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### Immigration Stories and the Construction of a Bilingual American Identity

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Honors Thesis

Immigration Stories and the Construction of a Bilingual American Identity

Camden Bowman

April 1, 2013

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project seeks to document first-generation, Spanish-speaking Americans' immigration stories by transcribing and translating their oral accounts from Spanish to English, in an attempt to increase understanding between Anglophone and Spanish-speaking populations. The project envisions immigration stories as the basis for a distinct American folklore, at the same time connecting Americans to their ethnic or national roots and distinguishing them from their ancestors, giving them a unique American identity. With this sort of nationalizing "myth" in mind, the project seeks to create a record of first-generation permanent Americans, painting a picture of the beginnings of a new Spanish-speaking U.S. identity.

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## PROLOGUE

### INTRODUCTION

Stories, whether true or fictional, play a pivotal role in cultural identity formation. Important cultural stories can take the form of myths, folklore, fairy tales, or even oral and written histories. In the U.S., immigration stories form an important part in how we define ourselves culturally, allowing us to both make connections with our cultural heritage, be it European, African, Asian, or Latin American, while simultaneously allowing us to distinguish ourselves from our ancestors. Despite the fact that we may consider ourselves American, we commonly hold strong cultural affiliations, be they German, English, Dutch, Irish, Mexican, Polish, Puerto Rican or otherwise. Such identifiers may be obsolete for someone who is first and foremost a Michigander, for example, yet they still hold cultural significance for us in defining who we are. Not only do they allow us to make distinctions between each other, they also serve the purpose of uniting us under the common experience of immigration, whether we experienced it personally or by proxy through our parents, grandparents or great-grandparents.

With this idea of cultural solidarity created through the common immigration story in mind, I set out to document the immigration stories of first-generation Americans from Spanish-speaking countries. The 2010 census puts the Hispanic/Latino population of the United States at around 50.5 million people. Although not all of those who claim ancestry from Spanish-speaking countries necessarily speak Spanish, they are still influenced by cultural ideals emanating from those countries, and constitute part of an important and vibrant U.S. subculture, forming a piece of the puzzle of broader U.S. culture. By understanding the immigration stories that form the basis for a vibrant American subculture, we can begin to understand Spanish-speaking U.S. citizens and residents not

as immigrants or stubborn practitioners of a foreign way of life, but rather as an integral part of our national cultural landscape, much like German Americans, Irish Americans, African Americans, or English Americans. This project seeks to document, transcribe, and translate some of those stories.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to the 2010 U.S. census, just over 16 percent of the nation's population self identifies as Hispanic or Latino, making Spanish-speakers the largest minority culture in the United States. Although the percentage is considerably lower in Michigan, standing at about 4.4 percent, the growth in the Hispanic/Latino population over the last ten years was nearly 35 percent. This increasing presence of Spanish-speaking individuals all over the United States creates an environment where a new fusion of Latin American cultures with U.S. ideals and experiences can flourish to create unique Spanish-speaking subcultures within the United States. Hector Tobar (2005) describes the development of this new American identity with journalistic flare, describing Los Angeles as the new hub of U.S. immigration and the source of new cultural production, much as Ellis Island served as the starting point for the American experience of millions of Europeans. Whether or not Los Angeles can really be ascribed such importance, it is clear that such a culture is developing, as demonstrated with Mendoza's (2012) efforts to document stories from across the United States. He shows that this "new" wave of immigration affects nearly every region of the country. What's more, the phenomenon we are seeing today is not merely the assimilation of formerly Spanish-speaking immigrants into the broad Anglophone society. A good deal of assimilation happens, but Wieling et al's 2008 study shows a measure of give and take happening between the two cultures. Although Wieling found that second generation parents were more likely to demonstrate more "American" attitudes, they maintained a strong sense of Hispanic/Latino identity.

Culture and Language travel hand in hand, and the rapid growth of the Spanish-speaking population in the U.S. has profoundly impacted the way that immigrants speak. Otheguy and Stern argue in a 2011 article that some language patterns often called “Spanglish” actually constitute the development of distinct U.S. dialects of Spanish. The occasional use of English vocabulary or syntax, he argues, is typical of nearly all “legitimate” dialects, as nearly all languages are influenced to an extent by the languages spoken around them. These American dialects, however, are often disparaged as illegitimate forms of the language, leading to an interesting identity crisis as outlined by Coryell et al (2010). The study found that participants connected the ability to speak “standard” forms of Spanish with what the researchers called a “cultural metanarrative”. The participants saw the language as a way to connect with their cultural roots.

Language is not, however, the only cultural identifier that individuals can reach back to in order to inform their identities. *Home Wasn't Built in a Day* (2006) is an interesting collection of family stories from students at a high school in San Francisco, California. It helps to demonstrate the importance of our family stories in creating identity. On a more scholarly note, Morote Magán (2007) writes about the importance of oral history and collecting stories. Although Magán deals primarily with folktales and legends, her research is especially useful to the current project, which sees immigration stories forming the basis for a sort of unique U.S. folklore. Both Tobar and Mendoza see the retelling of Spanish-speaking Americans’ stories as important for the discourse about immigration, and part of the reason it’s important is that it reminds us that we all have a story to tell.

Not everyone in the U.S. feels comfortable with these demographic shifts. Many Anglophone Americans feel that the emergence of a Spanish-speaking cultural identity in the United States threatens their own cultural integrity. Regardless of these reservations, Kotkin and Ozuna’s 2012 study shows that immigration from Latin America is essential to the United States’



demographic health. Despite these demographic needs, many Anglophone Americans are still resistant to Latin-American immigration, a trend that, according to Lu and Nicholson-Crotty's 2012 study, may find its basis not so much in cultural or economic concerns, but primarily in negative ethnic stereotyping. If in fact anti-immigration sentiment emerges primarily from negative stereotyping, perhaps retelling personal stories could seriously undermine them.

In order to undermine stereotypes and present an honest account of a family's history, we must carefully recount the stories in culturally sensitive ways. A bilingual identity perpetually exposes itself to the risk of misunderstanding. Francisco Castro-Paniagua's book on translation (2000) presents the act of translation as not just a technical discipline, but rather as a sort of diplomacy between languages. The translator does not mechanically decode one language into another, but rather simultaneously occupies the role of anthropologist, ambassador and communicator. The translator must be able not only to transmit the ideas, but also the cultural context surrounding the ideas to the target language. In the current project, the complex task of transmitting ideas from one language to another is further complicated by the transcription process, which as Christina Davidson (2009) points out in her study on transcription techniques, can be nearly as complex a process as translation itself.

## **METHODOLOGY**

I selected a convenient sample of five first-generation immigrants to the United States from Spanish-Speaking countries or territories that were either U.S. citizens or permanent residents, currently residing in Michigan. I then asked each subject a series of broad, open ended questions (included as an appendix to this document) and recorded their responses on an audio device. After transcribing the responses, I then translated them from their original language (Spanish) into the target language (English) to compile them into a collection of stories. I then analyzed all of the problems that I encountered in the process and also performed cursory content analyses of the

respective stories, although because the stories belong to a few individuals, their contents are not intended for extrapolation to a larger population.

### **ANALYSIS<sup>1</sup>**

Transcribing oral speech presents a long list of potential technical difficulties. Subjects vary greatly in speed and clarity, and many times it can be difficult to understand what they are trying to say. Even if the speech is clear, it can be difficult for the transcriber to decide what to include in a transcription and what not to. Although the initial impulse may be to include everything that the transcriber hears, verbal speech is often not as fluent as written speech. Subjects often start then stop, leaving ideas unfinished. For my project, I decided to catch as many of the starts and stops as I could, while simultaneously dropping meaningless fillers like “um...” and “eh...” in favor of a more fluid text. Davidson points out that selectivity does not constitute an unscientific error, but rather that all transcriptions are in some way selective. She contends that an explanation of what has been omitted and why is more important than absolute faithfulness to the original oratory (4).

In addition to decisions as to whether or not to clean up the language used in interviews, transcribers must also face the fact that it is impossible to record all aspects of recorded speech. Much of the communication latent in verbal communication comes from tone and volume, leaving the text devoid of much of the original life of the oratory. Transcribers face the difficult task of communicating the original idea through punctuation, and incorrect punctuation can lead to very different meanings in the text. The transcriber must also decide whether or not to include non-verbal cues such as gestures, pauses, etc. I have chosen to let the text speak for itself, in order to avoid further cluttering the transcription with descriptions, therefore interrupting the flow of the story. Subject three, for example, made extensive use of dialogue in her stories, often using the tone of her voice to indicate the identity of the speaker, and mimicking different characters' accents and

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<sup>1</sup> Analyses of the literary themes and content of each story are included in the section titled “NARRATIVES”. This section will deal primarily with the transcription and translation processes.

intonations. When she spoke of family back in Mexico, her accent would become more regional. Of course, I wasn't able to maintain dialect changes in the written text, and especially not in the translation, so instead I opted for new paragraphs every time the speaker changed. Since her exchanges rarely involved more than two people at a time, it should be relatively easy to keep track of who's speaking.

If transcription itself presents difficulties, then transcribing oral speech from dialects that have yet to be codified, such as U.S. varieties of popular Spanish, augments those difficulties. The Spanish spoken in the United States not only comes from very diverse origins; it also varies greatly in terms of syntax, grammatical structure and vocabulary. Subjects use widely different standards when it comes to using anglicisms or nonstandard usages for existing Spanish words. Otheguy and Stern identify several ways in which different popular varieties of Spanish show their uniqueness (88-91).

The first unique feature we find in U.S. Spanish (as well as in any variety of popular Spanish) is lexical borrowing. In the U.S., lexical borrowing usually involves taking words from English and incorporating them into Spanish usage. A good example of this is subject one's use of the word *factoria* to mean the more standard Spanish usage *fábrica* or factory. Another example is the common use among many of the subjects of the English word "so" as verbal filler instead of more common Spanish fillers like *Entonces* or *Así que*. Some words are even borrowed directly into Spanish from English because either a Spanish equivalent doesn't exist, or the subject is using the English word to describe a particularly American version of something. Subject two uses the English word *highway* to describe the type of roads she drives on in the U.S. The standard Spanish words *carretera*, *autovía*, or *autopista* could have easily described the type of road she was referring to, but subject two seems to chose *highway* specifically because it refers so perfectly to the U.S. road system, and not to the road system she knew from Colombia.

The second feature of popular Spanish in the U.S. is what Otheby and Stern call local meanings. Local meanings comprise words that have a standard Spanish meaning, but are used in a different context in the local language variety. When referring to the process of applying for amnesty, subject three uses the verb *aplicar*, a verb that in standard Spanish usage has a very physical connotation, like applying paint to a wall or similar activities. While the standard Spanish word, *solicitar* would be more appropriate in many places, *aplicar* is perfectly understandable, as it is very commonly used in U.S. popular Spanish. Another slightly less obvious case of a local meaning is subject one's use of the word *colegio* to refer to college. The meaning of the word *colegio* varies from country to country, but it generally applies to what we would call high school in U.S. English. Once Spanish speakers arrive in the U.S., the English usage of the word "college" and the mixing of various regional varieties of Spanish tend to normalize the use of *colegio* to refer to tertiary education.

In addition to these types of lexical differences in popular Spanish, Otheby and Stern also mention differences in morphology leading to altered word endings, where a word like *terapeuta* can be heard as *terapista*, as well as a fourth type of local phraseology whereby common phrases can be expressed in very different ways, such as "*Te llamo para atrás*" (literally: I'll call you back) instead of the more standard, "*Te devuelvo la llamada*" (literally: I will return your call). In standard Spanish, the former phrase "*para atrás*" would typically be reserved for expressing spatial direction (such as backing up a car or moving backward in time), but in this case takes a cue from English and refers to returning an action. These two "errors", or deviations from standard Spanish appear with less frequency in the transcripts I gathered. For whatever reason, the subjects I interviewed seemed less likely to make use these constructions than they were the other types of localisms discussed here.

