer, after I would bet money, I did things that well that a child...Ah, well and because I was always with adults, I was good at playing soccer so they would invite us and we "celebrated" they called it, and we got swept into it. Then all those things affected me.

But how did you become involved with those people, because you have told me these people were much older than you, but how did start getting involved with them? (21:07)

Well its because it was the same people of the community, well the same crew, so, for example, like I said there was a lot of land in front of the house where soccer was played. All the older people would come to play soccer in the afternoons. So I was young but because I had virtues to play, we could play with the adults and play at the same level or even better. So we would get involved with them. We were in that environment and maybe we didn't live or the process of development like adolescence, like from childhood jumping to adult, like the older people and all that. And we would go to, to other cities or other **cantones** to play. And we were in the middle of adults. So...now how I decided to come to the United States, well it was because, in that process that I'm telling you, that my father got, got married, when my father came back for the second time before getting married, my older brother who in those times was eighteen years old, talked to my father and he wanted, because he didn't either, it was like what happened

with my mother had affected him and he didn't want to study. He was in high school at the time. And he told my father that they should buy a pickup, a vehicle, to work instead and make a living in a comfortable way. So they bought a vehicle. That was before my father got married. And a time after he had gotten married, we were going to see a soccer game in San Salvador of el FAS. And he had about ten people there in that back part of the pickup and when we were going to San Salvador he didn't have much experience, he was driving too fast, he had an accident...tremendous, right, there were many injured.

My godfather was driving? (23:27)

Aha. So after that, he was traumatized by the, by the accident, he decide to come to the United States, my older brother. And when he had established himself here, well he was the one that, and I asked him, right, if he could help me come because in that time, another thing that made me, that influenced my decision to come to the United States was that in El Salvador, in that time, at the end of '79 to '80, the process of the revolution was developing for the civil war. And I felt some sympathy, a great sympathy, for the opposition, right, that were organizing to combat the government for all the injustices that were in the country. And I was determined to incorporate myself at their side but the opportunity to presented itself and I talked to them and well told them, "Look, I am going to try to go to the United States, if I get through its not meant for me to incorporate myself." Right, the side of the guerilla but if not then I'll stay there and everything ends there. And I think that in some way, well that influenced me and Thanks to God, well, I don't know if for good or for bad like they say but I got through and I established myself in the United States and I've lived here since then.

And how did you correspond with my godfather? (25:11)

Well by means of letters. By letters because in those times we didn't have a telephone. Over there where I lived in El Cobano they didn't exist not even the cable of the telephone not even electricity no nothing. The only way was through letters.

And the guerilla asked you or did you go looking for them to...(25:33)

In those times the guerrilla wasn't around, it wasn't established as such. It was that like people, right, everything was, its was under water like we say because the government forces were there too, right, watching everything watching where people came out of. It was only people that get together and conversed and talked, they were leaders. So well, I, I wasn't, let's say directly contacted, no. But there were people that were organizing, right, but then they talked to me and they knew I, lets say, the same sympathy for the process. Ah, because we were like between the wall and the sword. In the same hamlet there were representative of the military. They called him the Commander of the Army. What those guys do is recruit people to take them to the army. So those men had an eye on us that we were adolescents, thinking, no, to take us to the army. So there was another, we had the pressure from that guy he already knew us, and he was from a hamlet different from ours, we were troublemakers, tremendous, he didn't like us. So he was hungry for us, like we say over there, like to recruit us and put us in the army. So, right, I

talked to my comrades, or my friends, and the majority agreed that first the guerilla over the army, because to us, because the army, well their philosophy, the form of expressing themselves, they said it was to defend themselves.....but well, the truth was they defended the interests of the powerful and the rich. Right, and us seeing that and _____, so how were we going to defend the interests of those people? Instead being able to defend the interests of the working class. It's simple.

So in what year did you leave? (27:47)

The year that I emigrated from El Salvador? I immigrated in January of 1980.

