

LA FAMILIA ES LO PRIMERO

AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

VIOLETA RIVAS

BY:

MALLORY HERBERGER

Mallory Herberger
HIST428N
Professor Thomas Castillo
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Oral History Interview: Abstract

In this oral history interview, Violeta Rivas discusses her experience as an immigrant in the United States. Born in Nicaragua in 1960, Violeta and her husband came to the U.S. in 1984 to escape the Sandinista regime and to build a new life. Thirty years later, they are still here. Although Violeta had originally intended to return to Nicaragua, she and her family stayed, and throughout the course of the interview, she displays an acute awareness of her life in retrospect. Leaving her home was a sacrifice, but she did it for her family; every obstacle she faced and every cultural barrier she had to overcome was for her family. That is the essence of the interview, and throughout the course of this oral history, Violeta guides her listeners through the things that matter the most to her: religion, tradition, and moral values. Violeta's story is not just one of many Central American immigrant narratives; it is a part of a whole, and without it, the picture is not complete.

In this interview, there are three participants. Because Mrs. Rivas was more comfortable speaking in Spanish, her daughter, Jennifer, acted as a translator.

- Mallory: Okay, my name is Mallory Herberger and today I will be interviewing...
- 0:08 Violeta: Violeta Rivas.
- 0:10 Mallory: For the purpose of recording her life story. The date is March 26, 2014 and we are at Mrs. Rivas's house in Silver Spring, Maryland. Before we begin I'd like to receive your oral consent for the interview.
- 0:24 Violeta: Si, yo conciento.
- 0:26 Jennifer: Yes, I consent.¹
- 0:27 Violeta: Yes, I consent.
- 0:28 Mallory: Thank you very much. Alright, um why don't we start at the beginning? Can you tell me about where you were born...where you're from?
- 0:35 Violeta: En español, verdad? Nací en Nicaragua.²
In Spanish, right? I was born in Nicaragua.
- 0:38 Jennifer: I was born in Nicaragua.
- 0:43 Violeta: En la ciudad de León.
In the city of León.
- 0:45 Jennifer: In the city of Leon.
- 0:46 Violeta: Cuidad universitaria.
A university city.
- 0:48 Jennifer: It's like a university city.
- 0:51 Violeta: Todas las universidades están allí.
All the universities are there.
- 0:53 Jennifer: All the universities are there, that's why it's called university city.

¹ In this interview, Violeta's daughter Jennifer acted as the translator. At times, her mother spoke directly to her daughter, which helped to both facilitate the interview and limit my part in the process.

² At this point, Violeta launches into her storytelling mode, interrupted only by Jennifer's translation. She had a very clear purpose in mind, and that was to tell her story.

- 0:57 Violeta: El 17 de Agosto del sesenta
On August 17, 1960
- 1:02 Jennifer: I was born August 18, 1960.
- 1:05 Violeta: August 17!
- 1:06 Jennifer: Oh, 17.³
- 1:11 Violeta: Crecí en una familia normal.⁴
In just a normal family upbringing.
- 1:15 Jennifer: In just a normal family upbringing.
- 1:20 Violeta: Fuimos ocho, cuatro mujeres, cuatro varones.
We were eight...four girls and four boys.
- 1:23 Jennifer: Four sisters and four brothers...eight altogether.
- 1:30 Violeta: Y todos estudiamos. Yo estude para maestra.
And we all studied. I studied to become a teacher.
- 1:37 Jennifer: We all studied a certain major and I studied as a teacher.
- 1:45 Violeta: Después tuve otra oportunidad para educación especial.
Then I had another opportunity for special education.
- 1:50 Jennifer: I did specifically special education.
- 1:56 Violeta: Vivimos en León, y después nos trasladamos a Managua.⁵
We lived in Leon, and then we moved to Managua
- 2:02 Jennifer: First we lived in the city of Leon and then we lived in the city of Managua.
- 2:06 Violeta: Porque estaban más cerca las universidades para otros hermanos que estudiaban otras diferentes carreras.
Because the universities were much closer for my other brothers who studied other different careers. Medicine, economics, engineering.

³ This slip-up was an interesting demonstration of the family relationship. Jennifer assumed her mother's birthday was on the 18th, so she mistranslated and had to be corrected in English so that the story would be accurate.

⁴ Here is an example of where I should have asked a follow-up question. In one sentence she summed up her childhood, and yet I did not clarify her meaning by "normal family upbringing."

⁵ Managua is the capital city of Nicaragua.

- 2:12 Jennifer: We moved because it was just closer for my other siblings who were studying other things like medicine, economy, so the universities were closer in Managua.
- 2:25 Violeta: Me recibí muy joven.
I graduated very young.
- 2:27 Jennifer: I graduated very young.
- 2:30 Violeta: Y me case muy joven.
And I got married very young.
- 2:32 Jennifer: And I got married very young.
- 2:35 Violeta: A los veinte años casi veinte y uno tuve mi primer niño.
At twenty years old, almost twenty-one, I had my first child.
- 2:42 Jennifer: I had my first child when I was twenty.
- 2:45 Violeta: Me case con Nicolas Rivas.⁶
I got married with Nicolas Rivas.
- 2:48 Jennifer: I was married to Nicholas Rivas.
- 2:51 Violeta: El tenia veinte y cinco años.
He was twenty-five years old.
- 2:53 Jennifer: He was 25 years old.
- 2:58 Violeta: El trabajaba...como se llama... para proyectos geotérmicos
He worked for...how do you say...geothemic projects.
- 3:04 Jennifer: He worked for...
- 3:07 Violeta: Que hacen exploración para sacar energía eléctrica.
They do explorations to remove electrical energy.
- 3:15 Jennifer: Something with electricity and the earth and making holes...like engineer or something.

⁶ Violeta seems to be giving a brief overview of her life in Nicaragua. Had I taken the opportunity, I would have asked more direct follow-up questions to these statements. For instance, I did not ask from what university she graduated, how old she was, etc.

- 3:25 Violeta: Lo que sacan para sacar petróleo y todo eso.⁷
The people who take out petroleum and all that stuff.
- 3:29 Jennifer: Geo-thermal engineer...that's what I'm getting.
- 3:35 Violeta: Estábamos muy bien.⁸
We were doing very well.
- 3:37 Jennifer: Everything was good...we were living fine.
- 3:40 Violeta: Pero la transición de un gobierno hacia otro cambio.
But the transition from one government to another changed.
- 3:49 Jennifer: Okay but then the government changed and that's when everything started becoming different.
- 3:56 Mallory: What changed for you, specifically?
- 4:00 Violeta: Para nosotros realmente, yo seguía trabajando normal, el seguía trabajando normal
Actually, well for us, I continued to work normal. He continued to work normal
- 4:08 Jennifer: In the beginning you know everything, we...I was working normal and he was...his normal work.
- 4:14 Violeta: Pero sucedió que el nuevo gobierno Sandinista
But what occurred was that the new government Sandinista
- 4:19 Jennifer: But what happened was the new government called the Sandinistas...
- 4:27 Violeta: ...querían que hicieran postas, como cuando una persona en el trabajo tiene que quedarse uno o dos tres días vigilando
...wanted everyone to do posts, like when one person at work has to stay one to two or three days keeping guard.

⁷ Neither Violeta nor Jennifer seemed very knowledgeable about Nicholas Rivas's work in Nicaragua. For information about the uses of geothermal energy, see: T. Leardini and N. L. Falcon, "Geothermal Power [and Discussion]," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* 276, no. 1261 (May 1974): 507-526.

⁸ Both Violeta and her husband enjoyed professional careers in Nicaragua and would not have left if not for the dangerous political situation, as was the case in many Central American countries in the twentieth century. On motivations for immigration, see: Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, "Who They Are and Why They Come," in *Immigrant America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

- 4:39 Jennifer: Uh...certain jobs required people to be posted in front of like buildings and other places...like kinda like protecting.
- 4:52 Violeta: No a mí porque era maestra.
Not me, because I was a teacher.
- 4:55 Jennifer: Not to her, it was mostly my dad—her husband.
- 5:00 Violeta: Eran los hombres y los jóvenes. La cosa está en que tenía que estar con un rifle y ya habían asesinado a varios.⁹
It was men and youngsters. The thing is, is that they had to have a rifle and they had already killed many people.
- 5:12 Jennifer: The problem was that in order to be in these posts they had to have weapons and a lot of people were already killed doing this like they would just come up to them and kill them on the spot. So it was becoming very dangerous.
- 5:28 Violeta: Y lo que paso es que la Azucena, una prima de Nicolas vivía en Los Estados Unidos precisamente en Maryland.¹⁰ Y el hermano quería venirse para los Estados Unidos.
So then what had happened is that Nicholas's cousin lived in the United States, precisely in Maryland. And her brother wanted to go to the United States.
- 5:41 Jennifer: So uh one of her husband's cousins already lived in the United States. And so the...his cousin's brother was gonna go to the United States so that's when they started thinking maybe we should go too.
- 6:00 Violeta: Entonces la prima le dijo, Nicolas quieres acompañar a mi hermano, quieres irte porque esto esta peligroso.
So the cousin told him, "Nicholas, do you want to accompany my brother. Do you wanna go? Because this is getting very dangerous."

⁹ Due to the need for manpower, many civilians were handed weapons and told to fight or keep guard even if they had no experience with a rifle. Families often mourned the loss of their loved ones over a conflict in which they had no investment. See the New York Times article: Stephen Kinzer, "Nicaragua Rebels Do Damage But Are Halted," *The New York Times*, September 28, 1983.

¹⁰ In this case, Nicholas Rivas's draw toward the Washington D.C area was not because there was an abundance of job openings or that the area was friendly to immigrants; it was because he already had a relation living in Maryland, and that was the most logical place to go if he wanted to leave Nicaragua. For information on migration patterns see Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, "Moving," in *Immigrant America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

- 6:10 Jennifer: So the cousin that was in the United States told her husband you know, it's getting very dangerous over there...the government is getting crazy and you should definitely come to the United States.
- 6:24 Violeta: Y en tres cuatro días lo arreglo los papeles y se vino por México por Tijuana. *And in three to four days he worked out his papers and he came here through Tijuana, Mexico.*
- 6:34 Jennifer: And so in 3 to 4 days he got everything ready and he left to Nicaragua by himself.
- 6:41 Violeta: Con el primo.
- 6:43 Jennifer: With his cousin.
- 6:45 Violeta: Por Mexico.
- 6:46 Jennifer: Through Mexico.
- 6:48 Violeta: Tijuana...Los Angeles.¹¹
- 6:51 Mallory: So you didn't go together?¹²
- 6:52 Violeta: No no no. No, yo me quede trabajando. *I stayed working.*
- 6:57 Jennifer: I stayed working.
- 7:00 Violeta: Ellos pasaron por tres intentos, y nada hasta que pasaron.¹³ *So they passed after three tries, and then nothing until they passed.*
- 7:08 Jennifer: They tried many times to cross a border and they finally did it. They did like, the dangerous way...swimming.

¹¹ Violeta is clarifying the information to make sure that Jennifer does not miss anything in translation. Notice that Violeta originally said her husband came to the United States through Tijuana, Mexico, but Jennifer omits that from her translation. This is a dynamic that repeats throughout the interview.

¹² I already knew the answer to this question, but thought it was necessary for clarification. For interviewing techniques see: Valerie Raleigh Yow, "Interviewing Techniques," in *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2005).

¹³ The language here is confusing, but she means that they tried three times to pass the border with no results until they were finally able to get through.