Once the transcription process is complete, further complications surface in the translation process. For one, a lot of linguistic flare disappears in the transition from one language to another. Occasionally, subjects would speak very poetically, the meter of which vanishes when the words are

transposed into the target language. As far as the richness of U.S. popular varieties is concerned, unique lexicon and structure doesn't translate well. To partially compensate, I have placed non-standard Spanish words, like the ones discussed in the previous paragraphs, in *italics*. The measure does not preserve the original linguistic creativity of the speaker, but it does at least give an idea that the Spanish used is unique.

Another persistent problem I encountered in the translation process surfaced in regard to sentence order and syntax. In most cases, Spanish follows a very similar word order to English, with only a few exceptions (such as the fact that adjectives are normally placed after the noun). Occasionally, however, Spanish speakers present ideas in a very different way than English speakers would, making the translation more difficult. A linguistic example of this is the fact that Spanish often does not require an explicit subject for a sentence. In many cases, the subject can be easily inferred and transferred into the English sentence, but in other cases the subject is not important in the Spanish sentence, making it very difficult to identify.

Idiomatic phrases also make translation difficult, as direct translations of a proverb or a saying may not exist. Beyond just proverbs and common sayings, some statements just don't make sense in English. Subject three makes a statement in her story where she says, "*bueno vamos a hacer lo mejor,*" literally meaning, "Well, we are going to do the best", or "the best thing". The translation is o.k., but it feels awkward in English and doesn't make very much sense in the context. Instead, I chose to translate the phrase as, "the best thing we can". It adds a little bit of meaning to the text, meaning that although not explicitly present in the original, the Spanish sentence implied it.

A final and subtler translation issue is collocation. Collocation refers to the ways that words are often used together, outside of the confines of grammatical rules. A good example of this is the phrase 'Merry Christmas'. The word 'Merry' is not often used in American English, however the British construction 'Happy Christmas' may sound incorrect to Americans. There is absolutely no

rule that says there is anything wrong with the term ‘Happy Christmas’ except for the fact that American collocation favors the word ‘merry’ when dealing with Christmas. Say ‘Merry Thanksgiving’, however, and you will have violated American rules of collocation. A bilingual example of collocation differences shows up when we talk about the common Spanish construction ‘papá y mamá’, (literally: dad and mom). In English, however, we tend to put ‘mom’ first and ‘dad’ second. There are no rules for good collocation, so the only way to do it correctly is to have an intimate knowledge of the language and its usage. Good collocation goes beyond concrete examples like “Merry Christmas” or “Mom and Dad”. When translating, the translator has to keep the concept constantly in mind, as collocation differences can be present in any sentence. Making the language sound natural is perhaps the most difficult task that the translator faces, and good collocation is at the center of natural, flowing speech.

## **DISCUSSION**

The stories told here account for a very small number of immigration experiences from a very limited pool and a small region of the country. To tell any story approximating the true experiences of Spanish-speaking America would take a much larger sample. Even to tell the story of Spanish-speakers in Michigan would require a much larger-scale project. With that said, these stories do provide invaluable insight into the lives and experiences of these particular immigrants, and they help us to understand the deep impact that the immigration experience has on an individual’s life.

On the linguistic side of things, these interviews demonstrate the presence of what Otheguy and Stern call popular U.S. Spanish even in first generation immigrants. Despite the fact that each of the subjects spoke with the regional dialect from their country of origin, nearly all of them had begun to incorporate words from popular U.S. Spanish, or what some would call ‘Spanglish’. The presence of these non-standard vocabularies and usages complicates the transcription and translation processes, while simultaneously supporting the idea that a Spanish-speaking subculture in

the United States is both alive and evolving independently from its cultures of origin. A deeper linguistic analysis of the interviews, though outside the scope of the current project, could reveal interesting patterns of speech influenced not only by English but also by contact with other Spanish dialects, as immigrants tend to be more likely to speak with Spanish-speakers from all over Latin America.

The interviews were somewhat limited by time constraints and the format in which they were delivered. Ideally, it would be better to allow stories to surface naturally, in the normal flow of daily living. Forcing the matter with questions led to very inconsistent results, with some subjects willing and able to share large amounts of narrative detail and others answering the questions somewhat mechanically. Although every subject provided useful material, the questions limited some subjects' ability to provide narrative structure to their responses, and also occasionally interrupted the natural flow of storytelling. A slower, more open approach may contribute to broader results in the future, although it would be difficult to implement and hard to focus.

## NARRATIVES

### 1. Puerto Rico

I debated the decision of whether or not to include a subject from Puerto Rico for a long time. At first glance it seemed like an easy decision: Puerto Ricans comprise the second largest group of Spanish speakers in the United States, after Mexicans, and if I'm going to do a project about Spanish-speaking identities, how could I exclude them? The controversy, however, can be found in the very title of my project: *Immigration Stories*. Puerto Ricans are not immigrants. The 1917 Jones-Shafroth act conferred full U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans born on the island, so in technical terms, Puerto Ricans coming to the mainland are internal migrants, not any different from someone who moves from Indiana to Michigan. Calling them immigrants didn't just seem incorrect; it seemed offensive.

Eventually, the solution to my problem was practical: I got the opportunity to interview subject number one, a Puerto Rican woman who had been living in Michigan for nearly fifty years. I knew that she represented a demographic category that was going to be difficult to fill on a college campus, so I decided to go ahead and do the interview. I drove all the way across the state to a small suburban retiree neighborhood and went inside to meet her. She offered a warm welcome and, of course, food. Sometimes she spoke in accented English and other times in Spanish with a smooth, Puerto Rican accent. After eating I explained the project, and she protested, “But I’m not an immigrant”. I agreed, but explained that to ignore the Puerto Rican population would leave out a huge group of Spanish-speakers. She agreed to participate, and we began:

**Why did you decide to come to the United States?**

Well, the reason was really to visit some family, and when I got to New York, I decided to stay a while. I had finished college in Puerto Rico. I found, when I went to look for work, I liked the job and they interviewed me. In the interview, I realized that I needed to adjust my ear to the language. Because in Puerto Rico they teach you English from first grade on, but they teach it differently. There, they teach you to pronounce, for example, “*water*”, and I found that here, in the United States, they said “*wadda*”. They teach us to say “*little*”, which is the correct way, but here they said “*liddle*”. When I went to take the test at the office where I wanted to work, the boss put me in his office and went to another and said, “I’m going to dictate a letter to you”. I had studied business, and I had passed with the highest grades. So I had a lot of confidence in myself. When he dictated the letter to me... I had to take it down in *shorthand* at that time... And he dictated the letter to me and when he came to see the page was blank. I hadn’t understood a word. He said, “What happened?” and I said, “I didn’t understand you.” But he had seen my resume and everything and had liked it a lot. Then he gave me some advice, and told me, “I want to give you the job. I need



a person like you. But like this, you can't do it. What I recommend is that you go to a *factory*, and try to communicate with everyone until you adjust your ear to the pronunciation."

That's what he told me. Can I speak in English? Or not? I can't change, right? He told me, "You have to adapt your ear to the language." He said, "and as soon as you think you are ready, come see me." He told me, "I'm going to give you three months, because I want you to come work with me." And that's what I did. I went to a *factory* and was there some three months and in less than three months I had already... I understood what... I learned. I learned to speak like everyone here. So I went back and they gave me the job. But my purpose at first was to visit, and later I wanted to stay to work for a while, make some money, and then go back.

**What is the story of how you arrived here?**

Well, the circumstances were that the man who would be my husband arrived in New York. He arrived; we had known each other in Puerto Rico. We grew up together, you could say. We hadn't seen each other for years. He left for Cuba when he was fourteen, and I stayed in Puerto Rico. Then in a few years I got to New York. But he knew that my mom was in New York, and since we were neighbors he wanted to go and greet my mom, to see her. And when he got there to say hello to my mom, we found that we were no longer children. I was now a young woman, and he was an incredibly handsome young man. And instead of seeing my mom he saw me instead. That was where we started our relationship. We decided to get married, and we got married in Chicago. And when we got married in Chicago, he always wanted to be a doctor. He went to the university, and there, How was it again? He studied something. We got married.

Then getting back, he wanted to get into medical school and that was when we went to Mexico. He studied in Mexico. After finishing in Mexico he came here to the United

States. We came back and he did his *internship*. We already had four kids, when he finished his *internship* in Toledo, Ohio. Then, he had to look for a place to do his residency. He came here, they recommended him well and he was accepted, and since then we have been here. That's how we ended up in Michigan.

**[Skipped question]**

**In what ways has it been difficult to adjust to living in the U.S.? What parts have been easy?**

There really haven't been difficult things because we have progressed. In spite of the fact that we lived well over there, but like everyone, you know, this is the nation that everyone wants to be in, for the progress, the opportunities. The opportunities in Puerto Rico are not the same as what you have here. So it's like an expansion of the benefits for your future. I would say more benefits than difficulties, changing from Puerto Rico, from being there to being here.

**Do you believe you are an American or a Puerto Rican? Do you believe that it is possible to be both at the same time?**

Both. Both. I am Puerto Rican, and I'm an American citizen. I have been able to enjoy my small island. We go and visit, always with a lot of affection. We enjoy all of the beauty of the island, which has a lot to offer for anyone who visits. And we also enjoy the benefits from here. But we also contribute, because we have taken advantage of our time. We've become better educated. We have taken advantage of the opportunities that have presented themselves to us, worked very hard, and we have made a good future. Not only for ourselves but also for our sons, who thank God are all professionals.

May I say something about when we went to Mexico? That was where we had some difficulties, because when we went to Mexico for [my husband] to start studying medicine,

we already had two little children. I wanted to work, but I couldn't because they wouldn't allow it. And so it wasn't easy. He was a student. He couldn't work and neither could I. So what we did was our family helped us out. His parents sent us something monthly and my parents sent us some money. But in the summers we came here. They were two months; he worked and me too. Here we could work, and make some money to go back and continue. Every six months we had to go to the border to renew the visa. However we had a great time because we were able to adapt to the situation. Mexico is very beautiful and we liked it. The people were very kind, we loved the music, the food; we had good neighbors. And because we could adapt and have a better time because, as you know, the way of life there is cheaper, and so with dollars from here, there was enough to sustain us as a family. But I say that it was a little difficult. It was a little difficult because we had to adapt to a different situation than what we were accustomed to. Regardless, it was a blessing because he finished medical school, and then we came back here. And God blessed us a lot. He was able to do his internship in Toledo, Ohio. Later he came here and did his residency and we liked it so much that we stayed. And this is where the children consider home.

**Comments:**

The secret can be summed up in one word: adaptation. You can obtain whatever you want, if you are prepared to adapt to what you are offered. Now, someone who has another way of thinking and arrives here and says, "I can't do this. I'm not used to it. I was used to a better life here or there." That person will not triumph and attain a better future. The secret is to adapt yourself and be, how do you say it? *Willing?* Willing. Be willing to accept the situations and make the best of them.

Her story has a lot of themes that would be common with all of the interviews. The final section about adaptation brings a key necessity for recent immigrants into sharp focus: everyone who moves

to another place has to learn to adapt. The subject's difficulty with the language is almost comical, as she was forced to learn it as a child but still wasn't able to work in New York upon arriving. The story also contains an ironic twist, where the subject and her family go to Mexico while her husband is going to medical school in Montemorelos. As Puerto Ricans in Mexico, they are forced to deal with a culture even more foreign to them than the U.S. This experience highlights the diversity of backgrounds that Spanish-speakers bring to the United States. Although our census numbers tend to lump all Spanish-speakers into one category, a Spanish-speaker from one country may feel even more out of place in another Spanish-speaking country than they do in the United States.