So you weren't, you didn't live there for much time during the war? (28:00)

When, before I emigrated, the war had not yet been declared. A lot of things were happening, like the guerilla was abducting the rich and powerful people to get money and to finance itself in its, its process. And the _____, that were already established, already knew the people that sympathized or were involved in politics, they would take them and kill them and in the morning the dead were in different part. Like sometimes I would go to the city or hear on the news "Two, three dead were discovered". And that's where that started. But not yet, there wasn't an open war. But that escalated, I emigrated in January, around March, I think of that same year, was when they killed Monsignor Romero. And that was what gave more flame to the thing, right, because he was, he was like a representative of the interests of the working class, of the humble. And to see that he was giving mass and saying there should be peace, to respect the people, that, they kill him. Right in mass. Then that well, even people that maybe weren't, weren't in that, right, incorporated themselves and it happened. And then that's when things got, things got serious.

And how was your voyage to come here? (29:48)

Well, I would say it was easy, in those times everything was easy. And I, I, even though I was humble, from humble origins, I thought I was _____ and that I could figure things out on the way. On one side, I was excited but on the other side, like I tell you, right, it was sad for example, my grandmother...she didn't want me to come, right, because she loved me so much. But at the same time, she knew that over there, there was no future, there wasn't even hope. More because of the war, because of the economy, because everything was changing, no. aside from that, my father had I think, _____ the land. A land where we lived and she didn't trust it, she felt like, because poor her she didn't know, she had a feeling like, like, I remember her telling me before I left, not to forget to help and pay the debt my father had because she didn't want them to kick them out of there. Like lose it, right, and she in her, in her humility and everything, but she had a feeling of something like that. si my voyage was, was strange because...then I remember that not even buses went there to El Cobano, I came to Santa Ana in a pickup truck. And after, I was looking for the bus that was going to take me directly to the capital of Guatemala, right, that left there from Santa Ana a Bulma they called it, it was a nice bus. But in results I couldn't even find that one when I got to Santa Ana, there I has to take one of those big buses that

went to the border with Guatemala. And from the border with Guatemala, to another, until to the capital. When I got to the capital of Guatemala, it was already nighttime almost, it was getting dark. From there I took a bus that took us to the border with Mexico. But we got there in the middle of the night, we got to the border, like around one in the morning, so we couldn't pass, we had to stay in the pueblo at the edge of the border there. Tecun Aman it seems like it is called, we stayed there, we were there until the morning with other people who came on the same bus. Some people from Honduras and from El Salvador that were coming. There in a park walking and talking until it was morning because well, there weren't any hotels or anything to stay at for...for the next day at first hour to be able to cross the border. But since those Mexicans are some thieves, see I had a visa, for Mexico right, because in those times no, since it was different not too many people emigrated then, they gave visas. They gave me a visa. But when I cross the border they tell me that I can't pass because they wanted me to give them money "una mordida"*** like they called it. And I tell him, "But I have a visa." The scoundrels said no, ah, because I didn't bring enough luggage they told me because I only had one small bag with a...two outfits no more. Well, I had to give it to them, I don't remember maybe 500 pesos, to be able to pass. And from there I took a bus to Distrito Federal. To the capital. And because I will, I was in a rush to get to my destination, so from the capital I took a taxi, that took me to the Terminal of the North that they called it to take a bus that would take me to Tijuana. And I remember that was funny I had a taxi driver, those Mexicans are so funny, that he was talking and talking but because they have different accents, right, he was supposedly telling me jokes and he would laugh and I didn't understand him. "Who knows that this guy is talking about" but at least he didn't rob me, right, he was honest, he charged me and took me to _____. When I got there I bought my passage directly to Tijuana. I didn't know the obstacles that I would face on the way but I bought my direct passage. Well not to tire you, it was...I was out of El Salvador...from El Cobano a Thursday in the morning. A Monday morning, I was in Tijuana. It took me four days by bus, of course that I didn't even shower or anything, because well, I didn't stay at a hotel or anything, I just kept going straight, like the cousin would say.

Mhmm (34:30)

Aha, but look I was lucky...because those Mexican authorities are thieves. When you pass Guadalajara until Tijuana, going over there, there are stops on the way where they stop and check the bus and see if anyone is an immigrant and they take them off the bus. And if you didn't give them money, they wouldn't let you pass.