- 7:15 Violeta: Swimming! (laughter). Um, Y después en Los Ángeles tomaron un avión. Estaba otro primo y él les compro un ticket para Maryland.
Then in Los Angeles, they took a plane. There was another cousin and he bought them tickets to Maryland.
- 7:32 Jennifer: So when they finally made it through they were able to get on an airplane from Los Angeles to Maryland.
- 7:41 Violeta: Después llamo que estaba bien todo está bien.
Then he called and said he was fine, everything was fine.
- 7:46 Jennifer: He called her and he told her everything was fine. They got safely there.
- 7:52 Violeta: Pero teníamos que pagar los dólares que prestamos para el viaje.¹⁴
But we had to pay the dollars that we borrowed for the trip.
- 7:58 Jennifer: But we still needed to pay off the cost to get there. It was a lot of money.
- 8:04 Violeta: Y el empezó a trabajar en el Chi Chi's.
And he started to work at Chi Chi's.
- 8:08 Jennifer: So his first job was working at Chi Chi's.
- 8:13 Violeta: Es un restaurante Mexicano. Llego muchas veces inmigración y lo metieron en una heladera en el freezer.¹⁵
It's a Mexican restaurant. Immigration arrived many times and they put him in a freezer...in the freezer.¹⁶

¹⁴ Many smugglers charged exorbitant prices to smuggle immigrants across the border, and most of the time the immigrants are so desperate to make it into the United States that they agree to whatever price and conditions are set. For more on human smuggling, see: Kevin Tessier, "The New Slave Trade: The International Crisis of Immigrant Smuggling," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 3, no. 1 (Fall, 1995): 261-265.

¹⁵ At this point in the interview, Violeta's eldest son, Nick, came down into the basement and yelled, "In the freezer," and both Violeta and Jennifer laughed in response. Apparently, this story about their father having to hide in the freezer from immigration is often recounted in their family, which says something about stories and memory. Violeta and her husband do not want their children to forget their experiences and what it took for them to survive in this country, and these kinds of anecdotes ensure that will never happen.

¹⁶ "They" refers to Chi Chi's management. Immigrants work for cheaper wages than naturalized citizens, which was (and still is) an incentive to hire them. The United States was working hard to reduce illegal immigration in the 1980s, which would come to fruition in the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. See: Romano L. Mazzoli and Alan K. Simpson, "Enacting Reform, Again," *The New York Times*, September 15, 2006.

- 8:27 Jennifer: So many times while he was working at the restaurant the immigration would come in and he would have to hide in the freezer for like hours.
- 8:42 Violeta: Mi papa, él era residente y tenía hermanas, y él me dijo a mí, si tú quieres seguir casada, por tu matrimonio tienes que irte.¹⁷
My dad, he was a resident and he had sisters, and he told me that if you want to stay married, for your marriage you have to leave.
- 8:58 Jennifer: My father told me when I was in Nicaragua that if you wanna remain—stay married...remain being married then you need to go where your husband is. You need to go to the United States.
- 9:12 Violeta: Porque ya había pasado que muchos hombres se habían venido acá y se olvidaban de las esposas.
Because what had happened was that many men had come here and they would forget about their wives.
- 9:23 Jennifer: My dad was saying that lots of times men who go to the United States by themselves and leave their wives behind tend to get married again and forget about the wives they leave behind.
- 9:37 Violeta: Entonces vendí todo, solamente el terreno no lo vendí, quedo haciendo se la casita que estábamos haciendo. Y vendí todo, cama, muebles, todo... todo.¹⁸
So I sold everything.¹⁹ I didn't sell the land because that's where we were going to build our little house that we were building. And I sold everything including bed, furniture, everything...everything.²⁰
- 9:52 Jennifer: So that's when I thought about it and I decided yes and I sold everything...everything I had.

¹⁷ Her father is speaking from experience. His sisters (Violeta's aunts), had been left behind by their husbands when they left for the United States.

¹⁸ Here is an interesting example of some of the problems associated with oral translating. Jennifer did not translate the part about building a house on the land, and had I known what Violeta said, I may have asked a question about it. From this sentence, it appears the Violeta intends to return to Nicaragua, and although I did ask a question about that later, this was an opportunity for the interview to flow more smoothly.

¹⁹ This is the first occasion in the interview that I became aware of the depth of love Violeta had for her family. She was only twenty-three years old, but she left everything behind because she wanted to keep her family together. This is a theme that repeats throughout the course of the interview.

²⁰ I later found out that she made this decision after five months of separation.

- 10:01 Violeta: Fui a la embajada Americana con Nick chiquito y pedí visa y me la negaron.
I went to the American embassy with little Nick and I asked for a visa and they denied me.
- 10:10 Jennifer: I went to the United States embassy to try to apply for a visa with my youngest...with my son, and they denied me immediately.
- 10:21 Violeta: Y yo le dije al señor, “Está bien nos miramos en los Estados Unidos, adiós.”
And I told the man, “Okay, we’ll see each other in the United States anyways. Goodbye.”
- 10:30 Jennifer: She just told them, okay that’s fine I’ll see you in the United States anyways.
- 10:37 Violeta: Y ellos se pusieron a reír. Por México me dieron Visa Mexicana a Nick y a mí y venimos por México.
And they started laughing. Mexico gave Nick²¹ and I a Mexican visa and we came through Mexico.
- 10:48 Jennifer: She did...I did end up getting a Mexican visa...so...
- 10:54 Violeta: Por avión viajamos.
We traveled by airplane.
- 10:57 Jennifer: So I was able to go to Mexico with my son on an airplane.
- 11:00 Violeta: Y llegamos a la capital pero yo no iba sola. íbamos una sobrina mía, la abuelita...íbamos un grupo.
And arrived at the capital but I wasn’t by myself. In all it was my niece, the grandmother...we were all in a group.
- 11:12 Jennifer: There was...we were in a big group. I wasn’t by myself with my son. I had my...
- 11:16 Violeta: Pero hacíamos de cuenta que no nos conocíamos.
But we pretended that we didn’t know each other.²²
- 11:20 Jennifer: It was my cousin, my nephew, oh and her...and her grandmother. But we had to pretend like we didn’t know each other at all.

²¹ Nick is Violeta’s son, named for her husband.

²² They pretended that they did not know each other because they had to look as if they were not attempting to cross the border illegally. There is a significant amount of fear and uncertainty associated with illegal immigration. If anyone looked suspicious then they were likely to be sent back to their native country.

- 11:33 Violeta: En México nos llevaron a una casa de hospedaje donde hay muchos cuartos y rentan cuartos, como motel le llaman acá.
*In Mexico they took us to a motel where there's lots of rooms and they rent rooms...like a motel. They call it here a motel.*²³
- 11:59 Jennifer: We ended up staying in Mexico for a while.²⁴ It was like a motel.
- 12:05 Violeta: Los que llevaron en taxi a mi sobrina eran ladrones, y nos llegaron a robar. Y nos metieron en el baño con las mochilas y todo pero yo me puse el dinero acá [en el pecho]. Las registraron y después se fueron.²⁵
The people who took my niece in a taxi were robbers and they came in to rob us. And they put us in the bathroom with our backpacks and everything but I put my money in here [points to bra]. They went through them and then they left.
- 12:24 Jennifer: The people who we thought were helping us actually ended up being very bad people and they were robbers. So where we were in the motel...they came into the motel and told us to uh...put all our luggage in front of us...
- 12:44 Violeta: Solo teníamos unas mochilas
We only had a couple backpacks
- 12:47 Jennifer: And they took everything.
- 12:49 Mallory: You were robbed?
- 12:50 Violeta: Pero me metí el dinero aquí en una bolsita.
But I put my money here [in her bra] in a little bag.
- 12:52 Jennifer: But luckily I kept some of the money in my bra.
- 13:00 Violeta: Porque mi papa me había dicho, tiene que andar dinero en México acá
Because my dad had told me, "You have to keep your money here [in her bra] when you're in Mexico.
- 13:11 Jennifer: I put it in my bra because my dad had told me, in Mexico it's very bad so don't ever keep your money in bags or luggage.

²³ The "they" she refers to were individuals who had been paid to guide their group. For information about methods of illegal immigration, see: Vernon Briggs, Jr., "Methods of Analysis of Illegal Immigration into the United States," *International Migration Review* 18, no. 3, (Autumn, 1984): 623-641

²⁴ Violeta told me after the interview that she had stayed in Mexico for three weeks before they were able to cross into the United States.

²⁵ Immigrants who are crossing the border illegally are much more likely to be taken advantage of. They carry all their valuables with them and the criminals are less likely to be prosecuted for their actions.

- 13:18 Violeta: Bueno después a la familia llamaron y les mandaron dinero por Western Union.²⁶
Okay, then they called the families and they sent them money through Western Union.
- 13:31 Jennifer: Everybody else had to call their families in Nicaragua to send them money, kinda like the Western Union.
- 13:36 Violeta: Después nos fuimos en un bus a Matamoros una ciudad de México. Allí estuvimos como una semana y media. Se nos enfermaron los niños. Fuimos al hospital. Se enfermó Nick.
Then we left on a bus to Matamoros, a city in Mexico. We were there for like a week and a half. All the kids got sick. We went to the hospital. Nick got sick.
- 13:55 Jennifer: We ended up having to take a bus to another city but at that point everybody got sick. The stomach virus, the flu, everything was bad.²⁷
- 14:04 Violeta: Pero yo puedo poner inyección. Yo les inyectaba a todos
*But I know how to put vaccines. I injected everyone.*²⁸
- 14:10 Jennifer: Everyone had to get shots.
- 14:14 Violeta: Y después la persona que nos iba a llegar a recoger allí no apareció.
And then the people who were going to pick us up never appeared.
- 14:21 Jennifer: The person who was supposed to pick us up from that city never showed up.
- 14:27 Violeta: Y la Señora Martinez llamo a su esposo a Miami y le dijo que hiciera contrato con otra persona.
And Mrs. Martinez called her husband in Miami and asked him to do a contract with another person.
- 14:37 Jennifer: One of the ladies that was in our group had to call her husband that was already in the United States to try to make a deal with somebody else who could help them cross the border.

²⁶ The Western Union is a financial services company that allows customers to transfer money. See: Joshua Craver, “the WESTERN UNION way,” *T+D* 67, no. 11 (November 2013): 36-39.

²⁷ This is an interesting example of oral translation. Violeta did not mention the stomach virus or the flu, yet Jennifer included it in her translation. Perhaps she already knew the story, which was why she added in her own details.

²⁸ I’m wondering now why Violeta knew how to give vaccines and why the hospital in Mexico allowed her to inject her fellow travellers. But Jennifer did not mention this in her oral translation, so I was unaware of this detail until I received the written translation.