## **2. Colombia**

My next interview took me to a small student apartment. Subject two was a Colombian woman in her early twenties, working and studying to get a degree. She came to the United States just under a decade ago, and has spent her time in both New York and Michigan. Like the previous subject, she spoke in heavily accented but competent English. Her Spanish, on the other hand, was fluent and eloquent, a very clear Colombian accent punctuated occasionally by the English word 'so', which had replaced more common Spanish verbal fillers in her speech. Her reason for coming to the United States had less to do with economy, and more to do with safety:

### **Why did you decide to come to the United States?**

Well, the truth is that they threatened to kill my dad in Colombia so we had to travel to Panama. We lived in Panama for around four years, but the Panamanian government did not accept our request for political asylum. So we had to ask the United States for help and... that's the reason we are here.

### **What is the story of how you arrived here?**

Ah... That is a pretty interesting story. My dad was talking to various pastors from different conferences to find out who could give him a call to come here to the U.S. The

General Conference [of Seventh-day Adventists] offered to help him and sent him papers and everything that he needed to request the visa. Being in Panama, our economic situation was very complicated, so we didn't have the money we needed to go and request the visa application. And one day, out of the blue, my dad got a call telling him that there was a money order waiting for him. He said yes, and he went and it was the exact amount of money that he needed to be able to present himself before the embassy. My grandfather had sent the money; he had just sold his car and felt that we needed the money more than he did, so he sent it to us.

With that money, we went to the U.S. embassy, afraid that they wouldn't give us the visas because we were in Panama illegally. We had been illegal almost three years, and of course the first thing that they ask you for are your Identification papers to show that you are legal in the country. But they didn't ask us for any of that. They asked us for the papers for here. The man simply left for some five minutes and when he came back he told us, "welcome to the United States". They took our fingerprints, they gave us our papers, and well, now we have the visas but we don't have money for the plane tickets, and for that we have to pay a debt of two thousand dollars per person per year for every year that we were illegal in Panama. And that was, of course, too much money. Around that time, Panama granted us political asylum, but we didn't accept it. But, by giving us asylum, they covered the debt and we only had to pay fifty dollars to leave the country, for the four of us, which was a ton of money. From one friend to another everywhere he [my father] was looking for a way to get the money to come here to work for a few months and later send for us; to call my sister, mother and I. So we would have to stay in Panama alone a few months.

When he was looking for the money and all that, my dad got another call telling him that he had another money order waiting for him, and he also accepted it and when and it

was four hundred dollars that my uncle had sent. He just felt that he needed to send the money to my dad, and he sent it to him. With that, in addition to the fact that my dad had proof that he was a pastor the airline gave him a minister's discount that they give priests and nuns and all of those people and they gave it to my dad too. With that he got the money for the ticket. And we were going to stay there in Panama for a few months, But my uncle, my mom's older brother, he sent us the money. He sent us tickets so that we could go and live in Colombia while my dad was here in the United States. We were in Colombia some nine months while dad worked. I worked those nine months with my uncle in his construction company; my uncle is an architect. At the end of the nine months my dad bought us the tickets. First he sent for my mom and she came first. She came like five months after my dad got here. And four months later my sister and I went too... we were in Miami one week. And the rest? Yeah. From there we went to New York.

**What difficulties did you face in the process?**

Well, to start, the fact that we were illegal in Panama presented us with a lot of difficulties. It was one of the reasons that we had to come here. My dad couldn't work. We didn't have money. We would literally walk down the street looking for coins to collect so that we could buy some rice or some food because we didn't have much income. So money was, practically the most... getting here was complicated. Because first getting the money so that my dad could come and later for us to come. But God always showed us the way. He solved the problem but, money was definitely one of the things for trying to get here.

**In what ways has it been difficult to adjust to living in the U.S.? What parts have been easy?**

Well, the most difficult thing in the beginning was English and the communication barrier. It's really difficult to get to a place and not know how to say something as simple as,

“I need a bathroom” or something like that. It’s always a communication barrier even after eight years it’s still kind of there. There’s still a lot to learn, a lot to improve when it comes to communication and the language... everything that has to do with English. One of the easiest things is that, since we are a pastor’s family, we’ve moved around a lot. So changing to a new environment, a new culture wasn’t so complicated for us. Having lived in Panama, we got used to another lifestyle, another style of culture that wasn’t our own as Colombians. And, then, coming here to the United States, that cultural level opened even more with each friendship from another country that we have. The food, for example, we’re no longer accustomed to just Colombian food or Panamanian food. Now we eat Dominican, Ecuadorian... all kinds of food... Mexican, or whatever. And that’s... that has been the easy part. The ability to open yourself culturally and learn a lot more about other cultures as well as American culture. I think that I would now feel pretty uncomfortable going back and living in Colombia because a lot in my routine, and my life is already very Americanized. Especially, for example, driving styles. In Colombia the speed limit on the *highway* is thirty-five to forty miles per hour. That is what I normally do here in an urban area. And in urban areas the speed limit is fifteen miles. So, I think that it would frustrate me too much to drive in Colombia now. So, getting used to other cultures, getting used to new lifestyles and new different things has always been the easiest.

**Do you believe you are an American or a Colombian. Do you believe that it is possible to be both at the same time?**

O.K., I believe that I am 100% Colombian. I was born, raised and lived in Colombia for twelve years. Yes, I’ve spent more time living outside of Colombia than what I’ve lived there, but I feel Colombian. I have a deep love for the United States, and for Panama. There will always be a very special place in my heart for the nation that embraced me. Because this

country embraced us and gave us a new opportunity, a new lifestyle. I will keep being Colombian because there I was born and that is... those are my roots, but the trunk keeps on growing and every piece, every branch that could be a new country or a new adventure will always have a place in that “tree” of life. But roots are always roots. They are what call out to you, and I am Colombian but, but at the same time in a certain part I can also say that I am an American at heart.

Subject two’s story highlights the fact that motivations for immigrating vary greatly between subjects. While subject one’s primary reason for coming to the United States was economic, subject two’s family was fleeing political persecution. Despite that fact, economic considerations still play a pivotal role in her struggles, and family, much like in subject one’s story, often steps in to help fill the gaps. Family, in fact, plays an important role for most of the subjects in the study, and although separation from family may not always come up as the biggest difficulty in the immigration process, the topic always surfaces at some point.

Subject two’s final paragraph very eloquently sums up an idea that is common throughout the study: roots are roots, but new growth is possible. Her use of a tree to get the point across is especially poignant: her branches and trunk may very well be American or Panamanian, but she will always have Colombian roots.

### **3. Mexico**

A subdivision literally rises out of a rural Michigan vineyard, a strange juxtaposition of suburbia and rural simplicity that is becoming the norm in the American Midwest. As I pulled into the house, I knew this was the perfect place to find my next subject. She was the perfect example of an American success story: middle-aged in a nice suburban home with a backyard and a dog. She spoke in a refined Mexican accent, although when speaking of certain people her accent would get considerably more regional. Though calm, she was a natural storyteller, and the excitement in her



voice when telling certain anecdotes drew the listener into the story. When talking about conversations, she acted out each part, giving the characters in her stories different voices and accents depending on the context. Her storytelling prowess, of course, made transcribing her answers difficult. Regardless, some shadow of the original survives. Her story begins with her husband's dream to study in the United States:

**Why did you decide to come to the United States?**

Originally, my husband and I came to study. We came on an I-20 visa to study.

**What is the story of how you arrived here?**

How we arrived... hm. It's interesting because when we got married we went to work in the south of Mexico, since my husband was a pastor. And since he was there as a pastor he went to turn the tithe in at the conference. One day when he went to turn in the tithes at the conference he met a group of missionaries from Tennessee that were passing through southern Mexico on their way to, what is the country called? I forgot. There in the south of Mexico, on the border. And he, just playing around, told one of them that he knew, that he had known from college before and was a friend of his, "Hey, when you get the chance, if you can send me a visa, send it to me. I'd go, right away." And, well, he came home and said, "Look, I ran into this friend. He came with a group of missionaries."

"Ah, great!"

"And I told him, if some day he had a visa he should send it to us."

But we kept on working. Three months later the I-20 arrived for us to come here with everything paid for. Everything. It was a really difficult decision for us because for my husband coming to the United States was like a dream that he always had. To come here and study at Andrews, that was his dream. But it wasn't for Andrews. It was a school in Tennessee. So when it arrived, we were like, "How can we leave the ministry we just started?"

We have only been working for a year on a project building a church. What will people say?”

I mean, not everyone in Mexico wants to come the U.S. In Mexico many professionals see coming the U.S. like, “Ah, you are leaving what’s difficult, you are just going the easier road”... They resent that someone might abandon work, abandon the country, abandon it for something better. It’s not always well respected. So it was a difficult decision and my husband and I decided to ask for advice. So he started, and he went to the person he trusted the most there at the conference, where he worked, and he asked, “Look, I have this opportunity. What do you think?”

And he said, “If I were in your position, I’d go. Because I have always wanted to go study at Andrews, in the U.S. That is your first step. Don’t even think about it. Go.”

And he told him, “Well, this worries me.”

“Don’t worry. Go.”

But my husband is a person who asks advice, I would have been fine with just that. I ask once and then I go. No, he asks one person’s advice, then another’s, and he wants reaffirmation, right? So he went to other people and they told him exactly what he didn’t want to hear, “How can you leave us? Don’t go. That is not good. To such a perverse country? No.” Because what we hear in the news, right? That they killed someone here or whatever, right. So he was so confused because now, “Well, one person said yes but others said no.” And, with a lot of prayer and thought for God, and well, we left everything and came to Tennessee. So, that is the background for how we made the decision and got the I-20.

**What difficulties did you face in the process?**

Well, I think that the biggest difficulty was making the decision knowing that our coworkers did not accept it. Just thinking, well, we are not getting support from our

coworkers but we are going anyway. I think that was the toughest challenge. Because when you get the visa that says, “You have everything paid for”, and the embassy gives you the seal, all that’s left is to buy the tickets and you come and carry on here with everything. So no, we didn’t have that process of not collecting the funds for the tip. That wasn’t a problem. Yeah, I don’t know if you have a question about coming here? Or the challenge of getting here? Do you have another?

**[This is the only one]**

Because getting here, I think that, well, the challenge didn’t end just with what you leave there but coming here, right? So I, as a pastor’s wife, came to a country where it was kind of liberal for me. This country, compared with how I, by tradition and norms, had to dress a certain way. But coming the United States I thought, “Ah, I’m going to be able to wear shorts, I can wear sleeveless shirts when it’s hot. I don’t have to deal with the heat.” But I came to one of those self-supporting schools with even stricter rules than what I had before... It was like a disappointment for me to go there the first day, and I put on shorts – and they weren’t short, they were what we call Bermudas, no? – Pants down to the knee. And it wasn’t a dress with the whole back showing but I had a sleeveless shirt. Then I went there, and no one was dressed like that! It was like living in a place where there were only pastors’ families. That was kind of a really big disappointment for me because, I bought clothes because I was coming the U.S., I left clothes because I wasn’t going to need them here and it was all backward. So, for me that was like, I thought that I was coming to a place that was a little more... different... more normal, right? But to have to be in the pastor’s family is a little stricter when it comes to how you dress. That part was the first thing I reacted to. I get here and I go to eat with all of the students, and I was the only one with

shorts and a sleeveless shirt. And from there, well, there was the different language, the culture and everything that moving to a different world entails.

**[And how did you get to Michigan?]**

To Michigan?

When we were in Tennessee the amnesty law was ending. So my husband went to the embassy to ask, because he had worked illegally. When he was a student at Montemorelos he came to work here, in the United States. So he worked as an illegal for months... he'd come, then go back to Mexico and then come back. So someone told him, "Look, you meet all of the requirements, *apply*." But no, we were good. "But it's closing! Go, go!" So he went to the embassy and they told him,

"This law is not for you. This law is for illegal immigrants."