From Guadalajara to Tijuana? (35:00)

Yes, well that happened many times. So I was going and they were taking and taking money. Well at, at the end I had about ten or eleven dollars, I think, but maybe it was what is convenient. A man came on, a man that was Mexican. Because there are good people in Mexico too. And he came with this big hat and sat next to me and I sat next to him. And since I was a teenager I was only seventeen year old, I looked young, so I...I...and I told him the story of what they had been doing to me and that I didn't have

anymore money “Ah, don’t worry son” he told me, “I will help you and you will see...” and the man was coming sipping on some tequila and he gave me some, right, and because I was used to those things, right, I took a shot. But look, I, look, when we got to _____ there in Mexicali like they call it...he told me “You fake like you’re sleeping and I’m going to tell them you’re my son and that’s it” right, and when they come, because those guys come like this***with a flashlight, they stop the bus and since its nighttime, no, they are shining face by face, right, and if they see something suspicious, be it by the clothes or the appearance there are questions or if they hear you talk...

Yea...(36:23)

They detect you. Well I did like this***, I even got down in the seat, right, so I could look smaller. And the man “No my son is sleeping” and that was it. What a difference! See the difference that the word of someone does, right.

Mhmm (36:38)

So they didn’t take me off. I got to Tijuana...and well when I got to Tijuana it was, it was difficult because I didn’t even have money and I didn’t even know where to go. But when I got to Tijuana, there was a taxi driver there and I told him the story and he told me “Ah I’ll take you to a hotel that’s there, near here” he told me. And see he charged me a lot, right, because what I, what I had he took it he said “Give me that and I will take you to a hotel there”. But he helped me because the woman of the hotel that was right, well the hotel was here and you see the line and on the other side is the United States. Especially that I was on the second level I saw well from there. Well he already, those guys already know those people right.

Mhmm (37:26)

He took me to the hotel and the women...he left me there. Ah and she attended to me well. She said to me “There’s no problem stay here” because she knew that I responded, right, physically for...for the money. I didn’t have money but someone was going to send me money.

Mhmm (37:42)

So she gave me a room, she even gave me cigarettes because I smoked, me she gave me food, and that’s it I went to...I went to take a shower because I hadn’t showered. The hard thing was that I had never known what hot water was, well, and the water fell on me, and the hot water fell on me and I got burned “How does this work” I was saying to myself, in El Salvador I had never seen hot water (laughing). Only the water that came from the mountains that came out burning. And I asked the woman and she came to regulate it and told me how to shower, right, and that...but being in that hotel...she let me borrow the telephone so I could call my brother. Ah so my brother, since he didn’t have papers either, right, but he had a friend who was Mexican and he sent him to bring me money, to be able to pay the hotel and buy food while they got a coyote*** that

would take me to the other side. So he came a day later...he came the next day...this guy came and he took me in his car to eat tacos, right, and he bought me some beers there and he even left me with cigarettes. And well the woman gave me the food and see the difference it makes.

Mhmm (38:50)

That's why the connections, the contacts, the connections are very important, sometimes more than the money...well I was there...until...I came a Monday. But he...my brother, I think he couldn't find anyone to take me over...they didn't pass me until the day of Wednesday. Because the day Thursday, I already was, I got to Los Angeles. Around five in the afternoon I got to Los Angeles on the day of Thursday...of the next week. I left Thursday and got there Thursday. So in eight days I was in Los Angeles. But the funny thing was, that, the crossing of the border was fun, no, like I tell you I was at the hotel...

Mhmm (39:39)

I could see the river that divided, no, but the river was on the side of the United States, even the...the fence, ___like that. at night I could see the helicopters that were around. Well the day that...that they were going to pass me, the person came, the coyote, to pick me up...and I thought that he would pass me directly but it wasn't like that. Instead he took me to another house and I was there, I was there all afternoon. There I stayed refuged like waiting for nighttime to come. And he went to look for others...other people right, because I wasn't the only one to cross. The fun thing was that since they had their holes, right, I crosses the, the bar and I went in and that's it we were on the side of the United States, but the river was there. Only a shallow river that was there. That, that...and right there is Tijuana...no San Diego that they call it...there in Tijuana, there isn't much there. There's no desert or anything, none of that, instead there are some bushes...if you cross the river...there...but the river was almost dry...some got in the water, others over rocks. There are some bushes and there are highways right there, the streets and the hotels and that. So those guys already know everything.