- 14:48 Violeta: Y encontró a una persona que nos llevó a Aguas Calientes.²⁹
And he found a person that took us to Aguas Calientes.
- 14:57 Jennifer: So they hired another person and they had to go to another city in Mexico.
- 15:00 Violeta: Aguas Calientes está cerca de la frontera.
Aguas Calientes is close to the border.
- 15:04 Jennifer: Called Aguas Calientes which is, it's the closest city to the border.
- 15:07 Violeta: Y esa noche, no noche era tarde, eran como las cinco, nos dijo que teníamos que quitarnos los zapatos que íbamos a pasar, era como un río pero estaba seco.³⁰
And that night, well not that night, it was actually afternoon...it was actually five o'clock...he told us that we had to take our shoes off cause we were going to pass. It was like a river but it was dry.
- 15:21 Jennifer: So it was like really close to nighttime and the man who was taking us told us that we had to take our shoes off cause we had to cross this river.
- 15:36 Violeta: Con los niños y Nick.
With all the kids and Nick.
- 15:39 Jennifer: With the little kids...the little kids had to be on everyone's shoulders. And it was freezing.
- 15:44 Violeta: Pasamos a esta ciudad Broquelan, Texas.³¹
We passed and ended up in Broquelan, Texas.
- 15:57 Jennifer: In Texas? Oh when they...when we crossed the river we ended up in a city in Texas called Broquelan.
- 16:11 Violeta: Llegamos a una tienda y compramos algo para comer.
We went to a store and bought something to eat.
- 16:17 Jennifer: We went to any store cause we were hungry so we had to buy something to eat.
- 16:22 Violeta: Y después no subimos a una Greyhound, es un bus.
And then we got on a Greyhound, that's a bus.

²⁹ Aguas Calientes is close to Tijuana, Mexico.

³⁰ She just means a dry river.

³¹ I did not find any city named Broquelan in Texas when I looked it up on a map. However, that does not invalidate her story. It simply means that specific details may fade over time while the substance remains consistent.

- 16:25 Jennifer: Greyhound? We got on a Greyhound.
- 16:31 Violeta: Y nos dieron un permiso con nombres diferentes.
And they gave us a permit with different names on them.
- 16:36 Jennifer: And we got permits with different names on it.
- 16:42 Violeta: Nick iba como hijo de doña Martínez con otro señor. Yo iba sola y en el bus íbamos sentados, todos diferentes. Nick iba dormido
Nick was going as Mrs. Martinez's son and another man. I was going as a single person and on the bus we were all sitting, everyone was different. Nick was asleep.
- 16:54 Jennifer: We all had to be separated. Nick had to pretend like he was someone else's son. And I had to pretend like I was by myself.
- 17:02 Violeta: Íbamos a pasar una garrita, es donde está la inmigración, el hombre nos dijo hagan se los dormidos, si el hombre se sube y solo le hace haci (solo ver), y se baja, estamos bien
We were going to pass a toll, but immigration was there. The man told us to pretend like we were sleeping. "If the man gets on the bus, and if he only does this [just looks] and he gets off, we're good."
- 17:20 Jennifer: We had to cross the immigration patrol line and the man who was taking us told us to just pretend like you're sleeping. Just go to sleep. If he comes in and looks and just comes right back out everything's okay. But just pretend like you're sleeping. Pretend like nothing.
- 17:34 Violeta: Pero si no, el hombre, que a esa hora están cansados y no quieren revisar, y si el hombre quiere revisar, ustedes son la persona que está allí
"But if not, if the man that at that time is really tired and usually doesn't want to check everything but decides to check anyways, you guys are the people [on the permit]."
- 17:45 Jennifer: If the man does ask questions and wants to see identification you show them the fake identification that you have and that's the person you are. That name, that's who you are.
- 17:56 Violeta: Pero el hombre entro y solo se asomó, y dijo ok go ahead. Cuando íbamos como a una cuadra del bus todos empezamos YAY!!!!³²
But the man came in and he only looked through and said, "okay go ahead." When we were about one mile away everyone on the bus started "YAY!!!!"

³² The precision in which Violeta remembers these events is interesting. While she glossed over her early childhood and her life in Nicaragua, she recounts in detail what everyone said and did, including their positions on the bus. This was obviously an important moment in her life, and that is the reason that she remembers it so vividly.

- 18:14 Jennifer: So they ended up just going into the bus and we were all pretending to sleep and then he just left and after that everyone just cheered and was so happy and excited. We made it!
- 18:25 Violeta: Y después llegamos por la mañana. Nos llevaron al aeropuerto y comimos en el McDonald's el primer desayuno.³³
And then we arrived in the morning. They took us to the airport and we ate at McDonalds, our first breakfast.
- 18:38 Jennifer: They ended up going to the airport and the first real meal she had was McDonalds.
- 18:51 Violeta: De Texas a Miami
From Texas to Miami.
- 18:54 Jennifer: From Texas to Miami.
- 19:00 Violeta: Allí el hombre dijo hasta aquí no más, ustedes van son libres.
The man told us that from Texas to Miami, that's it. After that you guys are free.
- 19:08 Jennifer: And then when we finally got to Miami the man told us, that's it. I'm done and you guys are on your own now.
- 19:17 Violeta: Y yo llegue a la casa de la señora Martínez, es muy linda la casa que tenía el marido.
I arrived at Mrs. Martinez's house. It's very beautiful, the house that the husband had.
- 19:22 Jennifer: I was able to stay at one of the lady's house that was in our group and she had a beautiful house in Miami.
- 19:29 Violeta: Y llame acá a Maryland a Nicolás.
And I called here to Maryland to Nicholas.
- 19:33 Jennifer: I called Maryland to my husband, Nick.
- 19:36 Violeta: Y el con Azucena me mandaron el ticket para el avión de Miami para que el siguiente día ir a Washington.
And him and his cousin sent me the ticket for the airplane for Miami to arrive the next day in Washington.
- 19:41 Jennifer: So they sent me a ticket and then I got on the plane. Miami to Washington.

³³ Violeta later told me that she loves McDonald's for this reason. It always reminds her of the first taste of freedom and relief she felt after arriving in the United States.

- 19:47 Violeta: Dormí en la casa de la señora Martínez y al siguiente día me llevaron al aeropuerto y vine acá a Washington.
I slept at Mrs. Martinez's house and the next day they took me to the airport and I arrived in Washington.
- 19:55 Jennifer: I stayed there the night and then the next day I was here in Washington.
- 20:04 Violeta: Y todo bien,³⁴ Nick vino bien pequeño.
And everything was fine. My son came here very small.
- 20:10 Jennifer: Then everything was great.
- 20:12 Violeta: Pero después empecé a trabajar...
Then I started to work...
- 20:16 Jennifer: Then I started working...
- 20:19 Violeta: cuidando niños en casa y encontré a la Evelyn.
taking care of kids at home and I found Evelyn.
- 20:26 Jennifer: I started working taking care of kids and then I found Evelyn.
- 20:33 Violeta: Encontré a esta señora que ella habla español pero estaba embarazada. Y yo le dije, “yo le cuido al bebe pero si usted me da mis papeles.”³⁵
I found this lady, she spoke Spanish but she was pregnant. And I told her, “I’ll take care of your baby if you give me papers.”
- 20:45 Jennifer: Evelyn was a lady...she was pregnant. And offered her a deal that I would take care of your son if you give me papers.
- 20:58 Violeta: Y ella dijo está bien y empecé a trabajar. Me pagaba muy poquito, solo me pagaba setenta y cinco dólares a la semana.
And she said that was fine, and I started working. She started paying me very little money. She only paid me 75 dollars a week.
- 21:09 Jennifer: She paid me not a lot of money. She paid me \$65 a week.

³⁴ She repeats this constantly throughout the interview, as though trying to reassure me that her immigration experience had a happy ending.

³⁵ At this point in time, it was possible for an employer to provide his or her employee with valid immigration papers. Evelyn worked as a nurse at the Washington Hospital Center, and she employed Violeta to watch her child and clean her house. Violeta told me after the interview that this is a friendship that has lasted to the present day, and that she still works for Evelyn.

- 21:18 Violeta: Y bueno empezó a crecer Alex y nació Jennifer. Pero nos movimos de casa y encontramos un apartamento solo, vino mi hermana...³⁶
And so Alex started to grow and then Jennifer was born. And then we moved from the house we were living in and we found an apartment. My sister came...
- 21:33 Jennifer: Um everything changed. We were able to get an apartment. Jennifer was born.
- 21:42 Violeta: Tenía Nick seis años y medio.
Nick was six and a half years old.
- 21:44 Jennifer: Nick was six years old.
- 21:46 Violeta: Y después donde Evelyn, ya Alex estaba grande y empecé a agarrar casas.
And then at Evelyn's, Alex got bigger and I started working at other houses.
- 21:53 Jennifer: And then when the little boy that I took care of got older I was able to go to other houses and work for them, and clean.
- 22:03 Violeta: Tambien, a los siete años de tener la residencia me hice sudadana.³⁷
After seven years being a resident, I became a United States citizen.
- 22:12 Jennifer: And after seven years I became a citizen.
- 22:29 Violeta: Después todo fue bien, trabajando muy duro
Then everything went smoothly, working very hard.
- 22:34 Jennifer: Everything else after that was just working really hard just to...
- 22:37 Violeta: Pero yo tengo muchas historias cuando empecé ir a otras casas que no sabía cómo usar la lavadora, a las señoras les decía yes a todo.
But I have so many stories about when I started to work in other houses. I didn't know how to use a washing machine, I would tell the ladies "yes" for everything.
- 22:44 Jennifer: I have so many stories that I could go on. I didn't know how to use a washing machine. I didn't know how to speak English. And I would only say yes to everything.

³⁶ Once again, Violeta skims over a period of time that she does not think is important to her story. Just like she skimmed over her life in Nicaragua, she glazes over her initial years in the United States, listing off events like a grocery list.

³⁷ This would have been a good time to ask a question about why she became a citizen, but of course I let the opportunity slide again. I did question her later about citizenship but here the question would have proceeded more naturally.

- 22:57 Violeta: Yo lo hacía a mi manera pero lo hacía bien.³⁸
But I did everything my way and I did it well.
- 22:59 Jennifer: I did it my way and I tried. And I did it well.
- 23:06 Mallory: So how was it different living in Nicaragua versus living in America?
- 23:12 Violeta: Más trabajo acá.
More work here.
- 23:14 Jennifer: It's much more work here in America.
- 23:16 Violeta: Porque haya la vida es más fácil.
Because over there [in Nicaragua] life is easier.
- 23:22 Jennifer: Everything in Nicaragua was more calm, more where I could live my life without many worries.
- 23:30 Violeta: La ciudad, la ciudad es menos gente.
The city, less people in the city.
- 23:37 Jennifer: Where I lived there was less people, less crowded.
- 23:43 Violeta: Era más bonita dar clases a los niños.
It was nicer being able to teach classes to the little kids.
- 23:47 Jennifer: It was, she felt it was...I felt it was more beautiful and nice to teach kids...having my career.
- 23:57 Violeta: Pero si yo, si regresábamos no íbamos, no iban a tener oportunidades.³⁹
But if I, all of us went back, they (my children) wouldn't have had opportunities.
- 24:06 Jennifer: But if we would have returned I knew that my children would have less opportunities in Nicaragua then they would have here in America.

³⁸ Violeta is proud of her accomplishments in the United States. She admits that she struggled, but she is able to recognize the enormity of her sacrifices and her ability to overcome language barriers and cultural differences.

³⁹ This is a common theme in immigration stories, regardless of where they came from. People make sacrifices so that their children can have a better life. This is something that Violeta has gained in hindsight, as she had originally intended to return to Nicaragua after they saved enough money and it became less dangerous. See: Jennifer H. Lundquist and Douglas S. Masey, "Politics or Economics? International Migration During the Nicaraguan Contra War," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, no.1 (February, 2005): 29-53.