"No, I was, I filled..."

"Yes, but now you are legal. This is for illegals."

"What do I have to do?"

And then the person from the embassy told him, "What you have to do to *apply* is make yourself illegal. At this moment you are legal. You have an I-20. You have to abandon the I-20, make yourself illegal, and then you submit your *application* and then you'll be able to do it."

And so we had to do it. It was a year after we had arrived here; we came for two years, planning to return to Mexico. At the end of the year, a little more than a year, a year and a half, my daughter had already been born here in the U.S., we did just that. We left the school, which was a very tough decision because that school gave us the pass to come here, the I-20. They received us with everything with... we lived in a mobile home, so we had everything there: beds, washing machines, dryers, everything for the kitchen, everything, I

mean sheets. We had everything. And we had to leave that to... and it wasn't just what we left. It was, "how are we going to do this to the people here?" My husband worked in construction, and I worked in the cafeteria of a nursing home. And we were doing well there. We felt that our service was contributing, and it was like, "well, we are going to do the best thing we can. They gave us this. We are giving something back." And leaving all of that after they had done so much for us was really hard. But it was our only chance, because there was a due date for submitting the papers. And we were some of the last people to submit the *application*, or the application, for amnesty.

We went to Texas where my husband had worked as an illegal and where he knew some people that he thought could help us. So, it was pretty hard and with a newborn baby that cried when everyone was sleeping, living with someone for a few months subjected to their eating habits, because we paid the person but we had to eat everything they did. I mean, we paid whatever amount of money to live there; we ate there, [my husband] worked with them. And having a baby was pretty tough when the baby would cry and everyone was sleeping. But we made ourselves illegal. Then we submitted the *application*, and everything went through because we fit the requirements. So, that was how we made ourselves illegal in Texas.

We stayed four years working in an Adventist academy there. [My husband] was a teacher's aid and he taught Bible, or did he? Yeah, he taught Bible and Spanish. I was a teacher for four years there. And then the idea came up, "Well, now we have enough savings to go to Andrews." And then we came here for two years. So we arrived here to Andrews. For two years. And two more years, then two more years, then two more years...

**In what ways has it been difficult to adjust to living in the U.S.? What parts have been easy?**

Difficult? The language. When we got to Texas there wasn't a single Hispanic. We were the only Mexicans. We were told that in the area where we were they didn't want Hispanics, especially not Mexicans. So there was nobody around that I could talk to and, well, when we got to Tennessee, even when there were people who spoke Spanish, since part of the point was to learn English, we weren't allowed to speak Spanish. And it was really hard for me especially because [my husband] understood a little English. So when we were in church, sometimes they would say something funny. I wanted to laugh with everyone else, and I'd tell my husband,

"What are they laughing at? What...?"

"I'm going to lose concentration, I'll tell you later."

"But I want to laugh now!"

"I'll tell you later. I'll tell you later."

That aspect of communication was really hard because I had to work at waiting to know what people were saying until I got home, because [my husband], actually is a very firm on reverence in church. So, he didn't want to be translating for me because for him it was irreverent, you know? The language was hard. One time when I was working, they told me... they handed me my purse and waved goodbye. I understood that they were telling me to leave, right? So, because they gave me my purse, they took me to the door. They waved goodbye. That I understood, but then they talked a lot and I thought, "Are they telling me to come back in two hours? To come back today? To come back later? I guess I'll just stay." Because my work was important; I worked in the cafeteria and every person had their specific tasks: one served coffee, one served soup, one prepared things, one got stuff ready

for the next day. I mean the work was assigned. That is, if you weren't there, everything went crazy, right? I didn't want to mess up. I mean, if they were saying that I should come back, I didn't know what time. I didn't understand. So they did a lot of gestures and talked a lot, beyond just "*goodbye*", no, it was a lot. It was a lot and I understood nothing. So I decided to stay. I said, "I'm not missing anything if I stay. Maybe an extra day of work, but no." At the end of the day they found someone to tell me that I'd had the day off. I'd stayed at work all day.

Yeah, so language was definitely [hard], especially for me. I like to talk, and I converse a lot. My communication style is verbal. For me, maybe the entire percentage apart from my gestures, the biggest part is verbal. That and after that the food. I hold Mexican food so close to me that it was really hard to get used to American food. Now, with time I've realized how closely I carry it that when I had to present at the University about what it was like to come to the U.S., whenever I talked about food I cried. I think this is the first time that I've talked about how hard it was without starting to cry because... it made me cry not even just when I've talked about it but when something had to do with the food I missed or the food that I wanted to eat, I cried. My frustration over not being able to eat Mexican food, Mexican bread, or other Mexican food was that emotional for me. For me it was probably those two things, the food and the language, not so much family or family members. That's probably in third place. But no, I never cried because I was alone, or missed my mom, or missed my sisters. Nope, it was the food and the language.

**And what was easy?**

I think friendships were easy. It's been easy to make friends with people even though it's a different culture, and I attribute a lot to the fact that [my husband] is a social person. Not just me, but both of us. So I have made... I can meet people and share, and he has

another group with him that we know and share. So the road kind of opens up quickly for us because, I do my part and he does his. And that's opened a lot of opportunities for us. I mean, there've been times when, for example, when [our daughter] was born I knew nothing about what I know now. Now a lot of people have programs that help mothers, pregnant women and mothers with small children. But I didn't know all of that when I got here. And there were people who helped me; that even though we didn't have that ease of verbal communication, still they stayed there and talked to me. Then, little by little, I started to learn vocabulary associated with pregnancy, vocabulary for children.

I wanted to cook something, for example I didn't know how to make bread. Like a good Mexican woman, I went to the bakery. There are bakeries everywhere. You don't have to make bread at home. Here it's pretty common for Americans to make their own bread. Even when you can buy it, you make it. We don't. At home the oven was for storing bread, but never for making it. Mom, if she had to bake some meat had an oven outside the house where she cooked. But she never baked bread. I found Americans here who asked, "You want to make it? Come over. I'll teach you." That was totally different for me because it's not like that with us Mexicans. It's more like a competition, "I know, but I'm not going to teach you." And here I found that it was pretty easy, "Oh, you want to learn? I'll show you." "I want to make, learn to make cake, pastries."

"Oh, I'll teach you. Come to my house every afternoon. I'll show you."

It was a world that made you want to stay, to be in that environment. And we got to live in that kind of environment for the two years in Tennessee. The five or six years that we were in the area in Texas were like that among Americans; with an open atmosphere, pretty supportive until we came here, which is a little more Hispanic. Coming here to Berrien Springs is closer to the culture I grew up in.



**Do you believe you are an American or a Mexican? Do you believe that it is possible to be both at the same time?**

For a long time I felt frustrated because when I went to Mexico I got criticism from my friends, “Why do you do what you do? That’s not how it’s done.” And here in the U.S., I have also experienced discrimination especially because of my English. My English isn’t perfect. I have a pretty strong Mexican accent. And I feel I’m not from there. When I’m here I say, “Oh, yeah, I’m Mexican from Mexico.” But I go to Mexico and I don’t fit anymore. I don’t fit. And here, I don’t feel like I fit in a hundred percent either. So, when I’m here, I consider myself from there. And when I’m there, then I feel, “How could I think I belong here?” But, at the same time, it’s neither here nor there. Because I don’t fit in there a hundred percent, and I don’t fit in here a hundred percent because I have suffered discrimination. It’s hit me hard. Yes. So I don’t consider myself a hundred percent Mexican, and it would be an insult for the Americans if I considered myself a hundred percent American. But I believe I have learned to live in a culture where I try to hold on to the best that I have from both. Because I believe that American culture has really beautiful things: I appreciate the value that is given to family. Family is valuable in theory and in practice. And in my Mexican culture where I grew up the value that is given to family members and the opportunity that you have to live with your family, and not just the nuclear family but the whole community. That’s unique and it belongs to that place. Then here I learned to feel complete with just the nuclear family, I’ve learned that here with American culture, and that’s helped me to survive here where I am. So I try to be positive and learn the beautiful things from this culture, and to try and maintain the good things from mine as well. Every culture has pretty things, right? So, no, I’m definitely not from either place.

Subject three takes a different position regarding the question of whether she is American or not. While the first two subjects tended to express their multi-cultural identities in positive terms, subject three expresses them in negative terms. That is not to say that subject three shows a negative attitude. In fact, the overwhelming feel of subject three's discourse is very optimistic. Regardless of the optimism, however, subject three defines herself not as belonging to both Mexico and the U.S., but rather as belonging to neither. This could potentially relate to the fact that her immigration experience had less support from those close to her in Mexico. Subject two left Colombia for lack of other options, and subject one had family support (as indicated by the fact that her mother also lived in New York). Subject three and her husband, on the other hand, seem to be going it alone.

On another note, the couple's willingness to take risks is stirring. Their willingness to grab hold of opportunities when they present themselves seems to have been key to their ability to be successful in the U.S. Intentionally abandoning your legal status in a country is a bold move, but in the end it worked out for them and they have been able to make a good life for themselves. Sometimes chasing a dream does work out, and in ways that are not easily understood.

#### **4. Venezuela Part 1**

Subjects four and five are a married couple from Venezuela who have been in the U.S. for around 15 years. The two came to the U.S. so that the husband could finish his Masters Degree. Getting two peoples' perspectives on the same story offers an interesting opportunity: we get to see how perceptions differ. When we see differences in a story, it highlights the literary nature of memory and stories. We craft our memories from the present into a coherent story of us, in a similar way that culture then combines those stories to create a national identity. Subject four was a no-nonsense interviewee who answered questions succinctly but sufficiently. Regardless of the brevity of the interview, a clear narrative emerges from his answers:

**Why did you decide to come to the United States?**

An opportunity for higher education. It was a *scholarship* or *beca* to study.

**What is the story of how you got here?**

I went to study for my *bachelors* on the island of Trinidad, at an extension campus that Andrews University had. I studied there for four years. Being there I was able to get an *assistantship*, or a scholarship to do my masters here at Andrews University. That was how everything started, with that opportunity.

**What difficulties did you face in the process?**

More than anything there were economic difficulties in looking for the money to study my masters here. And, of course, there is always the problem of finding the student visa to come, and all that's involved in finding contacts for where to stay at the university and all that.

**In what ways has it been difficult to adjust to living in the U.S.? What parts have been easy?**

Maybe the hardest thing, of course I had the blessing of already knowing the language from having studied in Trinidad, and that was where I learned the language, English. Getting here to Michigan I think that the hardest thing was maybe the winters. With that said, it's something that I liked because I was tired of the other extreme of such heavy humidity and heat that exists in the Caribbean. And here you have the variations that you have winter but you also have summer, spring and fall. So, perhaps the most difficult thing was winter, but at the same time it was a blessing.

**And what was easy?**

The easiest thing here? Well, since I was Adventist in a Christian environment here in the University it has always been good. The people, in my experience the people here have

always been very kind: in the university, the professors you find people from every country here so, it's really a great atmosphere.

**Do you believe you are American or Venezuelan? Do you believe it is possible to be both at the same time?**

Yes, it would always be a mixture of the two, but truthfully I feel very identified with being American as well. I have involved myself in the culture here well and, as I said, the people here, at least from Michigan, in the environment maybe outside the university, the people have been very kind, always very affectionate, good treatment. Yes, I think that now after fifteen years we feel American. We have the privilege of voting too, being citizens now for a while.

### **Comments**

Of course, every person will have a different experience. We had the blessing that I had family here since I was small. I visited this country several summers in the areas of Florida and Georgia. So we more or less understood what the lifestyle here was like. Never in Michigan, but it's similar, I think, to the rest of the country as far as how things work. Really in this country, opportunities opened up here and the idea was maybe to go back but opportunities came up here for work and above all I could learn local work here in the area. So God opened up the way in this place, and we've really been blessed in that aspect. So my experience has been, I think, a lot easier maybe when compared with other people who have immigrated, because it wasn't a sudden immigration, but rather little by little. The most difficult thing has maybe been the distance that we still have from family. The closest are in Florida and then in Venezuela. So we are always kind of far from them. But the rest? Positive.