Mhmm (40:47)

But what I want to tell you is that we were there, and the helicopters were around. And the big helicopter with the big lights and shining them on you and we were there. Because they know, they were waiting for them to switch turns. They waited until the middle of the night. when they change of personnel, its like the helicopter rests and in that time you go. When the helicopter comes back we already passed and are in the bushes. And then we crossed, right, running, it was exciting.

(Laughs 41:13)

And because one is stealthy, right, and young, no, one is astute. And what, what is going to scare you in those situations, for me it was like excited like they say in English. (Laughing) well yea. So...well we crossed and we stayed there and we got to the

highway looking there...and without anyone noticing we crossed the street near there and we walked and there was a hotel and well there, we went inside. There we stayed in a room. There were four of us in a room...but the next day the came to pick us up in a car, a man that was going to take me. But he, he was looking...he, for another person and he left me for the time being...and went to go pick up the other person and he dropped me off at a park that was near the airport of San Diego, right, already seeing those...but well I felt strange because I was by myself there...and I just watched the planes how they came down and how...next to the...there...I was astonished by how fast they dropped and went up, no, because over there in the tribe*** I saw the plane that passed one day and in the air. "The Lunch One" we would say in El Cobano where I...until the man came to pick me up in the afternoon. And then I came with the other guy that he was going to take. And we went in the car but over there he got off the highway before crossing the clearing there before Chula Vista I think they call it, where immigration is. He opened the trunk and told us to get into the trunk, right, in the back part of the car. And the other guy didn't want to get in and said he wouldn't get in. that it was dangerous and that I don't know what, he didn't want to and he went into the woods and he stayed. So I got in and...I got in and he closed the trunk and he went. Well I don't know how long he drove, but it was some, some, twenty minutes maybe, the thing is that we got through fast, and he got off the highway on the, he got on the side and opened the trunk for me and then I got in...so then he told me we were going to Los Angeles then. And I was looking at the highways and I saw all that beauty, right. Well because I hadn't, never seen something so immense. Because imagine the change of one eighty degrees like they say. Living in El Cobano where there aren't even automobiles, not even highways, not even big roads and to then see those highways there with those...what do they call them? A, a plant that they plant, ivy they call it. That, that decorates, right, like the sides of the highway nicely cut, everything there looks like, well beautiful. Beautiful. I was astonished to see all that, that immensity...a change...it was a tremendous change...

How did you feel in Los Angeles? (44:08)

Ah (sighs), well on the...the day I got there. Well I didn't know anyone more than, anyone more than my brother. They came to pick me up there with the man, they paid what we were gong to pay him and they took me to eat, there I met the Mister, I met Alvaro, and other friends where my brother lived. And well I felt, I felt strange, well, but the strangest part was, like I have told you on other occasions, was well adapting. That, when for example, we had to do laundry. The laundry, I had never in my life had seen a machine...a washing machine (laughs). And how that worked, stoves, none of that, because over there in the tribe there was none of that, because it was wood and all that. and washing, the women washed by hand, we had never washed. And it was, at the beginning it was strange but, it was nice well because he had...I didn't work, well then I didn't work...he*** had a pair of friends that were vagos*** that didnt work and so he would even leave them his car and they were showing me around and I was seeing everything and like that...it was nice except that only thing is that I missed, well you know, one's, one's people, one's family and that but, but you adapt and then I was working and everything was normal...mormallizing...

What was your first job? (45:40)

(Pause)

Well my first job was...was with a man who worked in painting vehicles. He was a friend of Mauricio, of my brother, and one day after playing soccer we saw him and he told him that I...“Ah if you want he can come with me and I will teach him there” he told him and I helped him to paint cars, he painted cars but we also painted trailer heads, trailers and buses. He worked at a big company. There we painted buses. So, there we would get so dizzy because sometimes we had to paint the inside of the buses, imagine, the smell of the paint. Right, we would protect ourselves, right, but you come out all out if it from the stink of the paint...