- 24:21 Violeta: Yo sé que iban a estudiar y todo pero era diferente. La vida es muy diferente.
I knew they would still do their studies but it was different. Life is very different.
- 24:28 Jennifer: I know that they would have ended up studying in Nicaragua, but just...life is different.
- 24:36 Violeta: Todos se reciben como ya ves la Violeta, la está la otra y nadie tiene trabajo.
*Everyone graduates, but you see Violeta (niece in Nicaragua) and everyone else, no one has jobs.*⁴⁰
- 24:42 Jennifer: Things are different now. A lot of people end up graduating from college in Nicaragua but they never get jobs. Never.
- 24:52 Violeta: Mi hermano después se vino acá, y estuvo un tiempo y se fue. Todos se han venido y no les gusta acá.⁴¹
My brother came here afterwards, he stayed for a while, then left. Everyone has come here and they don't like it.
- 25:00 Jennifer: Everybody else in my family has come to the United States and they completely hate it and left. We're like, the only ones who stayed.
- 25:09 Violeta: Si tu Tío Claudio ya ves, nació Claudio José aquí, mi sobrino.
Look at your Uncle Claudio, you see, Claudio Jose was born here, my nephew.
- 25:14 Jennifer: Even my family members who had children here in the United States, took their children back. Citizens.
- 25:21 Violeta: Él es doctor ya Claudio, pero regresamos cuando podemos cada año.
But he is a doctor now. But we go back when we can every year.
- 25:32 Jennifer: We do go back when we can every year during the summer time. One month.⁴²

⁴⁰ According to a UNDP report titled "National Report on Human Development 2011: The Young People Building Nicaragua," forty percent of young Nicaraguans in 2011 were unemployed or worked in the informal sector, yet they still remained hopeful. See: United Nations Development Programme, "Despite High Unemployment, Young Nicaraguans are Hopeful," <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/articles/2011/12/07/-informe-nacional-de-desarrollo-humano-2011-las-juventudes-construyendo-nicaragua/> (accessed May 15, 2014). Violeta does not appear to have the same outlook about Nicaragua's employment situation, but perhaps that is because she has come to be more closely tied to the United States and her bias is now drawn in that direction.

⁴¹ I should have asked a question along the lines of, "what do they not like about the United States?" However, I was hesitant to interrupt, and then later forgot my thought. This would have been a good opportunity to take notes.

⁴² "One month," is obviously an addition by Jennifer because she knows that her parents go back for one month every year.

- 25:39 Violeta: Tenemos una casa grande grande⁴³
We have a big, big house...
- 25:43 Jennifer: We were able to make a big nice house, vacation house.
- 25:46 Violeta: Con corredor, hamacas, palos de coco
With a big hallway, hammocks, and coconut trees.
- 25:51 Jennifer: With palm trees and coconut trees.
- 25:55 Violeta: Muy grande.
Very big.
- 25:56 Jennifer: It's really big.
- 25:59 Violeta: Y visitamos a todos.
And we visit everyone.
- 26:01 Jennifer: We visit everyone.
- 26:04 Violeta: Y ahorra lo vemos lo que sucedió, cuando estaba pasando era terrible, pero ahora lo vemos diferente.⁴⁴
Now we look back and think about everything that happened, it was horrible at the time, but we see it differently
- 26:11 Jennifer: Now we see everything differently. At the moment when everything was happening it was something that was terrible, horrible. We were sad but now we look at it as, that was the best thing that happened.
- 26:29 Violeta: Si no se...
I don't know...
- 26:30 Jennifer: Without all that happening, we wouldn't be here.
- 26:33 Violeta: En Nicaragua era muy difícil encontrar leche, hacíamos unas grandes filas.
In Nicaragua it was very difficult to find milk, we would have to make long lines

⁴³ Despite the fact that Violeta and her family are now tied to the United States, it is important to them that they have a place to go in Nicaragua that is theirs. They have a permanent residence in both Nicaragua and the United States.

⁴⁴ This is a theme that Violeta keeps coming back to: how everything that she went through was worth it. She sees her sacrifices as necessary for her children's welfare, and that being the only thing that matters.

- 26:40 Jennifer: Because of the government, there was...everything was different, the economy was different. They would have to make long lines to try to get milk and food.
- 26:50 Violeta: La azúcar todo era difícil.⁴⁵
Sugar, everything was difficult.
- 26:51 Jennifer: Sugar. Everything was very hard.
- 26:55 Violeta: Ahorra está un poco más o menos, hay de todo hay súper mercados
Now it is alright over there, there's many things, there are super markets.
- 27:01 Jennifer: Now everything's different. It's a little bit different. They have supermarkets. It's more modernized.
- 27:07 Violeta: Pero la gente siempre sigue luchando, no hay mucho trabajo
But people still keep struggling, there aren't many jobs.
- 27:13 Jennifer: But people are still struggling. There's not a lot of work over there.
- 27:17 Violeta: Pero mi esposo quiere irse a retirar haya.⁴⁶
But my husband wants to retire and go over there.
- 27:22 Jennifer: But my husband wants to go retire over there.
- 27:26 Violeta: Y yo talves podría ir por dos tres meses pero no siempre.
And me, I would go too, maybe, for two three months but not forever.
- 27:33 Jennifer: And me, I could go for 2-3 months but I can't stay longer than that.
- 27:38 Violeta: Primero el clima lo siento ya muy diferente
First the climate, it's very different for me now.
- 27:43 Jennifer: The climate is completely different.
- 27:47 Violeta: Estar por, es como estar por el mar toda la vida.⁴⁷
It's like staying at the beach your whole life.

⁴⁵ During the Sandinista regime, the economy was not doing well, and part of that was because of the economic sanctions the United States placed on Nicaragua. President Carter had halted aid to the Sandinistas once he discovered they were smuggling arms to El Salvador, and President Reagan took a much firmer approach. See: William M. Leogrande, "Making the Economy Scream: U.S. Economic Sanctions against Sandinista Nicaragua," *Third World Quarterly* 17, no.2 (June, 1996): 329-348.

⁴⁶ She said this with a certain hint of annoyance. It is obviously a point of contention in their family and perhaps a sensitive topic.

- 27:51 Jennifer: It's like staying at the beach for the rest of your life.
- 27:55 Violeta: Yeah, it's hot hot hot. It's hot!⁴⁸
- 27:59 Jennifer: It's so hot. It's humid hot.⁴⁹
- 28:05 Violeta: It's very hot. Pero es muy lindo. Hay muchos Americanos que viven haya.
But it's still very beautiful. There are many Americans that live over there.
- 28:12 Jennifer: It's beautiful. A lot tourists and Americans live there too. But...
- 28:17 Violeta: Pero yo creo que no podría dejarlos por mucho tiempo.
But I think that I wouldn't be able to leave them [my children] for so long
- 28:26 Jennifer: But I know that my children would stay here and I couldn't leave them for so long.
- 28:34 Violeta: Ya no, Ya talves algún día tendré nietos no sé.⁵⁰
Maybe one day I'll have grandkids, I don't know.
- 28:39 Jennifer: Maybe one day I might even have grandchildren and I wanna see them.
- 28:43 Violeta: Si quiero cuidar los.
Yes, I want to take care of them.
- 28:45 Jennifer: I wanna take care of them.
- 28:47 Violeta: Pero mi esposo esta que quiere, él quiere irse.
But my husband has his mind set that he wants to leave, he wants to leave.
- 28:49 Jennifer: But my husband is like...we're leaving as soon as I retire.
- 28:55 Violeta: Porque es diferente te vas un mes y todo mundo te, pero ya vivir ya es más diferente, todo mundo en un mes es todo bien.
Because it's different, you go for one month and everyone is [nice], but living there is way different, for a month everyone is nice and everything is ok.

⁴⁸ She said this in English to emphasize the fact that it is hot there. Jennifer and I had laughed at her comment, "It's like staying at the beach your whole life," and Violeta felt compelled to defend her statement.

⁴⁹ Jennifer chimes in here, breaking outside of her role as a translator. Here, she has her own voice, and it is that of a disgruntled tourist complaining about the hot climate.

⁵⁰ Once again, Violeta makes important life decisions based on the need to keep her family together. First it was to stay with her husband, then her children, and now she is making future decisions based on any grandchildren she may have.

- 29:05 Jennifer: They only go for a month and of course everyone is treating them so nicely. But if you stay there forever everything changes.
- 29:18 Violeta: Y yo creo que talves nos iremos dos meses cuando se retire pero volvemos a la nieve al frio me gusta
But I think that we'll go for two months when he retires but we'll return to the snow and the cold. I like it.
- 29:33 Jennifer: We probably were only just gonna go for only 2-3 months but we're definitely coming back to the snow cause I like snow.
- 29:41 Violeta: Me gusta el frio.
I like the cold.
- 29:43 Jennifer: I like the cold.
- 29:45 Violeta: Me gusta el frio pero dos meses haci pero me gusta el cambio del clima
I like the cold, after two months, I would like a climate change.
- 29:51 Jennifer: She likes...I like the change of climate.
- 29:54 Violeta: Por ejemplo el spring me encanta, el spring el fall.
For example, I love the spring, spring, fall.
- 29:56 Jennifer: I like spring, fall.
- 29:59 Violeta: Pero haya es...
But over there...
- 30:00 Jennifer: But over there is constant summer.
- 30:02 Violeta: Es constante verano, verano, verano, lluvia verano. Y no hay un cambio...
It's constant summer, summer, summer, rain, summer. And there is no change...
- 30:10 Jennifer: There's no change. It's just summer and rain.
- 30:13 Violeta: Y eso cansa.
And that gets tiring.⁵¹

⁵¹ At this point in the interview we were halfway through, and I was beginning to feel that I hadn't asserted myself as an interviewer. I did not think there was any substance in discussing the difference between the climate in the United States versus Nicaragua, but then I also did not want to interrupt Violeta or come across as if I did not find value in her statements. So I allowed her to keep speaking.

- 30:14 Jennifer: And that's tiring.
- 30:17 Violeta: Pero es la experiencia creo que valió la pena porque mis hijos están contentos.
But the experience, I think, was worth it because my children are happy.
- 30:27 Jennifer: I think the experience truly...
- 30:33 Violeta: Valió la pena.
It was worth it.
- 30:37 Jennifer: It was worth it. The whole experience was worth it because now my children are happy here and we're all happy.
- 30:44 Violeta: Si, y si el gobierno no hubiera cambiado, yo no me hubiera ido
Yes, and if the government wouldn't have changed I wouldn't have left.
- 30:47 Jennifer: And if the government wouldn't have done all those changes at the time then this would have never happened.
- 30:53 Violeta: Estuviéramos en Nicaragua.
- 30:55 Jennifer: We would be in Nicaragua.
We would be in Nicaragua.
- 30:57 Violeta: Trabajando contentos pero no estuviéramos acá porque toda las personas que vienen acá es porque su gobierno hay un cambio y no hay trabajo.⁵²
Working, still trying to be happy. But we wouldn't be here. Every person who comes here it's because their government has changed and there is no work.
- 31:09 Jennifer: We wouldn't be here right now and I feel like every person who comes to the United States has mostly something to do because of the government and the government changing and the government affecting them.
- 31:21 Violeta: Y no hay trabajos.
And there aren't any jobs.
- 31:23 Jennifer: And there's no jobs and no work.
- 31:25 Violeta: Pero la mayoría, el noventa y cinco, el noventa por ciento viene a trabajar.⁵³
But the majority of them, 95 percent, 95 percent come to work.

⁵² Here she adds another consideration in her decision to leave Nicaragua. She had said that they left because it was too dangerous, but in this statement she implies that there also wasn't any work in Nicaragua. This would be a good point for further research.

⁵³ She's assuming here, but I think she's mostly right.