## 5. Venezuela Part 2

And now for subject five's immigration story. Of course, in many respects it will be the same as her husband's, but of course it is her story, not his. Although there may be intersections, everyone's perspective is unique:

### **Why did you decide to come to the United States?**

I decided because my husband proposed to me. We'd met in Trinidad where he went to study, I had gone to study English there, and afterwards he came to do his Masters and I went to Venezuela. So he went and proposed to me and so we got married and then came here.

### **What is the story of how you got here?**

Well, nothing really, when we arrived, when we got married. In Venezuela you have to get a civil marriage, which is the legal part, and afterwards you get married in the church. So when we got our civil marriage I took my marriage card, and I went to the U.S. embassy and requested my visa. My visa was an F-2, which was attached to the F-1 student visa. Then, well, we got the visa. We ended up getting married in the church and all that, and we came. Yeah, that was it. That was the process for getting here.

### **What difficulties did you face in the process?**

Really none because, since he already had his visa to be here, it was like automatic for me to get one. There was no problem in the embassy, they didn't give us any conditions or anything because, well, he was already studying here and I wasn't going to be able to function there in a marriage so, in that regard there were no problems.

### **In what ways has it been difficult to adjust to living in the U.S.? What parts have been easy?**

As for difficult, kind of the same as my husband: the winter. Because, well, I lived in Caracas, that's where I was raised. And it's warm but, well, yeah it's hot, not like this. It's a little cool in the mornings, but when I came here it was really cold; really cold. I had never experienced such cold. That was one of the things and then second, well, to be separated from my family. Because when I went to Trinidad it was the first time that I had been away from my family, and all of my family stayed in Venezuela so that for me was pretty tough. I talked to my mom, but it wasn't like talking to her on the phone every day. There was no Skype or anything like that so, that was complicated. I think that for me those two things, the winter but above all being far from my family were the most difficult.

**And what was easy?**

Easy? Well, being here with my family and starting out a new life as a family. And having a Hispanic church here because, the language could also be a little difficult, right? Because even though I'd studied English in Trinidad it wasn't like, I mean I still wasn't very fluent when I spoke and I was shy about it. So having a Hispanic church felt like it was a piece of home here. And the people were very kind and friendly. So, when you go to your church you feel comfortable, right? So that was the easiest. Starting there, it helped me.

**Do you believe you are an American or a Venezuelan? Do you believe that it is possible to be both at the same time?**

Well, we have already been living here 14 or 15 years but... I think that I'll always be Venezuelan. People often ask me here, "Where are you from?" And I always say, "I come from Michigan, but I'm Venezuelan." So I think that inside I'll always be Venezuelan. This country has offered us a lot of opportunities and the doors have always been open for us. We have never had a bad experience with the Americans; they have always been friendly and

kind people. And my children are from here so that part of me will be from here. But I will never stop being Venezuelan.

The differences in the two accounts are subtle. Both subjects identify the cold as the primary difficulty experienced in Michigan, although subject five later amends her statement, saying that family is first and cold is second. The deeper difference comes when the two discuss cultural identification. Subject four primarily sees himself as American, while subject five identifies most strongly with her Venezuelan identity. Her primary association with the U.S. is through her children, whom she identifies as “from here”.

Like others, both subjects cite being away from family members as a serious drawback to living in the United States. The nuclear family, however, at least in the case of subject five, seems to be strengthened. Much like subject three who learned to be content with just her nuclear family after leaving Mexico, subject five seems to also find comfort in the presence of her immediate family members.

## CONCLUSION

These stories, along with countless others, are crucial to understanding the changing linguistic nature of U.S. society and to framing the Spanish-speaking experience within the broader cultural patchwork of the United States. An immigrant constitutes the crucial first step toward creating a vibrant American subculture, and thus understanding their stories helps inform our understanding of subsequent generations.

Although certainly not a definitive anthology of immigration experiences in the United States, these stories offer a window into the first step toward creating an American identity for these families. Each story is unique, but certain themes run throughout the stories. Family remains very important to these immigrants, although American society’s stress on the nuclear family over broader family groups, coupled with the distance separating them from their traditional family ties

begin to erode the Latin American sense of family. Subject three specifically mentions that she both admires the American devotion to the nuclear family, and at the same time appreciates the Mexican tendency to maintain close ties with more distant relatives. She and subject five seem to resonate on this point, as subject five mentions being content with her close family, but also feels the distance from her family in Venezuela. Especially interesting, in subject five's case, is the fact that her automatic response to the question about what was most difficult was the cold, but later, as she thinks about the answer, she amends it to be more family oriented.

Language also surfaces as a serious hurdle to be overcome by these subjects, a hurdle that they do manage to functionally overcome with time and dedication, but that always remains in at a certain level. Subject one reveals how she was initially unable to get a job at her education level because she couldn't keep up with the language. In subject three's case, the language barrier led to some comical anecdotes, and was also a source of social isolation. Spending an extra day at work doing nothing is comical in hindsight, but at the time must have been very frustrating. Having learned English in Trinidad before arriving, the language presented fewer difficulties for subjects four and five, although subject five still cites it as a source of occasional frustration. The fact that subject two arrived in the U.S. at a younger age seems to have helped her to avoid a lot of the workplace issues involved with the language barrier, although she also mentions it as a serious hurdle, citing her initial inability to communicate even on a basic level as a serious disadvantage in American society.

Despite all being unique, the stories share something else in common: all of them deal with the process of transforming oneself from one thing into another. The changes that these subjects experience are not merely geographical, and to some extent all of them express some sort of altered identity (in the case of subject five, that altered identity manifests itself in the nationality of her children less than it does in her own identity, but the alteration takes place nonetheless). Both



subjects one and five take the position that, even if they may not be completely American, their children are. If we were to interview the second generation, what would we find? Perhaps a future study dealing with second generation Americans could reveal as much or more about the immigration process as the first.

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## APENDICES

### 1. Puerto Rico

#### ¿Por qué decidió usted venir a los Estados Unidos?

Bueno la razón realmente fue visitar alguna familia. Y al llegar a Nueva York, decidí quedarme un tiempo. Pero el... yo había terminado colegio en Puerto Rico, y encontré, cuando fui a buscar un trabajo, me... que me gustaba mucho el trabajo y me entrevistaron. En la entrevista, este, encontré que necesitaba adaptar el oído al idioma. Porque en Puerto Rico te enseñen desde primer grado inglés, pero lo enseñan distinto. Allá se, pero, te enseñan a pronunciar, por ejemplo, “water”: y yo me encontré que acá, en estados unidos decían “wadda”. Um... nos enseñan a decir “little” que es lo correcto. Acá decían “liddle”. Cuando fui a tomar el examen en la oficina del trabajo que yo quería, el jefe me puso a mi en su oficina y se fue a otra y me dijo “te voy a dictar un carta”. Ya había cogido Business, y había pasado con las notas más altas yo pasé así que yo tenía mucha confianza en mi. Cuando él me dictó la carta yo tenía que tomarla en shorthand, en ese tiempo. Y me dictó la carta y cuando vino a ver el papel estaba en blanco. No le entendí una palabra. Me dijo “¿Qué pasó?” Le dije “No le entendí”. Pero él había visto mi resume y todo y le gustó mucho. Entonces me aconsejó, y me dice, “Yo quiero darte el trabajo. Yo necesito una persona como tú. Pero así, no puedes, este, hacerlo. Lo que te recomiendo es que te vayas a una factoría (fábrica), y trates de comunicarte con todo el mundo hasta que, este, pongas tu oído a la pronunciación”, así me dijo él, ¿yo puedo hablar en inglés? ¿O no? No puedo cambiarlo ¿verdad? Me dijo, “Tienes que adaptar tu oído al idioma.” Me dijo, “Y tan pronto tu creas que estés preparada, ven donde mi.” Me dijo, “te voy a dar tres meses, porque yo quiero que vengas a trabajar conmigo.” Y así lo hice. Me fui a una factoría y allí estuve unos tres meses y en menos de tres meses ya yo había... ya entendía. Lo que... y aprendí. Aprendí yo a hablar como todos acá. Así que regresé y me dieron el trabajo. Pero... este... el

propósito mío fue primero visitar, y luego quise quedarme para trabajar un tiempito, hacer algo de dinero y regresarme.

**¿Cuál es la historia de cómo llegó aquí?**

Pues las circunstancias fueron que allí en New York, llegó él que se habrá mi esposo. Él llegó, nos conocíamos en Puerto Rico, crecimos juntos, se puede decir. Y dejamos de vernos por años. Él salió para Cuba de catorce años, yo me quedé en Puerto Rico. Y entonces a los pocos años yo llegué a New York. Pero él supo que mi mamá estaba en New York y como éramos vecinos quiso ir a saludar a mi mamá, a verla. Y al llegar a saludar a mi mamá, nos encontramos que ya no éramos niños. Ya yo era una señorita, una joven, y él un joven guapísimo. Y en vez de ver a mi mamá a quien miró fue a mi. Y allí fue donde empezó nuestra relación como novios. Decidimos casarnos y nos casamos en Chicago. Y al casarnos en Chicago, él siempre quería ser doctor. Él se fue a la universidad, y allí este, como estuvo la cosa, estudió algo, nos casamos, entonces ... y al regresar, ya quiso entrar a medicina y fue cuando fuimos a México, él estudió en México. Medicina. Al terminar en México vino acá a los estados unidos. Regresamos y hizo su internship. Y al terminar, ya teníamos cuatro niños, al terminar su internship in Toledo, Ohio. Entonces, él tenía que buscar donde hacer sur residencia. Vino aquí lo recomendaron muy bien y lo aceptaron, y desde entonces hemos estado aquí. Así fue como terminamos en Michigan.

**[Pregunta omitida]**

**¿En cuáles áreas ha sido difícil acostumbrarse a vivir en los EE.UU.? ¿Cuáles aspectos han sido fáciles?**

Realmente no han sido cosas difíciles porque hemos progresado. A pesar de que vivíamos bien allá, pero como todo el mundo, tu sabes que esta es la nación que todo el mundo quiere venir a estar, del progreso, de las oportunidades. Las oportunidades en Puerto Rico no son iguales a las que tienes

acá. Entonces es que como una expansión de beneficios para tu futuro. Así que este, yo diría que mejor que dificultades: beneficios. Cambiar de Puerto Rico, de estar allá, a estar aquí.

**¿Usted cree que es americana o puertorriqueña? ¿Cree usted que es posible ser ambos a la vez?**

Ambos. Ambos. Soy puertorriqueña, y soy ciudadana americana. Este, y he podido disfrutar de mi isla pequeña. Siempre con mucho cariño vamos y visitamos. Disfrutamos de toda la hermosura de la isla que tiene mucho que ofrecer a todos que visita. Y también disfrutamos de los beneficios de acá. Pero también aportamos. Porque hemos aprovechado el tiempo. Nos Hemos educado mejor. Hemos aprovechado las oportunidades que se nos han presentado, trabajado durísimo, y hemos hecho un buen futuro. No solamente para nosotros pero para nuestros hijos, que gracias a Dios son todos profesionales. ¿Puedo decir algo cuando fuimos a México? Allí fue donde tuvimos algunas dificultades, porque cuando fuimos a México para él empezar a estudiar medicina, ya teníamos dos niñitos. Entonces, este, yo quise trabajar, y no pude no me lo permitieron. Y, así que no fue fácil. Él era un estudiante. Él no podía trabajar, y yo tampoco podía. Así que lo que hacíamos era que sí la familia nos ayudaba. Sus padres mensualmente nos mandaban algo y mis padres nos mandaban algo de dinero. La cuest... Pero, los veranos, este, nos veníamos acá. Eran dos meses, él trabajaba y yo también. Aquí podíamos trabajar, y hacer algo de dinero para regresar y continuar. Cada seis meses teníamos que ir a la frontera a reanudar la visa. Sin embargo lo pasamos muy bien porque nos pudimos adaptar a la situación este México es muy bonito nos gust... , la gente muy amable, la música nos encantaba, la comida, teníamos buenos vecinos. Y como nos pudimos adaptar y pasarla mejor debido que tu sabes que el modo de vida allá es más barato, así con los dólares de aquí, podíamos...era suficiente para nosotros como familia sostenernos. Este... pero yo digo que fue un poco difícil, fue un poco difícil porque tuvimos que adaptarnos a una situación distinta a la que estábamos acostumbrado. Sin embargo fue una bendición por que terminó su escuela de medicina y

luego regresamos acá y Dios nos bendijo mucho. Él pudo hacer su internado en Toledo, Ohio luego aquí vino hizo su residencia y nos gustó tanto que nos quedamos. Y aquí es lo que los niños consideran su casa.