Mhmm (46:38)

Everything closed. But (laughs) that man was tremendous. Because, I, like I told you before, I had learned things I shouldn't have. I drank when I was young and when...for that time, I had turned eighteen years old here when I worked with this Miguel. His name was Miguel. And, and the days they would pay us, we would go, he would go cash the check, he would pay me, and we would go eat around there. But look, since we were rascals, right, the people couldn't tell. Since I couldn't drink, right, because I was underage. But he would buy his bottle, we would take it with us, eat there and I would ask for my soda and I would pour some in it and I would be sipping some liquor. I was drinking and eating with him. (Laughs). Its like I tell you, we were tremendous, tremendous. That, that not rules not anything, we went through whatever. Let someone come and tell me. Or like some of the young people nowadays think they know...if what they may have lived I have lived it and double and triple and what I know. Like they say, the devil knows more from being old than from being the devil. So we worked. I worked with him for a long time. Maybe for a year. And I got confidence, to know that environment.

And was that your first job in your whole life? (48:03)

Well yes, its that, its that in el, over there in El Salvador we worked in agriculture, right. But it was different.

Like...(48:10)

We worked in our own home. I planted corn, right and I had...I paid other people to help me. I worked too but it wasn't like...I say I worked because...I was the owner of that. Of the produced, that was mine. Ah but my father was the one who gave me the land, even the people who worked. And we paid them. But the crop was mine; I sold it, well like I tell you. But here the first job where I got paid was that. It was that...

And how many, what did you do after, how many jobs did you have? (48:42)

(Sighs)

Ay hija, after...after that ended, I worked for some time in landscaping. With a man, working in landscaping, we would do landscaping there in Los Angeles, right, but more in the West and in the area of Beverly Hills, Bel Air and all those, Hollywood Hills and I know those by memory. Big Palisades, Santa Monica, Encino, all the exclusive places where they pay better, right. The people try to get jobs there because they work in Los Angeles but there the houses are humble, right, and they pay little. It's less pay. Instead over there in Palisades, there was a mansion that, we had to go three times a week just...imagine how much that woman paid. One day was just to plant flowers, another day just to clean, another to cut the grass...yes, yes one learns. That's why I still at my house I do, right, landscaping and I prune the trees and I do it with that, like a work of art. Because I left the little thing, like the people require. That was, that was a time after, an opportunity came up to work in a company in the Valley, in San Fernando, Chatsworth, it was called...it was for computer memory, it was called. And it was to make and assemble computers, right. The memory of the computers. I worked there for a few years. A few years because the computer sometimes have their____. They hire a lot of people and then, lay off and lay off the people. I worked there for a few years...

And then? (50:43)

Well after that...I was out of work, I went to unemployment. Then I got a job there in...I didn't like it much, in...like giving maintenance to chain of stores, to the floors, right, shining and fixing the floors. I would go at night with a friend. But I didn't like it. And in that I had a problem...that...that...I have a small accident and I hit a car and I had...I had been drinking and...there I got in that issue that...how do they call it in English...a DWI I think. And well like that made me...like that...I didn't like it...and well at that time a younger brother who's name was Pedrito had come and he didn't like it here and he had gone to Vancouver over there in Canada. So then I guess I well wanted to escape from the problems. I sold the pickup that I had and I went to Vancouver. I was there in Canada for about two years. But...well we got over there into Canada; it was like...we didn't have a migratory status. I, we went to work like that in jobs that paid us in cash. Like planting, I told you right, cutting strawberries, being in the country. One time we went with a company to plant pine trees...I was planting pine trees...and there I saved up some money because since the government gave us money to pay the bills, the little extra money I made I would save it. Because I had...well ideas to go back, right, over here. Because I, I don't know, didn't adapt and since I had met your mother and we communicated, right, I thought to get back with her, I was making planes, right, to live together and all that. So I thought of coming back. And I came back to the United States again. And I established myself...

And it wasn't difficult to come back? (53:32)

Look, from over there in Canada to here, well, I didn't have papers, right, to come here but I had a Canadian permit, so I was kind of like a Canadian resident. The only thing is

that an official Canadian resident, like legal, he can go in, in that time he could go into the United States without a visa, right. Just with an ID and come in and out. But because I didn't have that, I had a permit. So I couldn't go in. The first time I came, I tried to pass; I came in walking, well, since there are no division or anything. Instead there's a park, the street on the other side and the park. I walked to the park and I came like I was walking. Right, I had already decided that I, that the bus left from there, the Greyhound, I thought to come on the bus. And when I came walking, there was a cop of immigration there. He came over to me and stopped me. He asked where I was going, to buy some beer I told him because there was a liquor store close. But he didn't believe me I think, I think he thought that I...I didn't bring anything, well I didn't bring anything, just like that (patting pants) a pair of pants, a shirt and the only thing I brought was well money. And that was it, since they search you. Not even like \$200 maybe. I had enough to pay for the bus tickets. Or \$600 I don't know how much I had, I had something like that. But so I wouldn't look so suspicious I didn't bring anything, only the clothes I had on and I would get there that would be it.