- 31:30 Jennifer: And ninety percent of people come here is to work.
- 31:35 Violeta: Y el otro porciento es porque hay malas personas que vienen.
And the other percent, those are bad people who come.
- 31:38 Jennifer: And then the other percentage is just bad people.
- 31:42 Violeta: Pero la mayoría mayoría que es que están sacando ahorita es buenas personas que dejan a su familia y todo.
But the majority, majority of the people that are coming here are good people that leave behind their families and everything.
- 31:52 Jennifer: It's good people who come here, who leave their families just to try to send them money.
- 32:00 Violeta: Si pero todo está bien.⁵⁴
Yes, but everything is good.
- 32:02 Jennifer: But everything is good.
- 32:04 Mallory: So when you came, how long did you expect to stay for?
- 32:10 Violeta: Terminar la casa que estábamos construyendo, recoger un poco para poner un negocio o algo. Tres años tres cuatro años tres.
Finish the house that we were having constructed, save up a little to open up a small business or something. Three years, three, four years.
- 32:24 Jennifer: Our goal was to get enough money to finish the house that we were building in Nicaragua and raise money also to start a little business in Nicaragua. And that, 3-4 years we felt like was enough to accomplish it.
- 32:40 Violeta: Pero no paso así.
But it didn't happen like that.
- 32:41 Jennifer: But that didn't happen.
- 32:43 Violeta: Porque la familia haya llamaban que necesitaban dinero porque está enfermo uno que la otra y la otra.
Because the family over there would call that they needed money because someone would be sick and other and other reasons.

⁵⁴ There it is again: "Everything is good." After a while she started to say this statement every time she finished answering a question and I would take it as my cue to ask another question. This is just another example of how I felt like I was not in control of the interview. Instead of taking cues from me, I instead took my cues from Violeta.

- 32:50 Jennifer: Most of our money that we were trying to save ended up being for people who would call us from Nicaragua. “We need help, we’re sick. We need help.” And all our money was going to them instead of for our goals.
- 33:02 Violeta: Enviar a Nicaragua, enviar a Nicaragua. El gol nunca llegaba, nunca llegaba. *Always sending [money] to Nicaragua, sending to Nicaragua. Our goal never came, never came.*
- 33:08 Jennifer: The goal never came.
- 33:10 Violeta: Y fue pasando el tiempo el tiempo...
And time would pass and pass...
- 33:12 Jennifer: And time passed and time passed and...
- 33:15 Violeta: Y nada.
And nothing.
- 33:16 Jennifer: And nothing.
- 33:17 Mallory: Was there a time when you just decided that you were gonna scrap that plan and start new?⁵⁵
- 33:24 Jennifer: Hubo un tiempo que el plan cambio y decidieron que aquí nos quedamos para siempre?
- 33:31 Violeta: Si cuando decidí hacerme suidadana.
Yes when I decided to become an American citizen.
- 33:34 Jennifer: Yes, and that was the day that I said, “I’m gonna become a citizen of the United States.”
- 33:41 Violeta: Para votar! Por los derechos de los inmigrantes.
*To vote! For the rights of immigrants.*⁵⁶
- 33:46 Jennifer: To have the right to vote for the rights of immigrants.

⁵⁵ I should have phrased this question: “At what point in time did you decide to abandon your plan to return home permanently?” Instead, the phrasing is sloppy and sounds unprofessional.

⁵⁶ Many immigrants become apart of these transnational communities, effectively suspended between two countries, and “this translates into a far greater presence and influence of immigrant diasporas in the affairs of their home nations.” See: Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, “From Immigrants to Ethnics,” in *Immigrant America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Violeta doesn’t expand on her own political views, and in hindsight I should have asked a question about it. Instead, the three of us laughed and she moved on.

- 33:52 Violeta: Si después convencí a mi esposo que se hiciera sudadano.
And afterwards I convinced my husband to become a citizen.
- 33:57 Jennifer: And then I convinced my husband to become a citizen as well.
- 34:03 Violeta: Mi hermana se hico sudadana.
My sister also became a citizen.
- 34:05 Jennifer: My sister also became a citizen.
- 34:08 Violeta: Y pero cambio con el tiempo cambio.⁵⁷
Everything changed after a while.
- 34:15 Jennifer: With time everything just changed and became different.
- 34:17 Violeta: Ahorra solo pensamos ir de paseo.
Now we only go for vacation.
- 34:22 Jennifer: And after that, it was always just planning just to go vacation there and come back.
- 34:28 Violeta: Come back porque el trabajo estaba acá.
We come back because our work is here.
- 34:31 Jennifer: Because work was here.
- 34:33 Violeta: Y no pude hacer mi sueño de lo que estaba haciendo haya pero por lo menos crie a muchos niños. A los Fungers, Alex esta hombre, muchos niños.
And I wasn't able to have my dream come true over there. But at last I was able to take care of many kids here. The Fungers, Alex who is a man now, many kids.
- 34:49 Jennifer: I wasn't able to do what I love...finish everything in Nicaragua. But I was able to be with kids here. I took care of lots of kids here.
- 35:00 Violeta: Muchos si y ya están grandes sí.
So many, they are all big now.
- 35:03 Jennifer: And now they're all old now, big.
- 35:05 Violeta: Pero siempre siguen allí.
But they're still there.

⁵⁷ This is yet another opportunity for a question that I let pass by. I should have asked what she meant by “everything,” for clarification. At the time I had just assumed that she meant her general way of life, but I realize now that it is important to clarify statements.

- 35:07 Mallory: Did you think you were gonna be a teacher when you came here?⁵⁸
- 35:10 Violeta: Si pensé pero no tenía las condiciones de dinero para ir a una escuela para aprender rápido el inglés.
*Yes I did think about it but I didn't have the money to go to a school to learn English.*⁵⁹
- 35:22 Jennifer: Yes, that was my first thought was to become a teacher here. But we didn't, I didn't have enough money to go to a school to learn how to speak English.
- 35:31 Violeta: No daban dinero para financiar.
They didn't give out financial aid.
- 35:36 Jennifer: There was no financial aid at that time.
- 35:41 Violeta: Y no teníamos a quien recurrir, quien nos iba dar. El banco?
And we didn't have anyone to borrow from. Who was going to give us money? The bank?
- 35:46 Jennifer: And we didn't have any means of getting that type of, that kind of money. The bank wasn't gonna give us money.
- 35:55 Violeta: Y entonces yo aprendí ingles por los niños.
So then I learned English because of the kids.
- 36:01 Jennifer: And I learned English by taking care of the kids.
- 36:06 Violeta: Y me enseñaron yo les enseñe español.
They taught me and I taught them Spanish.
- 36:08 Jennifer: The kids taught me and I taught them Spanish.
- 36:12 Violeta: Ellos hablan español y yo hablo un poco de inglés. Entiendo mucho pero...
They speak Spanish and I speak a little English. I understand a lot but...
- 36:18 Jennifer: I understand English a lot. I speak a little bit of English.
- 36:22 Violeta: Pero hubiera sido fabuloso que me hubiera dicho el gobierno "aquí está" después pero no.
But it would have been fabulous if the government would have said "here you go" but no.

⁵⁸ My use of "gonna" instead of the proper "going to" is very annoying.

⁵⁹ Many immigrants suffer a demotion in their professional lives once they come to the United States because they do not know English. Such was the case with Violeta and her husband. Violeta became a domestic worker, and Nicholas started to work maintenance jobs, which he still does today.

- 36:31 Jennifer: It would have been fabulous for the government to offer me something where I could do a teaching career here.
- 36:40 Violeta: Ahora hay más oportunidades.
Now there are much more opportunities.
- 36:42 Jennifer: Now, of course, there's more opportunities.
- 36:48 Violeta: Y la gente aprende más inglés en las escuelas...
And people learn more English at school...
- 36:50 Jennifer: People learn English anywhere now. They offer it free.
- 36:55 Violeta: ...gratis. El sábado en Wheaton, en iglesias.⁶⁰
...for free. On Saturdays in Wheaton, in churches.
- 37:01 Jennifer: At churches, anywhere.
- 37:03 Violeta: En aquel tiempo
Back then...
- 37:05 Jennifer: Back then nothing was free.
- 37:07 Violeta: Nada! Pero todo bien.
*Nothing! But everything is ok.*⁶¹
- 37:11 Jennifer: But everything was good.
- 37:14 Mallory: Um, something I wanted to ask...How have you kept your Nicaraguan identity and traditions in the United States?⁶²
- 37:22 Jennifer: Qué clase de tradiciones que hacían en Nicaragua todavía hacen aquí?
- 37:27 Violeta: Todas!
All of them.
- 37:29 Jennifer: Everything!

⁶⁰ She is absolutely right. A simple Google search of free English classes in the Washington D.C. area produces thousands of results.

⁶¹ It must be time for me to ask another question!

⁶² What I was looking for here was a more analytical answer about how she has retained her traditions in a foreign country. Instead, Violeta begins to tell me a list of the traditions she has kept. This has its own benefits, but I probably should have phrased the question differently.

- 37:36 Violeta: Somos Católicos.
We are Catholic.
- 37:38 Jennifer: We're Catholic.
- 37:40 Violeta: Y creemos mucho en la Virgen María.
And we believe very much in the Virgin Mary.
- 37:41 Jennifer: We believe so much in the Virgin Mary.
- 37:45 Violeta: Y hacemos siempre el rosario, rezamos y hacemos la purísima.
We always do a rosary, we pray and we do the purisima
- 37:52 Jennifer: There's a Nicaraguan tradition that on Mary's...there's a special day for Mary.
- 37:59 Violeta: May 13.
- 38:01 Jennifer: We pray for her. It's on May 13. It's a big celebration, all the family comes.⁶³
- 38:07 Violeta: Es cuando a los tres niños en Portugal se les apareció la Virgen de Fátima.⁶⁴
It's when the Virgin Maria Fatima appeared to three children in Portugal.
- 38:11 Jennifer: It's celebrating Mary and the day that in Portugal the Mary appeared to three children. And Mary told them the secrets of life.
- 38:27 Violeta: También hacemos las purísimas hacemos, hacemos las navidades, las gallinas hacemos todo todo.
We also do the purisimas, Christmas the same, the traditional chicken dish, we do everything, everything
- 38:34 Jennifer: For Christmas there's...and all the religious holidays we always do special Nicaraguan food. Everything Nicaraguan food.
- 38:45 Violeta: Y celebramos igual.
And we celebrate the same.
- 38:47 Jennifer: We celebrate it the same way we do in Nicaragua.

⁶³ Here is another example of Jennifer stepping outside her role as a translator and adding additional information based on her own knowledge. She knows that “all the family” comes because she is apart of that family.

⁶⁴ In Nicaragua, La Purísima is one of the most widely celebrated holidays from November to December. To give thanks for the Virgin Mary and the miracles that she has performed, families throughout Nicaragua pray to her and give thanks through song, dance, and a lot of food.