### **Comentario**

el secreto se resume en una palabra: adaptación. Tu puedes obtener lo que tu quieras, si tú estas dispuesto a adaptarte a lo que se te ofrece. Ahora alguna persona que tenga otro modo de pensar y que llegue aquí diga “yo no puedo hacer esto. No estoy acostumbrado. Yo estaba acostumbrado a una vida mejor de aquí de que allá” esa persona no va a triunfar y atener un buen futuro. El secreto es adaptarte y estar, como se dice, “¿willing?” Es dispuesto. Estar dispuesto a aceptar las situaciones y hacer lo mejor de ellas.

## **2. Colombia**

### **¿Por qué decidió usted venir a los Estados Unidos?**

Bueno la verdad es que um... Papá lo amenazaron de muerte en Colombia así que tuvimos que viajar a Panamá. Vivimos en Panamá por alrededor de cuatro años, pero el gobierno de Panamá no nos aceptó el refugio político. Así que tuvimos que pedir ayuda de los Estados Unidos y... por esa razón estamos aquí.

### **¿Cuál es la historia de cómo llegó aquí?**

Ah... Esa es una historia bastante interesante. Um... Bueno umm... mi papá estuvo hablando con varios pastores de diferentes asociaciones para ver a quien le podía dar un llamado para venir aquí a los estados unidos. Ah, la asociación de la General Conference le ofreció ayudarle le mandó papeles y le mandó todo lo necesario para que pudiera pedir la visa. Estando en Panamá la situación económica era muy complicada así que no teníamos el dinero para ir a pedir la solicitud para la visa. Y un día así sin más ni más mi papá recibe una llamada diciéndole que le está esperando un envío de dinero. Y él dijo que sí. Y fue y era la cantidad precisa de dinero que

necesitaba para poder ir a presentarse a la embajada. Y ese dinero se había enviado mi abuelo, acababa de vender el carro y sintió que nosotros necesitábamos ese dinero más que él, así que nos lo mandó. Con ese dinero fuimos a la embajada de los Estados Unidos con el miedo de que no nos dieran las visas porque estábamos ilegales en Panamá. Llevábamos ilegales alrededor de casi tres años. Y pues lo primero que le piden a uno son los documentos de identificación y que está legal en un país. Pero no nos pidieron nada de eso. Nos pidieron los papeles de aquí. El señor simplemente se retiró por unos cinco minutos y cuando regresó nos dijo bienvenidos a los Estados Unidos. Nos tomaron las huellas digitales, nos dieron los papeles y, pues, ya tenemos las visas, pero no tenemos dinero para los pasajes, y por eso tenemos que pagar una deuda de dos mil dólares por persona por año, por cada año que estuvimos ilegales en Panamá. Y era, pues, demasiado dinero. En esos días, nos dieron el refugio político en Panamá, pero no lo aceptamos. Pero al darnos el refugio, ellos cubrieron esa deuda y sólo tuvimos que pagar cincuenta dólares para poder salir del país, por los cuatro, que era muchísimo dinero. Entre un amigo y otro amigo para todo mirar él como conseguir el dinero para venirse para aquí a trabajar por unos meses y luego mandar nos a ... a llamar a mi hermana, mi mamá y a mi así que nos tendríamos que quedar en Panamá por unos cuantos meses solas. Cuando eh... estaba buscando el dinero y esto, mi papá recibió otra llamada diciendo que se estaba esperando otro envío de dinero y también dijo que sí, y fue y eran cuatrocientos dólares que le estaba mandando mi tío. Simplemente sintió que necesitaba que le mande el dinero a mi papá, y le mandó ese dinero. Y con eso y fuera de eso como mi papá tuvo pruebas de ser pastor la aerolínea le dio un descuento de ministro que se lo dan a los curas y las monjas y a todos esos se lo dieron a mi papá también. Y con eso consiguió su dinero para el pasaje. Y nosotras nos íbamos a quedar allí en Panamá por unos meses pero, mi tío el hermano mayor de mi mamá, él nos mando el dinero, nos mandó los pasajes para que



nosotras fuéramos a vivir en Colombia mientras mi papá estaba aquí en los Estados Unidos y estuvimos en Colombia unos nueve meses mientras papá trabajaba. Trabajo esos nueve meses con mi tío en su compañía de construcción, mi tío es arquitecto. Um... al terminar los nueve meses mi papá nos compró los pasajes. Primero mando a mi... mi mamá se vino primero. Se vino como a los cinco meses de mi papá estar aquí. Y luego a los cuatro meses más nos fuimos mi hermana y yo para... estuvimos en Miami una semana y el resto ya, eh, de allí nos fuimos para Nueva York.

**¿Cuáles dificultades enfrentó en el proceso?**

Bueno. Para comenzar el hecho de ser ilegales en Panamá nos presentó muchas dificultades. Fue una de las razones por las cuales tuvimos que venirnos para acá. Mi papá no podía trabajar. No teníamos dinero. Literalmente nosotras caminábamos en la calle mirando los centavos para recoger para comprar algo de arroz o algo de comida porque no teníamos mucha, muchos ingresos. Así que el dinero fue, prácticamente lo más... para llegar aquí fue lo más complicado. Porque primero para tener el dinero para que mi papá se viniera y luego para nosotras venirnos. Pero Dios siempre mostró la forma de... él solucionó el problema pero, una de las cosas sí fue en el dinero para poder llegar aquí.

**¿En cuáles áreas ha sido difícil acostumbrarse a vivir en los EE.UU.? ¿Cuáles aspectos han sido fáciles?**

Bueno, lo más difícil al principio fue el inglés y la barrera de la comunicación. Es muy difícil llegar a un lugar y no saber como decir algo tan sencillo como “necesito un baño” o algo así. Es siempre una barrera de comunicación que aun después de ocho años está un poco allí. Todavía falta mucho por aprender, mucho por mejorar en lo que es la comunicación y el lenguaje... todo que tiene que ver con el inglés. Um... Una de las cosas más fáciles es que, como somos familia

pastoral, nos hemos cambiado mucho de lugares de vivir. Así que el cambiarnos a un nuevo ambiente una nueva cultura no fue tan complicado para nosotros. Al vivir en Panamá nos acostumbramos a otro estilo de vida. Otro estilo de cultura que no es la nuestra propia como colombianos. Y, pues, al venir aquí a los Estados Unidos nos, ese nivel cultural se abrió mucho más con cada amistad de otro país que tenemos uh.. la comida por ejemplo ya no solo estamos acostumbrados a la comida colombiana o la comida panameña ahora ya comemos dominicano, ecuatoriano... de todos los tipos de comida... mexicana o lo que sea. Y eso es... eso ha sido la parte fácil el poder abrirse culturalmente y aprender mucho más acerca de las otras culturas también como la cultura americana. Yo creo que yo ya me sentiría bien incómoda volviendo a vivir a Colombia porque muchas en mi rutina y de mi vida como, que ya están muy americanizadas especialmente por ejemplo la forma de manejar. En Colombia el límite de velocidad en highway en carretera es de treinta y cinco a cuarenta millas por hora. Eso es lo que hago aquí en la carretera normalmente en una zona urbana. Y ya en zona urbana el límite de velocidad son quince millas. So, yo creo que me frustraría demasiado yo manejando ya en Colombia. So el acostumbrarme a otras culturas, el acostumbrarme a esa... a nuevos estilos de vida nuevas cosas diferentes siempre ha sido lo más sencillo.

**¿Usted cree que es americana o colombiana? ¿Cree usted que es posible ser ambos a la vez?**

O.k., yo creo que yo soy 100% colombiana. Uh, yo nací, crecí y viví en Colombia por doce años. Sí, ya llevó mucho más tiempo viviendo fuera de Colombia de lo que viví en Colombia, pero yo me siento colombiana. Tengo un amor profundo para los Estados Unidos, y lo mismo para panamá. Siempre en me corazón va a haber un lugar muy especial para mi y eh, para la patria porque me acogió. Porque este país nos acogió y nos brindó una nueva oportunidad, un nuevo estilo de vida. Um... yo seguiré siendo colombiana porque allí nací y ese es... son mis raíces,

pero el tronco sigue creciendo y cada pedacito cada rama que puede ser un nuevo país una nueva aventura siempre va a tener lugar en ese árbol de la vida. Pero las raíces siempre son las raíces. Son las que los llaman a uno y sí yo so colombiana pero, pero al mismo tiempo en cierta parte también puedo decir que soy americana de corazón.

### **3. México**

#### **¿Por qué decidió usted venir a los Estados Unidos?**

Originalmente, mi esposo y yo venimos a estudiar. Venimos con una visa de I-20 para estudiar.

#### **¿Cuál es la historia de cómo llegó aquí?**

Como llegamos... Eh, interesante porque cuando nosotros nos casamos fuimos a estudiar, eh a trabajar al sur de México como mi esposo como pastor. Y estando allá él como pastor fue a entregar los diezmos a la asociación. Y un día que él fue a entregar los diezmos a la asociación se encontró con un grupo de Tennessee, de misioneros que estaba pasando por el sur de México para ir a... ¿cómo se llama este país? Me olvidé. Allí en el sur de México con la frontera al sur de México. Um, y él así de juego le dijo a ese, um, esa persona que conocía que había conocido en un colegio anteriormente que era amigo de él, "Hey, cuando tengas la oportunidad si me puedes mandar una visa, mándamela. Me voy. Así. Así nada más." Y bueno llegó a la casa y dijo, "Mira me encontré este amigo. Venía con un grupo de misioneros." "¡Ay que bueno!", "Y le dije que si, algún día se tenía una visa que nos la mandara". Pero nosotros seguimos trabajando. A los tres meses llegó la visa, de I-20 para nosotros venir acá con todo pagado. Todo. Y fue una decisión bien difícil para nosotros porque para mi esposo el venir a Estados Unidos era como un sueño que siempre tuvo. Venir aquí a Andrews estudiar. Esa era su sueño. Pero no era Andrews. Era una escuela en Tennessee. Entonces cuando llegó era, "Como dejar el ministerio, recién estamos empezando, tenemos solo un año con proyecto construyendo una iglesia. Que va a decir la gente" o sea No... no toda la gente de México quiere venir a Estados Unidos. En México al profesionista, muchos profesionista ve al que viene a

Estados Unidos como, “Ah, estás dejando lo difícil, te vas por lo más fácil”... resienten ellos que uno, como, abandona el trabajo, abandona el país, abandona por algo mejor. No siempre se ve bien. Entonces fue una decisión difícil y decidimos [mi esposo] y yo, pedir consejo. Entonces él empezó, y fue con la persona que le confiaba más de allí de la asociación, donde él trabajaba, y le preguntó, “Mira, tengo esta oportunidad. ¿Qué me aconsejas?” Y le dijo, “Si yo estuviese en tú lugar, yo iba. Porque yo siempre he querido ir a estudiar a Andrews, a Estados Unidos. Ese es tu primer paso. No lo pienses. Vete.” Y él le dijo, “Bueno, pero me preocupa esto.” “no te preocupes. Vete.” Pero, [mi esposo] es una persona que consulta, yo me habría sí quedado con eso, una vez ya pregunto y me voy. No, él consulta con una persona, y consulta con otra, y quiere, como, reafirmación ¿no? Y fue con otras personas que le dijeron exactamente lo que él no quería escuchar, “¿Cómo nos vas a dejar? No te vayas. Eso no es bueno. A un país tan perverso. No.” Porque lo que escuchan en noticias, ¿no? Que mataron acá que, lo que sea ¿no? Entonces, ay, estaba tan [confundido] porque ahora, “Sí, bueno una persona me dijo que sí pero otros dijeron que no.” Y, mucha oración y como piensa en Dios y bueno, dejamos todo y venimos a Tennessee. Así que, ese es el trasfondo de cómo hicimos la decisión y como obtuvimos el I-20.

