

TITLE OF VIDEO: Elsie Alvarez

DATE OF VIDEO: July 7, 2018

TRANSLATED BY: Lauren Abaunza, Natalia Baldwin, Sofía Kearns

DATE OF TRANSLATION: November 30, 2018

[00:03] Elsie Alvarez:	My name is Elsie Lucia Alvarez, I am from Medellín, Colombia, South America. Ah, I came here in 1975. Ah, we were very lucky that my father brought us here. Ah...
[00:24] Sofía Kearns:	And how was it, do you know how your dad came? How did he hear about this place, what happened?
EA:	My father, ah, he worked for Pantex
[00:33]	a textile company in Colombia, and there was a recruitment for a company in Massachusetts and they gave them their tickets and their visas to ... to get there to work. After three years of working they could ask for their family to come too and that's how we got here in the year '75
SK:	And do you remember, what company did he come to? Which textile company in Massachusetts?
[01:03] EA:	No, I don't remember at this moment, no.
SK:	Or the city.
EA:	Eh, Holly, Massachusetts.
SK:	Ah.
EA:	We arrived after the three years, we arrived here and my father came here to Greenville to work in a company called Woodside Mill. Most of those who worked up north came here.
SK:	So, did you come directly to Greenville?
EA:	

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SK:	Here to Greenville, South Carolina.
EA:	Ah yes.
[01:33]	Yes, and we started working in textiles
SK:	Oh, like at the end of seventy-five.
EA:	Hmm.
[2:03]	Ah, we were, I was a spinner with my sister and we worked twelve years. I worked for twelve years until they closed the company. At Woodside Mill they sent us with many others, to another factory in Easley, also in textiles. In the Woodside in Easley, I worked two years before the company closed. After this, I immediately started to look for other kinds of jobs on my own, I quickly went to work in restaurants, in stores, and pretty soon I dedicated myself to cleaning.
SK:	And how were those first years working at Woodside? Can you tell us, for example, what your spinning job consisted of?
[2:33]	EA: It was very hard because when we arrived here we did not speak English only the basic, "hello, how are you, thank you" ah, but many times with just gestures one could learn and then be able to do things. Ah, it was hard because we had never worked and ah, it was a very nice experience. We worked very hard, the third shift, we worked overtime because there were very few people working and, well, we left. Our work consisted of filling some coils of thread, then take them to weave so that they could make them, the fabrics.
[3:03]	SK: What was the most difficult part of that job? Were there some difficulties?
EA:	It was very hard because ah during that time, now there is a lot of technology eh, with the speed of those coils we had to hold them to stop them with our finger, and many times it burned because [inaudible] was very strong. It was very hard because it was not a

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[3:33]	machine... Each machine had three hundred and sixty coils and they gave us fifteen, twenty machines to patrol and we had to change cones, it was hard work. Ah, what I liked the most about work was learning something because we never did [have education opportunities] and for me it was something very nice and I liked it.
SK:	What about your co-workers?
EA:	We were all Hispanic, we all helped each other mutually and there was a...(pause) We were like siblings, we were all very close, we
[4:03]	were very close because we all went out to eat during our break, we took the break together and we helped each other, the doffers as well as the spinners, we helped each other mutually. I came here when I was about sixteen years old.
SK:	Oh yes, but others, were other Colombian workers older?
EA:	Ah.
SK:	Or were there many your age?
EA:	Around the same age.
SK:	So then, did they form good friendships and were those friendships maintained for a long time?
[4:33]	
EA:	For a long time, unfortunately we were all taking, taking different paths, the obligations, ah, different kinds of work; and others went to other cities. Well, I did stay here because I love Greenville.
SK:	I imagine you had supervisors that were not Hispanic.
[5:03]	
EA:	They were Americans
SK:	And how was the relationship with them?

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EA:	Very grumpy, some very grumpy, yes (laugh), ah we did, well, the work and we did not want to be bothered after we did the work. We would sit down and we would help them and they would tell us to "work, work, work" but, well, I think that we find this everywhere we go. There will always be someone who is like that.
SK:	So they did not want you to sit or rest
[5:33]	
EA:	No ... they were, they wanted us to be ready for anything as they say that way (laugh).
SK:	Yes, and in breaks, how many hours did you have?
EA:	Oh, we only had fifteen, half an hour, and fifteen minutes to rest, that was all we had. And they did not pay for that half an hour, but I think they still do that, but when, when we started working, ah, the payment was like a hundred and fifty dollars a week, of course because this was cheaper and when you're young you don't need as much but for some it was a lot of money.
[6:03]	
SK:	In comparison with Colombia I imagine. And then, did you socialize a bit during your breaks?
EA:	Yes, we sat in the cafeteria and shared the food we had brought, and some of them had rice, others had a meat, a salad and we all shared, it was very nice.
[6:33]	
SK:	But only among the Colombians?
EA:	Yes among the Colombians, the supervisors often came to see and say what is that? and what is that? Oh, what is this cow's tongue? Ew! Oh, what is that? Then, yes, they left, but we Colombians stuck together.
SK:	So, with the supervisors or with the Americans, was there not a close relationship?