- 38:54 Violeta: Incluso vamos a otros lugares que son familias de Nicaragua que celebran igual.
We even go to other places where families that are from Nicaragua celebrate the same.
- 39:00 Jennifer: Any time that other families are celebrating Nicaraguan holidays...
- 39:07 Violeta: We have the Halloween but not the Halloween. It's like uh...
- 39:10 Jennifer: It's, there's something called the Purísima.⁶⁵ It's kind of like Halloween but it's slightly different. That instead of children going knocking on people's doors, the people go to them and they throw candy at them.
- 39:30 Violeta: Ellos dicen quien causa tanta alegría la concepción de María.
They say, "What causes such happiness among us?" "The conception of Mary!"
- 39:33 Jennifer: And it's mostly religious. Everyone is in religious costumes.
- 39:40 Violeta: Dan dulces, igual que aquí en Halloween.
They give out candies just like here on Halloween.
- 30:42 Jennifer: And a lot of families here do that and sometimes we go.
- 39:46 Violeta: Y nosotros vamos. Pero hay muchas tradiciones.
And we go. But there are so many traditions.
- 39:49 Jennifer: There's so many traditions.
- 39:51 Mallory: So how important to you is it to keep those [traditions]?⁶⁶
- 39:53 Violeta: Muy importante. Yo quiero continuar para que ellas aprendan. A ellas les gusta mucho.
Very important. I want to continue so they can learn. They like it a lot.
- 39:59 Jennifer: I want to continue this because I want my children to learn this. They love it!
- 40:05 Violeta: Si creo que sí, no te gusta? Quiero que sigan hablando español.
Yes I think so. Don't you like it?⁶⁷ I want them to continue to speak Spanish.
- 40:15 Jennifer: I want them to be able to speak Spanish.

⁶⁵ I believe this is the same holiday that they just described, but I'm not sure why they are explaining it differently here.

⁶⁶ Finally an appropriate follow-up question!

⁶⁷ Here Violeta is addressing her daughter directly. She detected a hint of sarcasm in Jennifer's translation and felt the need to ask her a direct question. At this point, I am just an observer in their interaction and my role as an interviewer is diminished even further.

- 40:20 Violeta: Tengo mucho problema con la del medio, Stephanie.
I have problems with this with my middle, Stephanie.
- 40:23 Jennifer: I have a lot of problem with that, with my middle child. Stephanie, she does not like to speak Spanish.
- 40:31 Violeta: Habla pero cuando la obligo.⁶⁸
She speaks it but only when she's obligated to.
- 40:33 Jennifer: She talks Spanish, but only when I obligate her.
- 40:37 Violeta: Si pero es necesario que sigan, no solamente por ellas, si no por los niños, porque es bueno saber dos idiomas.
Yes but it's necessary for them to continue, not just for themselves, but for their children, because it's good to know two languages.
- 40:45 Jennifer: It's necessary to speak Spanish...to keep traditions, not just for her, for them. It's for their children, their grandchildren...everyone.
- 40:55 Violeta: Saben dos idiomas, pueden ayudar a mucha gente. Porque yo...
If they know two languages they can help a lot of people. Because I
- 41:01 Jennifer: Speaking two languages is important.
- 41:03 Violeta: Yo no tenía quien me llevara al doctor y yo no sabía cómo explicar al doctor. No había gente que hablaba español.
*I didn't have anyone to take me to the doctor and I didn't know how to explain things to the doctor. There was no one who spoke Spanish.*⁶⁹
- 41:14 Jennifer: Not knowing how to speak English was difficult, I didn't know how to talk to anyone, especially at the doctor's office.

⁶⁸ According to Portes and Rumbaut, third generation immigrants are less likely to continue to speak the language that their grandparents spoke, and there is therefore a greater risk of losing that connection to their native country. This is precisely the problem that Violeta encounters with her daughter, Stephanie. She grew up speaking Spanish at home, but once she has her own children, there will be less and less Spanish spoken. See: Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, "Learning the Ropes," in *Immigrant America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

⁶⁹ Even today, language barriers between physicians and their patients is an extremely dangerous situation. If the patient is unable to communicate their health problems to their doctor, then they are at risk for not getting the care that they need and possibly developing a life-threatening condition. For more information, see: John Hornberger, Haruka Itakura and Sandra R. Wilson, "Bridging Language and Cultural Barriers Between Physicians and Patient," *Public Health Reports* (1974-) 112, no. 5 (October, 1997): 410-417.

- 41:20 Violeta: No había, necesitaban gente que hablara español. Por eso iba mucho hacer voluntaria en las escuelas. De casi todos los días iba de voluntaria a la escuela.
There wasn't, they needed people who spoke Spanish too. That's why I would volunteer a lot in the schools. I would go almost every day to volunteer at their schools.
- 41:35 Jennifer: I became a volunteer at school just so I could learn.
- 41:39 Violeta: Casi todos los días iba a la escuela. De Head Start me encantaba.
Almost every day at school. I loved the Head Start class.⁷⁰
- 41:45 Jennifer: I went almost everyday to the Head Start School with my children.
- 41:53 Violeta: Y aprendí allí poquito por poquito
I learned a lot there, little by little.
- 41:57 Jennifer: I learned little by little.
- 41:58 Violeta: Viendo televisión, las novelas.
Also watching television, the soap operas.
- 42:01 Jennifer: Watching TV I learned too.
- 42:04 Violeta: De All My Children...
Like All My Children...
- 42:07 Jennifer: Sesame Street!⁷¹
- 42:08 Violeta: Sesame Street!⁷² Um, the *General Hospital*.
- 42:15 Mallory: I love that show! Luke and Laura!⁷³

⁷⁰ Head Start is a federal education program geared toward helping the development of children from low-income families. Violeta does not specify if she enrolled her children in the program, but since she says she brought her children there, it appears so.

⁷¹ Jennifer obviously knows that Sesame Street helped her mother to learn English, so she offers it up to jog her memory.

⁷² There have been studies that Sesame Street is extremely helpful for learning a second language. Sesame Street became so popular, in fact, that countries such as Japan chose to broadcast the program in order to teach English. Sesame Street is not just a program for children; it is a program for anyone who wishes to gain a developmental understanding of the English language. See: Gregory J. Gettas, "The Globalization of "Sesame Street": A Producer's Perspective," *Educational Technology Research and Development* 38, no. 4 (1990): 55-73.

⁷³ At this point in the interview I was sufficiently anxious. I had run out of questions, and I was nervous that I would not have anything to say once Violeta had stopped talking. As an avid watcher of *General Hospital* since 2003, I seized on her mention of the television program in an effort to extend the conversation and grasp onto something familiar.

- 42:19 Jennifer: It's been on that long?⁷⁴
- 42:22 Mallory: Since the 60s.⁷⁵
- 42:24 Violeta: Yo mire General Hospital mucho tiempo.⁷⁶
I watched General Hospital for a long time.
- 42:27 Jennifer: I watched General Hospital for so long.
- 42:30 Violeta: Yo no sabía qué pero entendía.
I didn't understand but I did at the same time.
- 42:33 Jennifer: I didn't understand what was happening but I loved watching them.
- 42:37 Violeta: Y aprendí y las palabras se me iban conociendo más.
And I learned and the words were becoming very familiar
- 42:40 Jennifer: And then the words stuck to me. And...
- 42:43 Violeta: Mas, mas, mas.
More and more and more
- 42:44 Jennifer: More and more.
- 42:47 Violeta: Y bueno Sesame Street es buenísimo.
And well Sesame Street is the best.
- 42:48 Jennifer: Sesame Street is the best.
- 42:53 Mallory: So is it important for you to have your kids remember everything that you went through?
- 42:56 Violeta: Si, es muy importante.
Yes, it's very important.
- 42:57 Jennifer: Es importante para sus hijos, que sepan todo lo que paso en your vida?⁷⁷
So is it important for you to have your kids remember everything that you went through?

⁷⁴ Once again Jennifer breaks out of her role as a translator.

⁷⁵ I too break outside of my role as an interviewer, as I engage Jennifer in conversation about General Hospital in my effort to break the tension of the interview.

⁷⁶ Interestingly enough, it is Violeta that brings us back to the interview and re-establishes structure.

⁷⁷ Even though Violeta understood and answered my question without Jennifer having to translate, she does anyway because Violeta looked to her daughter for clarification.

- 43:04 Violeta: Si creo que si porque saben el sacrificio un hico.
Yes I think yes because they know the sacrifices we made.
- 43:11 Jennifer: Um, yes it's very important because then they know everything we went through and the sacrifices we had to make in order for them to be where they are.
- 43:21 Violeta: Si exacto porque fue un sacrificio porque yo me sentía muy bien haya.
Yes exactly because it was a sacrifice because I felt good over there [in Nicaragua].
- 43:30 Jennifer: It was a sacrifice because before everything happened I was happy in my country. I was...I was completely fine what I was doing.
- 43:41 Violeta: Es importante.
It's important.
- 43:43 Jennifer: So it's very important that they know.
- 43:48 Violeta: Sí que más?⁷⁸
Yes, what else?
- 43:55 Mallory: Um...⁷⁹so you're an American citizen?
- 43:56 Violeta: Si.
Yes.
- 43:57 Mallory: Um, do you view yourself as Nicaraguan first and American second? How do you view that?⁸⁰
- 44:04 Violeta: Yo creo que ahorita yo creo que estoy más con Estados Unidos porque ellos son.
I think that right now I'm more towards United States because they are.
- 44:14 Jennifer: I think now at this point in my life, I am more American. United States. Especially because my children consider themselves American.

⁷⁸ This phrase: "Que más," made me extremely nervous. I had run out of questions, and I felt very put on the spot. It was my job as an interviewer to have my questions ready and to facilitate a smooth transition from one topic to another. Instead, when she asked me what else I had to ask her, I panicked.

⁷⁹ This felt like a very long pause to me while I scrambled to come up with a question.

⁸⁰ Under the circumstances, I think I came up with a good question. However, I could have phrased it better. Perhaps, "Do you identify more with Nicaragua or the United States?"

- 44:25 Violeta: Pero segundo creo que Nicaragua.⁸¹
But second I think Nicaragua.
- 44:29 Jennifer: And second Nicaragua.
- 44:31 Violeta: Pero nunca pierdo mi origen.
But I never lose my sense of origin.
- 44:35 Jennifer: But I will never forget my origins and where I came from.
- 44:39 Violeta: Si porque creo que estados unidos está hecho pura gente de todos los países.
*I think the United States is made up of people from every country.*⁸²
- 44:45 Jennifer: I think the United States is just made up from so many different cultures.
- 44:51 Violeta: Hay muchos chinos, indios de todas.
There are many Chinese people, Indian people, everything.
- 44:55 Jennifer: Chinese, Indians, from everywhere!
- 44:58 Violeta: Y si todas estas culturas se fueran y solo quedaran los propios americanos estuviera vacío los Estados Unidos.
And if all of those cultures were to leave and only the primary culture stayed, the United States would be empty.
- 45:05 Jennifer: I feel like if all the foreign cultures were to leave the United States, the United States would be empty.
- 45:13 Mallory: Yeah.
- 45:16 Violeta: Si!
- 45:17 Mallory: Yeah.

⁸¹ Many immigrants, no matter how long they spend in the United States, continue to identify more with the country from which they were born. Note David A. Gerber, “Yankeys Now”?: Joseph and Rebecca Hartley’s Circuitous Path to American Identity- A Case Study in the Use of Immigrant Letters as Social Documentation,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 3 (Spring, 2009): 7-33. Joseph Hartley was born in England and continued to see England as his home. Violeta, on the other hand, sees her home as wherever her children are. But both Joseph Hartley and Violeta came to a better understanding of their identity once they left their homes.