### **¿Cuáles dificultades enfrentó en el proceso?**

Pues, yo creo que la dificultad más grande fue el tomar la decisión sabiendo que compañeros del trabajo no aceptaban la decisión. Simplemente pensar, bueno, no estamos recibiendo el apoyo de los compañeros de trabajo pero igual nos vamos. Yo creo que eso fue el reto más difícil. Porque cuando uno recibe la visa que dice, “Tienes todo pagado” y la embajada da el sello. Ya, es comprar los boletos y uno viene y sigue acá con todo, entonces no, no tuvimos ese proceso de que, como estuvo el no recaudar los fondos para viajar, eso no fue ningún problema. Sí. ¿No sé si tienes un pregunta en que fue llegar acá? ¿O sea el reto en llegar acá? ¿Tiene otra pregunta?

**Ésta es más o menos la única**

Porque llegando acá yo creo que, o sea, el reto no se acabó solamente de lo que uno dejó allá sino venir acá. ¿No? Entonces, yo como esposa de pastor venía a un país donde, para mí era un poco liberal, este país, comparando que, yo, allá por la tradición por las normas, tenía que vestirme de una forma. Pero viniendo a Estados Unidos yo pensé, “Ah, yo voy a puedo usar pantalones cortos, puedo usar ropa sin mangas y en calor, no me tengo que aguantar el calor.” Pero viene a una escuela de esos tem-propio con reglas todavía más estrictas que tenía cuando... Fue como un, como un chasco para mí venir allí el primer día, que me puse pantalones cortos, y no eran cortos, eran lo que conocen como bermudas, no... pantalones hasta la rodilla... y no era un escotado de toda la espalda libre pero era sin mangas. Entonces llevó allí, ¡y nadie se vestía así! Era cómo vivir en un lugar donde solamente vivían familias de pastores. Eso fue como un chasco para mí muy grande porque, compré ropa porque venía a los estados unidos, dejé ropa porque no la iba a necesitar acá y todo era lo contrario. Entonces, para mí eso fue como, pensé que venía a un lugar un poquito más... diferente... más normal ¿no? Porque tener... estar en la familia del pastor es un poquito más estricto en lo que se trata la vestimenta. Esa parte fue... fue la primera en que reaccioné. Llego allí voy en la hora de comer con todos los estudiantes y yo era la única con pantalones cortos y vestido sin mangas. Y de allí bueno vino el cambio de la lengua, la cultura y todo lo que implica ir a un mundo completamente diferente.

### **¿Y cómo llegaron a Michigan?**

¿A Michigan?

Cuando estuvimos en Tennessee se estaba cerrando la ley de amnistía. Entonces, mi esposo fue a la embajada a preguntar... porque él estuvo trabajando de ilegal cuando era estudiante en Montemorelos él venía a trabajar acá, a Estados Unidos. Entonces él trabajó de ilegal por meses... venía, iba a México y venía, entonces él dijo... alguien le dijo, más bien, alguien le dijo, “Mira, tú

“tienes todos los requisitos, aplica.” Pero no, nosotros estamos bien, “Pero se está cerrando, ve ve.”

Entonces él fue a la embajada y le dijeron, “Esta ley no es para ti. Esta ley es para los ilegales,”

“No, pero yo, lleno...”

“Sí, pero ahorita tú eres legal. Esto es para los ilegales.”

“¿Qué tengo que hacer?”

Y entonces la persona de la embajada le dijo, “Lo que tú tienes que hacer para aplicar es hacerte ilegal. Tú en este momento eres legal. Tienes el I-20. Tienes que abandonar el I-20, hacerte ilegal, entonces sometes tu aplicación y entonces tú vas a poder. Y tuvimos que hacerlo. Fue un año después de que llegamos acá, venimos por dos años con la idea de regresar a México. Al final del año, un poco más de un año, año y medio, ya [mi hija] había nacido, acá en los Estados Unidos, hicimos eso. Dejamos la escuela, que fue una decisión bien difícil porque esa escuela nos dio el pase para venir acá, el I-20. Nos recibieron con todo, con... vivíamos en una casa movible, entonces teníamos allí todo... cama, lavadoras, secadora, todo lo de la cocina, todo, o sea, sábanas. Teníamos todo. Y tuvimos que dejar eso para... y no era por lo que dejábamos. Era, como vamos a hacerle esto a las personas que estamos acá, [mi esposo] trabajaba en construcción, yo trabajaba en un asilo de ancianos, en la cafetería. Y estábamos bien allí, sentíamos que nuestro servicio contribuía, y era como, bueno vamos a hacer lo mejor. ellos nos dieron esto. Nosotros estamos dando algo a cambio. Y dejar todo eso después que nos habían hecho tanto era bien difícil. Pero era nuestra única oportunidad, porque tenía una fecha de vencimiento para someter los papeles. Y fuimos de las últimas personas en someter la aplicación, o la solicitud, para la amnistía. Nos fuimos a Tejas adonde mi esposo había trabajado como ilegal y donde conocía algunas personas que él creía que nos podían ayudar. Entonces, fue bien difícil y con un bebé recién nacido que llora cuando todo el mundo está durmiendo, vivir con alguien por algunos meses sometido al menú, porque nosotros le pagábamos a la persona, pero teníamos que comer todo lo que ellos comían. O sea, pagábamos no sé que

cantidad por vivir allí, comíamos allí, [mi esposo] trabajaba con ellos. Y tener a un bebé era bien difícil cuando el bebé lloraba y todo el mundo dormía. Pero nos hicimos ilegales. Entonces sometimos la aplicación, y todo pasó porque llenamos todos los requisitos. Entonces, así fue como nos hicimos legales estando en Texas. Nos quedamos cuatro años trabajando en una academia adventista allá, [mi esposo] era asistente al preceptor y enseñaba Biblia, no enseñaba, sí enseñaba Biblia y enseñaba español. Yo fui preceptora cuatro años allá. Y entonces después surgió la idea, “bueno ahora tenemos suficientes ahorros para ir a Andrews.” Y entonces venimos acá por dos años. Y llegamos acá a Andrews. Por dos años. Y dos años más, dos años más, dos años más.

**¿En cuáles áreas ha sido difícil acostumbrarse a vivir en los EE.UU.? ¿Cuáles aspectos han sido fáciles?**

¿Difíciles? La lengua. Cuando llegamos a Texas no había ningún hispano. Éramos solamente nosotros los únicos mexicanos. Se nos dijo que en el área donde estábamos no se quería los hispanos, especialmente los mexicanos. Así que no había nadie por allí cerca para conversar y, bueno cuando llegamos a Tennessee, aun cuando habían personas que hablaban español, como parte del propósito era aprender inglés, no se nos permitía hablar español. Y era bien difícil para mi especialmente porque [mi esposo] entendía un poquito de inglés, y cuando estábamos en la iglesia, a veces contaban algo gracioso. Yo quería reírme con toda la gente. Y [mi esposo] le decía a veces.

“¿De qué se ríen? ¿De que..?”

“Voy a perder la concentración, te digo después.”

“¡Yo me quiero reír ahora!”

“Te digo después. te digo después”.

Esa parte de la comunicación era bien difícil porque me costaba trabajo esperar para saber de qué hablaba la gente hasta llegar a mi casa, porque, [mi esposo] de paso es bien firme en la reverencia en la iglesia. Entonces, no quería estarme traduciendo porque era irreverente para él, ¿no? El idioma fue

bien difícil. Una vez mientras trabajaba, me dijeron, me daban la cartera y me hacían seña de adiós. Yo entendía que era que me fuera ¿no?. Entonces, porque me daban la cartera, me llevaban hacia la puerta. Me daban la seña de adiós. Eso entendía, pero entonces hablaban mucho y yo pensaba, “¿Estarán diciendo que yo regrese en dos horas? ¿Que yo regrese hoy? ¿Que regrese más tarde? Mejor me quedo.” Porque mi trabajo era importante. Trabajaba en la cafetería y había... cada quien tenía sus tareas específicas, el que sirve el café, el que sirve la sopa, el que prepara, el que hace la preparación para el siguiente día. O sea el trabajo estaba asignado. O sea, si tu faltas, todo se revuelve, ¿no? Y yo no quería fallar. O sea, Si me dicen que yo regrese, no sé a que hora. No entendía. Entonces me hacían muchas señas y hablaban mucho que no era solamente, “goodbye”, no, era mucho. Era mucho y no entendía nada. Y, decidí quedarme. Yo dije, “no pierdo nada quedándome. Un día extra de trabajo quizás, pero no.” Y al final del día consiguieron a alguien para decirme que es que tenía el día libre. Yo me quedé todo el día trabajando. Um... sí. Definitivamente el idioma para mí fue, especialmente para mí, me gusta hablar, converso bastante mi comunicación es verbal. Para mí, quizás todo el porcentaje aparte de mis gestos, el mayor parte es verbal. Eso, y después la comida. Para mí la comida mexicana la traigo tan aferrada a mí que fue bien difícil adaptarme a la comida americana. Ahora con el tiempo me doy cuenta que tan aferrada la traigo que cuando tenía mis presentaciones en la universidad que tenían que ver como llegar a los estados unidos, siempre que hablaba de la comida me ponía a llorar. Yo creo que es la primera vez que estoy hablando de lo difícil que fue sin ponerme a llorar porque, es que me ponía yo a llorar. No nada más cuando lo he contado sino, eran cuando se trataba de la comida que extrañaba o la comida que quería yo comer algo... lloraba yo. Era así bien palpante mi... mi frustración de no poder comer la comida mexicana, el pan mexicano el... o sea, la comida mexicana. Para mí quizás esas dos partes, lo que era la lengua y la comida. No tanto la familia. No tanto los familiares. Eso quizás está en tercer



plano. Pero, no, yo nunca lloré porque estoy sola, porque extraño mi mamá, porque extraño mis hermanas... no, era la lengua y la comida.