Mhmm (55:01)

But he took me, he put me in the cop car and he took me to get my information, right, and he told me...he took me and he brought me back to the border. When he took me back, the Canadians said "Ay why are you doing that..." they didn't say anything to me. I went back to Vancouver. But the second time that we came. When I came back, look people are very sneaky, right. There was a Honduran man, he was coming in a car and he had a lot of stuff in the car. But since he was the same as me...

How? (55:35)

That he didn't have papers. So a friend...how did have his residency drive with the car and went to park at that same park, at the parking lot I told you about. He parked the car and went walking back to Canada. There was someone waiting to take him back and we walked into the park, we got in the car and from there we came. Since the car was his, right, of the guy I was coming with. He was going to Honduras, he wasn't coming to Los Angeles, he was going to Honduras. The only thing was that he wanted to bring the car.

Mhmm (56:03)

And like that, that's how we got in. And we came. He brought me all the way to Los Angeles. And I helped him, right, I didn't pay him to bring me I just paid for the gas, because I was helping him to pay for the gas and...and that's how I came back, how I came back to Los Angeles. Ah, but in Los Angeles...it wasn't easy when I came because I had that charge pending. When I left I had left that charge pending from when the police stopped me and I didn't close the case, none of that. So I, I think I had an arrest warrant. I didn't know. But when I came, right, I wanted to fix that so I went to the court and I went to the judge. To tell them well, right, that...I didn't know not even if my license...well, I, I left and things stayed like that. I didn't think I would ever come back. But life takes so

many turns, that's why they say you should never say no, right, I'll never drink this water. Because you never know.

Mhmm (56:57)

So I didn't know and I went to the judge. That helped me because since I presented myself, right. And...then they arrested me. Ah, from right there in the court they took me to jail. In one of those buses all chained up and they took me to jail. Like they take the criminals, right, that's how I went. Can you imagine, no, nothing serious.

Mhmm (57:25)

That was one of the most unpleasant experiences I could have ever had. Because well, I had been detained in El Salvador, right, over there I had been in jail because the, some things the army, some false accusations, they humiliated us and threw us in jail. But that thing in Los Angeles I think was the worst of all. Because look that...well the judge determined that I had to serve about twenty days in jail. Something like that or twenty or twenty five days, for, for what had happened. And that I hadn't, I had left things like that and I don't know. Well I just wanted to establish myself and start a new life, right, and to do things right you have to confront problems and fix them because if you hide from them you get into...well. What I want to say is that the negative experience is that, well, they put you in that group, right, you are chained. With other people there, chained from here***and handcuffed and everything ,right. They take you to jail. When they take you to jail, that process, is the most humiliating there is. And they try to do it, maybe with the purpose to humiliate you and make people feel bad. I tell you, I'm not a person that gets into problems or anything but one of those guys, if I had been able to do something to them...

To the officers? (58:55)

To them. Yes to one of those sheriffs. From seeing the way they treat people. And I'm not a revengeful person or a, a criminal, nothing like that, but from the way they treat people. Well in that process, they take you from cell to cell there. Well and I was there until morning. Like I told you they took us there at five. Because I went to the court around four I think. From there they took me, right, they take you to a jail that is in the court and from the court they take you to a bus and from the bus to the sheriff's office and there the whole jail process. But in that process of the jail they take you from cell to cell, they take pictures of you, they do this to you, they even take your clothes, they give you a shower, a lot, even naked and all that, right. And finally you put back on the same clothes. Because well I didn't, they didn't give me anything. But what I want to say is that in that whole process...they finally made me an offer, since the jails are so full there. That they would give me the option to spend the twenty days in jail or to do community service.

After everything they did to you? (1:00:07)

Aha, that's why I say that, that's why. So, ah well I said I would work instead, right. Work was working for the city, right.