- 45:18 Violeta: Si entonces todos hacemos los Estados Unidos.
*Yes, so together we all make up the United States.*⁸³
- 45:21 Jennifer: So we all together make the United States.
- 45:26 Violeta: Pero tenemos nuestras raíces.
But we all still have our roots.
- 45:28 Jennifer: But, we all have our own background and where we come from.
- 45:36 Violeta: Si así es.
Yes, that's how it is.
- 45:37 Mallory: So when you go back to Nicaragua, does your family think of you as American? Like how do your neighbors think of you?⁸⁴
- 45:44 Jennifer: Que piensa la gente en Nicaragua cuando usted visita Nicaragua? Ellos piensan son Americanos o piensan normal?⁸⁵
- 45:52 Mallory: Just like normal?
- 45:54 Violeta: Normal, normal porque nosotros somos normal con ellos.
Normal, normal because we act normal with them.
- 46:01 Jennifer: They treat us normal because we treat them just the same.
- 46:06 Violeta: Normal, lo mismo. Hay niños que han crecido y me dicen, o todos los que me conocen..."Adiós Maestra, Adiós Maestra!"
Normal, the same. There are kids who have grown up and they tell, or everyone that knows me tells me, "Good day Teacher, Good day Teacher!"
- 46:16 Jennifer: Children that I used to teach a long time ago and they were to see me they still call me, "ah, teacher!"

⁸³ This is the first time that Violeta has ventured to give her opinion about politics. So far the interview has been exclusively about her own experiences and her reactions to them. This statement, on the other hand, is more abstract.

⁸⁴ I meant to gain an understanding of how Violeta's friends and family in Nicaragua relate to her now that she lives in the United States and if there is any conflict. Once again, I did not effectively relate this through my question.

⁸⁵ Whereas previously Violeta had been able to answer my question without needing Jennifer to translate, once I spoke in this instance she immediately turned to her daughter. This demonstrates that even though Violeta has a good grasp on English, her understanding is not perfect and she is still in need of assistance.

- 46:27 Violeta: Y normal, todos nos conocemos nos tratamos igual.
And it's normal, we all know each other and treat each other the same.
- 46:32 Jennifer: We all know each other and we treat each other the same way.
- 46:35 Violeta: No importa de adonde somos.
It doesn't matter where we are from.
- 46:36 Jennifer: Doesn't matter that I came from the United States.
- 46:40 Violeta: Ayudamos a los que podemos.⁸⁶
We help all those that we can.
- 46:42 Jennifer: And we...the only thing is we try...we help more to those people in need.
- 46:47 Violeta: Si necesitan techo le ponemos techo.
If they need a roof to live under, we provide them a home.
- 46:50 Jennifer: Anything they need we help them.
- 46:54 Violeta: Si necesitan comida le damos comida.
If they need food we give them food.
- 46:56 Jennifer: Food, shelter...
- 46:58 Violeta: Mucha ropa.
A lot of clothes.
- 46:59 Jennifer: We give them a lot of clothes.
- 47:00 Violeta: Mucha ropa. Les damos ropa a todos. Y ayudamos bastante.
A lot of clothes. We give clothes to everybody. And we help out a lot.
- 47:06 Jennifer: And we help a lot.
- 47:08 Violeta: Si, lo único diferente es que ayudamos....podemos podemos ayudar.
Yes, the only difference is that we help out now...we are able to help out more.
- 47:11 Jennifer: The only difference now that we are able to help them more.

⁸⁶ This was the original reason the Violeta and her family never ended up returning to Nicaragua. They had spent so much time and money helping those they had left behind at home that they never saved up enough money to build the house that they wanted. Although they eventually ended up building that house, enough time passed that they decided to stay in the United States. Nevertheless, they have continued to help everyone at home that asks for their help.

- 47:15 Violeta: Más, si es lo único. Solamente.
And that's it.
- 47:20 Mallory: Is there a Nicaraguan community in the area that you associate with, or...?⁸⁷
- 47:26 Jennifer: Hay una comunidad Nicaragüense aquí que compartimos con ellos?
- 47:33 Violeta: No precisamente, conocemos a muchas familias nicaragüenses.⁸⁸
Not precisely. We know a lot of families that are from Nicaragua.
- 47:39 Jennifer: Not precisely, but we do know a lot of Nicaraguan families.
- 47:43 Violeta: Sí que vamos a los cumpleaños...
We go to their birthday parties...
- 47:46 Jennifer: That we go to their birthday parties...
- 47:48 Violeta: A las comuniones...
To their communions...
- 47:51 Jennifer: Church gatherings...
- 47:54 Violeta: Pero no específicamente una comunidad.
But not a community specifically.
- 47:55 Jennifer: But not specifically a community.
- 47:57 Violeta: No, No, No. Tenemos muchos amigos del Salvador, de Perú.
No, No, No. We have a lot of friends from El Salvador, from Peru.
- 48:02 Jennifer: We have so many friends from other countries. El Salvador, Peru...
- 48:09 Violeta: Vamos donde si hay muchas partes que nos invitan.
We go to many places that we get invited to.
- 48:17 Jennifer: Many places we go to people are from Nicaragua, but not community.
- 48:21 Violeta: Not community.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ I didn't finish my question here because I figured that Jennifer would be able to translate my meaning. I was hoping to gain an understanding of any ties that she has to Nicaraguan immigrant in the area, but I fear that she misunderstood my question.

⁸⁸ This is essentially what I meant by Nicaraguan community. I think she took my question to mean a physical location of Nicaraguan families.

⁸⁹ She says this in English.

- 48:24 Mallory: And you said religion is a very important part to you. How important has that been throughout your whole experience coming to America?⁹⁰
- 48:34 Violeta: Bueno.
- 48:36 Jennifer: Como la religión ha tomado una parte de experiencia de venir aquí, como la religión ha ayudado?
- 48:44 Violeta: Realmente siempre nos mantenemos,...nos han tratado de cambiar a otras religiones.⁹¹
Honestly we always maintain our faith. People have tried to convert us to other religions.
- 48:51 Jennifer: Um, many times here so many people have tried to change our religion.
- 48:57 Violeta: Pero venimos de nuestras raíces muy apegadas al catolicismo.
But we come from a traditional background that is very close to Catholicism.
- 49:03 Jennifer: But we have strong roots with Catholicism.
- 49:06 Violeta: Los niños se han hecho, se han bautizado, confirmación, la primera comunión.⁹²
The kids have gotten baptized, confirmed, and done their first communion.
- 49:14 Jennifer: All my children have been baptized, first communion, confirmation.
- 49:19 Violeta: Todo lo que...
- 49:22 Jennifer: Everything that the Catholic religion requires.
- 49:26 Violeta: No somos muy como otros que solo en la iglesia, en la iglesia. No.
We're not like others that are constantly at church, only at church. No.
- 49:30 Jennifer: We're not so...like involved in the religion that we go to church every single day, but...

⁹⁰ Unfortunately, as I demonstrate with this question, I had an answer in mind that I was looking for. I wanted her to say something about how her faith kept her going and provided a source of strength. Kathryn Anderson makes it clear that an important quality in any interviewer is their ability to shed agendas. See: Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. by Sherner Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York, Routledge, 1991).

⁹¹ This would have produced an interesting follow-up question, but once again I felt that it would be rude to interrupt.

⁹² Violeta answers my question by providing a list of ways that they have been involved in their religion, which wasn't exactly what I had been looking for, although the information is still valuable.

- 49:38 Violeta: Pero si un domingo así cuando hay cosas [importantes] Vamos al iglesia Santa Catarina o a San Judas.
But some Sundays, like when there are important things we go. We go to a church called Santa Catarina or San Judas.
- 49:51 Jennifer: There's many churches...Santa Catarina...
- 49:54 Violeta: Hay veces queremos ir temprano, hay veces queremos ir tarde, no hay hora.⁹³
Sometimes we go early in the day or later in the day but there isn't a specific time.
- 50:01 Jennifer: There's no specific time that we go to church but we...we just pick any time.
- 50:05 Violeta: No es como los evangélicos que tienen que ir obligado a dar y dar su tiempo.
It's not like evangelicals that are obligated to go and take up all of their time.
- 50:10 Jennifer: We're not obligated to go.
- 50:13 Violeta: Pero si nos gusta mantener que crean en algo. Que crean en dios.
But yes we do like to maintain the faith, believe in something. To believe in God.
- 50:19 Jennifer: But we like to believe that...maintain in the house that we believe in the Catholic religion...we believe in something.
- 50:30 Violeta: Si y es bueno.
Yes and that's good.
- 50:34 Jennifer: And it's good.
- 50:35 Mallory: Is that...is that...let me think of how to say this.⁹⁴ Um, your religious community in Nicaragua...how was that compared to the community here?
- 50:46 Violeta: Es diferente. Muy diferente. En Nicaragua las personas son más más religiosas.
It's different. Very different. People in Nicaragua are much, much more religious.
- 50:55 Jennifer: In Nicaragua everyone is way more religious.
- 51:00 Violeta: Exactamente llevan lo que realmente lo que la biblia quiere.
They go exactly by what the bible says.
- 51:06 Jennifer: They do everything specific to what the Bible says. They do everything by the book.

⁹³ At this point I realized that we were getting a bit off track and I was trying to think of ways that I could ask a more direct question.

⁹⁴ I had an idea in my head of how to phrase this question but it came out very jumbled and I had to pause and collect my thoughts before continuing.

- 51:11 Violeta: Son más apegados a la iglesia.
They are closer to the church.
- 51:14 Jennifer: They're closer to the church. Every day...
- 51:18 Violeta: El padre, el sacerdote, como son ciudades pequeñas el sacerdote está en todo.
The Father, or the priest, since the cities are really small, is able to be involved in everything in the community.
- 51:24 Jennifer: The preacher, the father of the church...he goes to all the communities and talks to everyone. He knows everyone.
- 51:31 Violeta: He knows everyone. Se ayudan más. Por ejemplo alguien está enfermo y el padre dice, "La niña tal está enferma necesitamos recoger para ella".⁹⁵
They help each other more. For example, someone is sick, the Priest tells everyone, "This person is sick, we need to collect money for him or her".
- 51:45 Jennifer: The religious community in Nicaragua helps everyone. If anyone is in trouble that community tries everything that they can to raise money...to help that person.
- 51:55 Violeta: Hacer comida para todos.
They make food for everyone
- 51:58 Jennifer: They cook food for everyone.
- 52:02 Violeta: Si es diferente. Aquí nadie, haya todo mundo está "Hola come esta".
Yes, everything is different. Here nobody does that. Over there everyone is like "hey, how are you?"
- 52:09 Jennifer: Over there in Nicaragua church everyone knows each other, everyone's happy giving each other hugs. Here, it's not so much closeness.
- 52:18 Violeta: Aquí vamos a la iglesia y estamos sentados en la banca y nadie se conoce.
Here we go to church and we sit on these benches and no one knows each other.
- 52:25 Jennifer: Here, we go to church, to a Catholic Church. No one knows each other. We just sit and listen, no one talks to each other.
- 52:31 Violeta: Somos muy polite con la gente...
We are very polite with everyone...

⁹⁵ This seems to be something that has stuck with Violeta no matter what country in which she lives. She grew up in a religious community that helped one another, and in the United States she still provides for her friends and family. She has continued to retain a piece of her culture without realizing it.

- 52:35 Jennifer: But we're very polite to the people.
- 52:36 Violeta: Pero no como haya. Es diferente.
But it's not like over there. It's different.
- 52:38 Jennifer: It's different.
- 52:39 Mallory: Okay.
- 52:40 Violeta: Si.
- 52:41 Mallory: Um, so you were 24 years old when you came?
- 52:46 Violeta: No.
- 52:47 Mallory: No?
- 52:49 Violeta: Si tenía como 23 años.
Yes, I was 23 years old.
- 52:52 Jennifer: Twenty three/twenty four
- 52:54 Mallory: Okay. That's very—that's only a little bit older than I am. I can't imagine doing all of that. How do you think that affected you?⁹⁶
- 53:03 Violeta: Emocionalmente se hace más fuerte.
Emotionally one gets stronger.
- 53:07 Jennifer: Emotionally, it was hard but it made me stronger.
- 53:10 Mallory: With a young child too...
- 53:12 Violeta: Si es más fuerte porque yo venía con un niño y todas las cosas que pasan, pero se hace como más fuerte.
Yes, stronger because I came with a child and everything that has happened here has made me like much more stronger.