### **¿Y lo fácil?**

Yo creo que las amistades. Ha sido fácil hacer amistad con personas aunque sea diferente cultura porque, y yo le atribuyo mucho al hecho que [mi esposo] es una persona social. No nada más yo, sino los dos. Entonces he hecho, puedo conocer gente compartir, y él tiene otro grupo con él que conocemos y compartimos. Entonces como que el camino se nos abre bien rápido porque, yo de un lado y él de su lado. Y eso nos ha abierto muchas oportunidades. O sea, ha habido ocasiones por ejemplo cuando [nuestra hija] nació yo no sabía nada de lo que, no sabía lo que sé ahora, ahora muchos tienen un programa que ayuda a las madres con, embarazadas y madres con niños pequeños. Pero yo no sabía todo eso cuando yo llegué acá. Y hubo gente que me ayudó que aunque no teníamos esa facilidad para comunicarnos verbalmente, aun así se quedaron allí y me hablaban. Entonces empecé a aprender poco a poco vocabulario que iba con el embarazo, vocabulario con el infante. Um... quería cocinar algo, por ejemplo yo no sabía hacer pan. Como buena mexicana en, nosotros vamos a la panadería, dondequiera hay panaderías. No tienes que hacer pan en la casa. Acá es bien común que el americano hace su pan. Aun cuando lo puede comprar, lo hace. Nosotros no. En mi casa el horno se usaba para guardar el pan, pero nunca para cocinarlo. Mami lo, si tenía que hornear alguna carne tenía un horno afuera de la casa donde horneaba. Pero nunca horneaba pan. Encontré gente acá, Americana que preguntaba, “¿Tú quieres hacerlo? Ven, yo te enseño.” Eso para mí era totalmente diferente porque no es así entre nosotros los mexicanos. Es más un poquito de competencia, “yo sé pero no te voy a enseñar.” Y acá yo encontraba que era bien fácil, “Oh, ¿quieres aprender? Yo te enseño.”

“Quiero hacer, aprender a hacer pastel, repostería,”

“Oh, yo te enseño. Ven a mi casa todas las tardes, yo te enseño.”

Y era un mundo que daban ganas de quedarse, de estar entre ese ambiente. Y nos tocó quedarnos en un ambiente así los dos años en Tennessee fueron así. Los cinco-seis años que estuvimos por el área de Texas fue así entre americanos con un ambiente bien abierto, bien... de mucho apoyo. Hasta que venimos acá, que era un poquito bien ya más hispano. Mas cerca de la cultura en la que yo crecí, el venir acá, a Berrien Springs.

**¿Usted cree que es americana o mexicana? ¿Cree usted que es posible ser ambos a la vez?**

Por mucho tiempo me sentí frustrada porque cuando iba a México recibía la crítica de mis amigas. “Por qué haces lo que haces? Así no se hace.” Y acá en Estados Unidos he sentido también la discriminación. Especialmente por mi... por el inglés. Mi inglés nos es perfecto. Tengo me acento como mexicana bien fuerte. Y sentirse, no soy de allá. Cuando estoy acá digo, “Oh sí, yo soy mexicana y en México”, pero voy a México no... no encajo más. No encajo. Y acá, no me siento que encajo cien por ciento tampoco. Entonces, cuando estoy acá, me considero que estoy allá. Y cuando estoy allá, entonces me siento, “Como va a pensar que pertenezco acá”. Pero, al mismo tiempo es ni de aquí ni de allá. Porque no encajo allá cien por ciento y no encajo acá cien por ciento porque sí he sufrido la discriminación. Sí me ha tocado en una forma fuerte. Sí. Así que, no me considero Mexicana cien por ciento, sería un insulto para los Americanos yo considerarme Americana cien por ciento. Pero creo que he aprendido a vivir en una cultura donde trato de aferrarme a lo mejor que tengo de los dos. Porque yo creo que la cultura Americana tiene cosas bellísimas que aprecio lo que es el valor que se le da a la familia. Se le da el valor en teoría y en práctica. Y en mi cultura mexicana en la que crecí el valor que se le da a los familiares y la oportunidad que uno tiene de convivir con la familia, no solamente en el núcleo familiar sino con toda la comunidad. Eso es único que pertenece solo allá. Entonces aquí el aprender a sentirme completa solo con el núcleo familiar, lo he aprendido acá con la cultura americana, y eso me ha ayudado a sobrevivir aquí donde estoy. Entonces, trato de ser positiva y de aprender las cosas

bonitas de esta cultura, y tratar de mantenerlas las cosas buenas de mi cultura que también, cada cultura tiene cosas lindas ¿no? Así que, no, definitivamente ni de aquí ni de allá.

#### **4. Venezuela Part 1**

##### **¿Por qué decidió usted venir a los Estados Unidos?**

Una oportunidad de estudios superiores. De la universidad. Fue una scholarship o beca para estudiar.

##### **¿Cuál es la historia de cómo llegó aquí?**

Este, yo fui a estudiar mi bachelor's en la isla de Trinidad, en un extensión campus que tenía la Universidad de Andrews. Y estudié allí cuatro años. Estando allí pude conseguir un Assistantship, o una beca para hacer mi maestría aquí en la universidad de Andrews. Y así fue como comenzó todo, de esa oportunidad.

##### **¿Cuáles dificultades enfrentó en el proceso?**

Más que todo, dificultades económicas de buscar el dinero para estudiar la maestría acá. Y, por supuesto siempre está la dificultad de encontrar la visa de estudiante para venir. Y todo lo que es los contactos para donde quedarse en la universidad y todo eso.

##### **¿En cuáles áreas ha sido difícil acostumbrarse a vivir en los EE.UU.? ¿Cuáles aspectos han sido fáciles?**

Tal vez lo más difícil, claro tenía la bendición que ya tenía el idioma por haber estudiado en Trinidad, y allí fue donde aprendí el idioma, el inglés. Llegando aquí a Michigan yo creo que lo más difícil tal vez fue el invierno. Sin embargo es algo que me gustaba porque ya estaba cansado del otro extremo de la humedad tan grande y el calor que hay en el caribe. Y aquí tienes las variaciones que tienes invierno pero también tienes verano, primavera, otoño. Así que, tal vez lo más difícil fue el invierno, pero a la vez fue una bendición.

##### **Y de lo fácil?**

Lo más fácil aquí? Bueno, como era Adventista en un ambiente cristiano aquí en la universidad siempre fue bueno. La gente, en mi experiencia la gente aquí siempre ha sido muy amable en la universidad los profesores. Aquí hay una... encuentras personas de todos los países aquí así que, verdad que hay un buen ambiente.

**¿Usted cree que es americano o venezolano? ¿Cree usted que es posible ser ambos a la vez?**

Sí, siempre sería una mezcla de los dos, pero verdad que me siento muy identificado con ser Americano también. Me he involucrado bien en la cultura acá y, como te dije la gente de aquí, por lo menos de Michigan, en el ambiente tal vez fuera de la universidad, la gente ha sido muy amable, siempre muy cariñosa, muy buen trato. Sí, yo creo que ya después de quince años nos sentimos Americanos. Tenemos el privilegio de votar también, siendo ciudadanos y, es un rato allí.

**Comentario:**

Claro, cada persona tendrá su experiencia diferente. Nosotros tuvimos la bendición de que yo tenía familia desde pequeño. Varios veranos visité este país en el área de Florida, Georgia también visitábamos. Así que más o menos entendíamos como era el estilo de vida acá. Nunca en Michigan, pero es parecido yo creo al resto del país en como funcionan las cosas. Verdad este país, las oportunidades se abrieron acá y la idea fue tal vez regresar pero las oportunidades salieron aquí de trabajo... sí de trabajo sobre todo y podía aprender trabajo aquí local en el área. Así que Dios como que nos abrió el camino en este lugar y hemos sido grandemente bendecidos en ese aspecto. Así que mi experiencia ha sido yo creo que mucho más fácil tal vez comparado con muchas otras personas que han inmigrado. Porque no fue una inmigración así de golpe. Sino que como que poco a poco. Lo más difícil tal vez ha sido la distancia tal vez que tenemos todavía familia que está, lo más cercano está en Florida y luego en Venezuela. Así que siempre estamos un poco lejos de ellos. Pero el resto: positiva.

## 5. Venezuela Part 2

### **¿Por qué decidió usted venir a los Estados Unidos?**

Decidí porque mi esposo me propuso matrimonio. Entonces nos habíamos conocido en Trinidad donde él fue a estudiar, yo había ido estudiar inglés allí, y después él vino para hacer los estudios de maestría y yo fui a Venezuela. Así que él fue y me propuso matrimonio y pues nos casamos y nos vimos.

### **¿Cuál es la historia de cómo llegó aquí?**

Pues, nada, cuando llegamos, cuando nos casamos. En Venezuela hay que casarse por civil que es como por la parte legal y después te casas por la iglesia. Entonces cuando nos casamos por civil yo con mi carta de matrimonio, fui a la embajada norteamericana y pedí mi visa. Mi visa era F-2, u-huh, F-2 que era adjunto a la F-1 del estudiante. Entonces bueno obtuvimos la visa, nos terminamos casando por la iglesia y todo lo demás. Y nos venimos y... Sí, eso fue. Eso fue el proceso para llegar acá.

### **¿Cuáles dificultades enfrentó en el proceso?**

Realmente no porque, como tenía ya su visa para estar acá, fue como automático que yo obtuviera la visa. No hubo ningún problema en la embajada, no nos pusieron ningún pero ni nada porque pues el ya está estudiando aquí y pues yo allá no iba a funcionar así en matrimonio así que, en ese aspecto no hubo ningún problema.

### **¿En cuáles áreas ha sido difícil acostumbrarse a vivir en los EE.UU.? ¿Cuáles aspectos han sido fáciles?**

Difíciles un poco igual a [mi esposo] el invierno. Porque, pues, yo vivía en Caracas, allí fue donde me crié. Y es caluroso pero, pues, sí es caliente no es así, es un poco fresco en las mañanas. Pero al venir acá hacía muchísimo frío. Muchísimo frío. Nunca había experimentado tanto frío. Eso fue una de las cosas y segundo, pues, separarme de mi familia. Porque cuando fui a Trinidad fue la primera vez que

me separaba de mi familia, y toda mi familia quedó en Venezuela así que eso para mi fue bien difícil. Este, hablaba con mi mamá, pero pues, no era así como para hablar todos los días por teléfono. No había Skype ni nada del estilo así que, era complicado eso. Y creo que para mi esas dos cosas, el invierno pero sobre todo estar lejos de mi familia. Fue lo más complicado.

**¿Y lo fácil?**

¿Lo fácil? Pues estar con mi esposo empezando una nueva vida de casados. Y tener una iglesia hispana aquí porque, el idioma también podría ser un poco difícil, ¿no? Porque aunque había estudiado inglés en Trinidad, este, no era así, pues todavía no era muy fluente de hablar y me daba mucha pena. Entonces el tener la iglesia hispana como que se sentía un pedacito de casa aquí. Y la gente muy simpática y amable. Y pues, como, cuando uno va a su iglesia se siente cómodo ¿no? Así que eso fue lo más fácil. El empezar de allí. Como que me ayudó.

**¿Usted cree que es americana o venezolana? ¿Cree usted que es posible ser ambos a la vez?**

Pues ya tenemos 14 o 15 años viviendo acá, pero... creo que siempre voy a ser venezolana. La gente muchas veces estando acá me preguntan “¿De donde eres?” Y yo siempre digo, “Yo vengo de Michigan, pero so venezolana.” Así que yo creo que dentro de mi siempre voy a ser venezolana. Este país nos a brindado muchísimas oportunidades las puertas siempre han estado abiertas para nosotros. Nunca hemos tenido mala experiencia con los americanos; siempre han sido gente muy amable y simpática. Y pues mis hijos son de acá así que hay esa parte mía que va a ser de acá. Pero nunca dejaré de ser venezolana.

### Interview Questions

1. Por qué decidió usted venir a los Estados Unidos? [Why did you decide to come to the United States?]
2. ¿Cuál es la historia de cómo llegó aquí? [What is the story of how you arrived here?]
3. ¿Cuáles dificultades enfrentó en el proceso? [What difficulties did you face in the process?]
4. ¿En cuáles áreas ha sido difícil acostumbrarse a vivir en los EE.UU.? ¿Cuáles aspectos han sido fáciles? [In what ways has it been difficult to adjust to living in the U.S.? What parts have been easy?]
5. ¿Usted cree que es Americano o [país de origen]? ¿Cree usted que es posible ser ambos a la vez? [Do you believe you are an American or a [country of origen]? Do you believe that it is possible to be both at the same time?]