Mhmm (1:00:17)

The only thing is that they give you conditions that if you don't show up in the moment that you are supposed to show up for work, the time or something, you get a warrant for your arrest. And then you get into major problems. Well, it was better than being in jail, being outside working going to work. Well yes I tell you, for that whole process I was almost until six, five in the morning all night. Being there from place to place and all the humiliations they do to the people. Around five or six they let me out, they let me out and I...I called Mauricio, right, he knew I was going to court. And he went to pick me up there. I don't remember what day it was but I think it was a Thursday or something like that. But the thing is that the next Monday I had to present myself to the, at a certain place at a certain time, to go work. And it's, in a place where there are some vans, some mini vans of the county, of the government, of the state, to prune the highways, picking up trash, because I had done landscaping it was fun for me, only that I didn't get paid, right. But I enjoyed it, we were tranquil and aside from that making the city better, no.

Mhmm (1:01:32)

It was two weeks and they passed by fast and then, they gave me...that was it I was free and clean of the whole problem. It, it was much better for me than being in prison.

Mhmm (1:01:43)

That was it, and after that, the rest...well after getting out of that I started working because I had a job with Alvaro always in landscaping.

Mhmm (1:02)

So the next week I started working with him and your mother and I decided we would move in together after that...we looked for an apartment soon after and for the mean time I was there with Mauricio, my brother. We looked for an apartment with your mother and we established ourselves and...and then we came over here. Until today we are still together.

And what happened after, did you keep working with Alvaro? (1:02:24)

Yes after, well since I didn't have any connections or anything, in that time it was difficult. Imagine, before I had a car and everything and when I came we didn't have any. So I got a job with Alvaro and your mother, she had a job, she kept working, the only thing was that she didn't live in her job anymore instead she would go in and out everyday. Because we already lived together in the apartment. But it was hard because

we went to the laundry, well actually no, there was a laundry in the building, now I remember. But for anything, we had to walk or take the bus. So it was uncomfortable. Mama was uncomfortable. But see how things are, life right, it gives you opportunities. One time I bought a lottery ticket and, and I won \$2,650 I think. In the Lotto, which was new in those days. It's a little money but then it was more money, because money was valued more but with that money we bought the car. The first car we bought was \$1850 I think. That car was nice. And, and some money was left over, that mama, well mama already had papers then but she hadn't gone to Guatemala to see her daughter that she had left over there, Maria Fernanda. So with that same money she bought a ticket and she went to see the family. And, and then things were easier. After that, when she would go to work she would take the car. Because I didn't need it because Alvaro would come pick me up and drop me off. But that was like...well because in those times you would make less money, saving \$2,500 was more difficult.

Mhmm (1:04:25)

Ah and because one is innocent (laughs). I remember, I remember when we were together and mama would say, we were thinking of having kids, or something. And mama would tell me and I remember "When we have \$2,000 saved up I'm going to try to get pregnant". Ah \$2,000. Now I remind her and I tell her "Now you have \$100,000 and it seems like a little bit" right \$2,000. And according to her it was...it was...

A lot (1:04:56)

A, a like we say, a backup, no. Well then we kept working and saving, always together, united. And, and like I have told you, that was the, the money that I won in the lottery was the beginning. That opened the doors for us and because we were, we bought the car because we had saved something. We had some already. And since then, we have never not had money. We have always had and even more and enough and the necessary.

Mhmm (1:05:37)

Like I'm telling you we have never passed like any difficulties like other people. Because we're always thinking about that. If you think like that, never. Because you know, right, you know, you're listening to the story of the humble origins, humble jobs. That we never even went to school. But I know people who have gone to school or that were born here that, well, when they have, ah, they enjoy it but when they don't they don't have enough to pay. We have never had difficulties, economically, never. Simple. That's why I tell you to do with your life when. If you have money, no one can humiliate you, no one can be disrespectful because not even in a job. If you don't like it you can tell them to go to hell if you want because you, well have a backup. You are secure. You can survive one month, a year without working. And then what. And sometimes not even your boss can do that, not even your boss has that. Because apparently they have money but they have debts in a...you understand me...that asphyxiates them and they have to be there. If you know how to administer and have control...you have a tranquil life.

And how was it, that you decided to go to Nebraska. (1:06:51)

Ah hija, well the truth is that that story. Look when we went to Nebraska, I had left the job...with Alvaro.

Mhmm (1:07:07)