⁹⁶ Here I attempted to use the two-sentence format. Morrissey says that it is important to establish a sense in the interviewee that their answers are significant. See: Charles T. Morrissey, "The Two-Sentence Format as an Interviewing Technique in Oral History Fieldwork," *The Oral History Review* 15, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): 43-53. I tried to employ the two-sentence format by assuring Violeta that her experience was noteworthy and then prompting her to describe how it affected her life.

- 53:23 Jennifer: And I was with a child and everything that happened but I'm a stronger person. I'm strong.
- 53:29 Violeta: Si y creo que le cambia la vida a uno.
And I feel like life changes completely.
- 53:35 Jennifer: And it just changed my life completely.
- 53:40 Violeta: El pensamiento, uno quiere que los hijos sean, si yo he sido una cosa yo quiero que ellos sean más todavía.⁹⁷
Our way of thinking, we want our children to be something. If I have been something I want my children to be even more than that.
- 53:52 Jennifer: All the experiences that I've been through, it's just to teach my children I want them to be something in life. More than what I ever did.
- 54:01 Violeta: Exactamente es lo que quiere todos los padres.
This is exactly what every parent wants.
- 54:06 Jennifer: It's what every parent wants.
- 54:08 Violeta: Que tú seas más...⁹⁸
I want you to be more...
- 54:09 Jennifer: To be more than what I was.
- 54:12 Violeta:...que tenga...
... to have...
- 54:14 Jennifer: More opportunities.
- 54:15 Violeta: No cosas materiales...
Not just material things...
- 54:18 Jennifer: Not material things.
- 54:20 Violeta: Pero que seas buena persona.
But to be a good person too.
- 54:24 Jennifer: But to be a very good person.

⁹⁷ Time and time again, Violeta returns to the idea of family. Here she speaks about her family in more abstract terms: what she imagines and plans for them. She wants them to realize that she came to the United States for them and that she stayed for them.

⁹⁸ Here, Violeta is speaking directly to her daughter.

- 54:28 Violeta: Que puedas ser la diferencia.
I want you to be able to make a difference.
- 54:31 Jennifer: Make a difference in life.
- 54:34 Violeta: Si eso es lo único.
Yes, that's it.
- 54:35 Jennifer: That's what's important.
- 54:38 Violeta: Lo material va y viene.
Material things come and go.
- 54:39 Jennifer: Material stuff comes and goes it's...
- 54:42 Violeta: En Nicaragua pasamos cuando yo tenía 12 años el terremoto en el '72, perdimos todo.
In Nicaragua when I was 12 years old in 1972 there was an earthquake, we lost everything.
- 54:50 Jennifer: For example in Nicaragua when I was twelve years old there was an earthquake and we lost everything.
- 54:56 Violeta: Fifty thousand people died.⁹⁹
- 54:58 Mallory: Wow.
- 54:59 Jennifer: Fifty thousand people died.
- 55:00 Violeta: Mi sobrina que venía el día siguiente para los Estados Unidos una niña de seis años murió en la casa.
My niece that was going to the United States the next day died at six years old in our house
- 55:05 Jennifer: My niece, she was on her way to the United States and she died.

⁹⁹ Violeta emphasizes this number in English, as if to make sure that I understood the depth of the damage. In reality, the earthquake that hit Managua in December 1972 killed between 4,000 and 6,000 people, injured 20,000, and left nearly 250,000 people homeless. See: Tosimatu Matumoto and Gary Latham, "Aftershocks and Intensity of the Managua Earthquake of 23 December 1972," *Science* 181, no. 4099 (August 10, 1973): 545-547. It is interesting that Violeta remembers that there were 50,000 deaths from this earthquake, and I think it highlights the effect of traumatic events on young children. Violeta was just twelve years old when the earthquake hit Managua, and perhaps the event was so life-changing that it skewed the reality of the figures. Nevertheless, it is an interesting study of memory and how children remember traumatic events throughout the rest of their lives.

- 55:10 Mallory: Wow.
- 55:12 Violeta: Y después el huracán perdimos todo.
Then a hurricane hit and we lost everything again.
- 55:16 Jennifer: And then another natural disaster... a hurricane hit and we lost everything again.
- 55:22 Violeta: So material no es nada.
So material things mean nothing.
- 55:24 Jennifer: So material to me is nothing.
- 55:26 Violeta: Pero tenemos los valores nos queda...
But we have our values...
- 55:28 Jennifer: But we have our values and our morals.
- 55:32 Violeta: Y eso es lo más importante.
And that's what is important.
- 55:33 Jennifer: That's what's important.
- 55:34 Violeta: Somos ricos.¹⁰⁰
We're rich with values.
- 55:35 Jennifer: We're rich, if we have that. We're rich.
- 55:38 Violeta: Somos ricos. Es bueno si pero aquí en los Estados Unidos el que no aprovecha es porque no quiere.
We're rich. It's good but here in the United States those who don't take advantage in being here is because they truly don't want to.
- 55:48 Jennifer: But here if you don't take advantage however, it's not a good idea.
- 55:58 Violeta: La gente tiene que aprovechar estar acá.
People have to take advantage in living here
- 56:01 Jennifer: It's a very good place to be, here.

¹⁰⁰ Throughout this interview, Violeta has proved to be an extremely selfless person. Not only did she move from her home as a young woman with a small child, but she suffered a professional demotion and managed to keep her faith. She sent money back home and continues to do so, and even today she expresses no interest in material things. All she wants is for her family to be together and for them to be good people.

- 56:04 Violeta: Más seguro.
It's safer.
- 56:05 Jennifer: And I think it's safer too.
- 56:08 Violeta: Más seguro. Yo digo más seguro.
It's safer. I say it's safer.
- 56:11 Jennifer: That's what I think.
- 56:13 Violeta: Hay partes que son peligrosos pero más allá.
There are dangers in my country, more than here.
- 56:17 Jennifer: There's uh...dangerous parts everywhere in the world. Even here, but I feel like it's safer here.
- 56:28 Violeta: Que mas?¹⁰¹
What else?
- 56:29 Mallory: Um, yeah.
- 56:31 Violeta: Solamente!
- 56:34 Jennifer: Yay!¹⁰²
- 56:35 Mallory: What do you think is your life lesson from all of this? Like, what is your most important thing you've learned?¹⁰³
- 56:44 Jennifer: *Lo más importante que usted ha aprendido en todo esto, en toda las experiencias en todo eso lo más importante?*
- 56:52 Violeta: Yo creo que lo más importante es la unión familiar.¹⁰⁴
I think that the most important thing is the union of family.
- 57:00 Jennifer: The most important thing is staying always close to your family. Family. Never separated...a union.

¹⁰¹ There's that phrase again. I was ready to end the interview at this point because I could not think of anything else to say.

¹⁰² Jennifer is obviously happy that her job as a translator is over.

¹⁰³ At the last second, I decided to ask a more general question about Violeta's experience. I wanted the interview to end on a concise note, and I didn't think a statement about dangerous places in the word was a good summary of this interview.

¹⁰⁴ Here Violeta vocalizes what I had been gathering all long. The most important thing in her life is keeping her family together, and her experience as an immigrant has made that very clear throughout her life.

- 57:09 Violeta: La unión hace la fuerza.
The union is what makes the strength.
- 57:11 Jennifer: The union of the family makes strength. Everyone is strong.
- 57:17 Violeta: Si no hay unión no hay familia. La familia es lo primero.¹⁰⁵
If there is no union there is no family. Family always comes first.
- 57:24 Jennifer: Family is first. Always.
- 57:27 Violeta: Familia primero eso es una enseñanza que creo que hasta los americanos creen. Son más despegados pero nosotros creemos que somos más apegados a los hijos. No los dejamos.
Family first is something we have been taught, I think that even here in America they believe that. They are a little more detached from their children and we are more attached with our children. We never want them to leave
- 57:50 Jennifer: I feel like here, even in America...Americans feel the same way. And though I feel like in our culture we're a little bit more closer...tighter at letting go of our children.
- 58:04 Violeta: Pero creo que todos pensamos igual.¹⁰⁶
But in the end we all think the same.
- 58:07 Jennifer: But everything is the same at the end. Family.
- 58:11 Mallory: Do you feel just as close to your family in Nicaragua being so far away?
- 58:22 Jennifer: Es lo mismo la relación que tenían antes en Nicaragua a ahorita?
- 58:29 Violeta: Es diferente porque antes nos veíamos un poco más.
It's different because before we would see each other often.
- 58:34 Jennifer: The difference is that we don't see each other a lot.
- 58:38 Violeta: Pero si nos hablamos...
But yes we talk...
- 58:40 Jennifer: But we do talk on the phone.

¹⁰⁵ When she said this phrase, I instantly thought it would make a good title for the interview.

¹⁰⁶ Violeta expresses a very universal concept about families. Though everyone comes from different places and may speak different languages, everyone feels the same emotions and wants the same things for their families.

- 58:41 Violeta: ...en el teléfono y para cualquier cosa, navidad, cumpleaños.
...on the phone for whatever; we talk on Christmas, birthdays.
- 58:50 Jennifer: Birthdays, Christmas...
- 58:52 Violeta: Siempre estamos en el teléfono.
We're always on the telephone
- 58:53 Jennifer: We're always communicating.
- 58:59 Violeta: Y cuando vamos, vamos a todas las ciudades.
And when we go over there, we go to every city.
- 59:04 Jennifer: And when we do visit, we visit everyone.
- 59:08 Violeta: Porque todos viven en diferentes ciudades.
Because all our family lives in different cities.
- 59:11 Jennifer: Everyone lives in different cities but we still visit them.
- 59:14 Violeta: Y vamos a visitar. Más emoción,
And we visit everyone. It's very exciting,
- 59:18 Jennifer: It's emotional.
- 59:21 Violeta: Porque vamos a ver ciudades bonitas.
Because we get to visit many beautiful cities.
- 59:24 Jennifer: But it's good because we see a lot of different cities and they're beautiful.
- 59:27 Violeta: Muy lindas las ciudades, más frescos, la Jennifer le gusta donde vive su Tío Claudio.
Very beautiful the cities, some have cool climates. Jennifer loves where her uncle Claudio lives because of this.
- 59:33 Jennifer: My daughter likes where my...where my brother lives because it's really...it's a cool instead of hot place.
- 59:43 Violeta: Si es diferentes ciudades. Mis hermanos viven allí. Así es que...
Different cities where my siblings live. Yes...
- 59:48 Jennifer: Everyone is scattered though.
- 59:50 Violeta: Estamos lejos pero estamos siempre al ojo de ellos.
We are far away from each other but we still keep contact.

59:54 Jennifer: We're far away in distance but we still try to keep close in calling each other.

1:00:00 Violeta: Si eso es lo bueno.
That's the good thing.

1:00:03 Mallory: Alright. Family first.

1:00:05 Violeta: Y no solo familia, todos.¹⁰⁷
And not just family, everyone.

¹⁰⁷ Violeta ends the interview by expressing a concern not just for her family, but for everyone in which she comes into contact. She is a very giving person, which I think this interview has aptly demonstrated.