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EA:	No, no, no.
SK:	Only work
EA:	Mhm, work
SK:	But, did you feel like they treated you more or less well or fairly, or was there any incident? Do you remember anything?
[7:03]	
EA:	No, no, not at that time. Everything was very, very normal, but they were demanding., well, not demanding but, since they were so short on staff, as it happened to my dad, they would come to the employees' houses, after working 80 hours, the supervisors would go
[7:33]	look for them because they needed them to work because, well, there wasn't anyone to work, but yes they behaved well.
SK:	Then, were there always opportunities to work overtime?
EA:	Many, many.
SK:	And how could your father work overtime after working eighty hours?
EA:	Many times, because he would come back so tired, he had to put cans of beer at the door, so the supervisors could see that they were drunk and this was the only way that they could rest.
[8:03]	
SK:	So basically they had almost no right to say no.
EA:	(pause) they worked a lot, a lot, a lot.
SK:	Yes, and your father, was he happy in these work conditions?
EA:	Well, ah, unfortunately when we came to this country it was by necessity, for a better living. He was making his money and, yes he was happy. (Inaudible), and my mom also, rest in peace, also worked, also worked in textiles. Her job was placing bobbins in the machines
[8:33]	

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	<p>of the looms. It was a job, for her yes it was very hard work, because she could not cope with so many machines. But yes, a person that comes to this country, we come to work and try to stand out and have a better future yes.</p>
[9:03]	
SK:	Then, basically all the family was here working in the same company.
EA:	In the same company.
SK:	Did you see each other during the day?
EA:	Oh no, no because, we, my sister and I worked third shift and my mom and dad worked the morning shift. Then, when they arrived we were sleeping so we could go to work later.
[9:33]	
SK:	And then, when did you meet as a family?
EA:	Oh, maybe a Sunday or a Saturday, a Saturday or a Sunday.
SK:	And, what did you do to socialize?
EA:	Ah, lots of parties (laughter). The few of us here we would meet in one of our houses. I remember a lot Mrs. Matilde Rojas' family, may she rest in peace. She now has two daughters. One of them is Amparo, Amparo Muñoz. She has been a great friend. She drove us everywhere, she was our right hand because, she... served as an interpreter for us. She taught us how to spin, how... um, very hardworking. Eh,... and we would go out to have fun, to the nearby lakes, oh, we made food, roasts and danced, ah, but always among the few of us who were very familiar with each other.
[10:03]	
[10:33]	
SK:	And, did you work together with one another and help each other?
EA:	A lot, yes very much.
SK:	Very nice! What other people do you remember were there?

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EA:	Um. Ah. Although, to me I remember many that have already left us, may they rest in peace, Don Alfonso Posada, Gildardo Bolívar and Mr. Elkin Berrío. Ah, a Sr. Fidel Díaz I believe that he still lives but is in Florida. Ah, Sr. Aristizába.
[11:03]	
SK:	And your sister then also worked?
EA:	My sister was also a textile worker, she was also spinner with me yes.
SK:	Looking back at that experience in textiles, was it good for you in general? Did it, help you to enter this culture into this... this country? How do you see it now?
[11:33]	
EA:	Well yes, because um, it was something new that I learned and [pause] I see, I saw how, in reality, textiles, textile factories are much needed here [pause] in this country ah um... it was a very nice experience.
SK:	And the ties with Colombia, do you have them, or have they been lost already?
[12:03]	
EA:	Mmm. A little. Unfortunately, well I already have uncles, cousins, there and all that, but I already have my roots here.
SK:	And your father, while he was alive, did he maintain family relations with Colombia? Did he return to Colombia?
EA:	Ah yes, hmm he went so far as to go several times, he spent his Christmas's with us, and, yes, yes but, after that, he brought us here.
[12:33]	It is my, it is my country I love my Colombia and all that, however I don't fit well there. Two weeks is enough for me.
SK:	And at, what company did he work at in Medellín, do you remember?
EA:	He worked, the last company that he worked at was Pantex.

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SK:	Pantex?
EA:	At Pantex, he worked.
[13:03]	
SK:	This was in Medellin?
EA:	Yes, in Medellin, in Bello. He worked in Gaseosas Lux. Ah, he worked in Tejicondor, worked in another company called Jacar, Jacar Limitada.
SK:	And this was also in textiles?
EA:	Yes, ma'am.
SK:	Then he worked in several textiles in Medellín.
EA:	Textiles there in Medellin, yes.
[13:33]	
SK:	And why did he change so much from one to the other?
EA:	Because of the money I imagine. I suppose Jacar was, if I remember correctly, Jacar was the first that he worked at but it was a small factory and there, what they did was designs. He designed, like these flowers and the fabric came out, all that. After that he went and got into other larger companies like Tejicondor and Pantex.
[14:03]	
SK:	And, was his work spinning?
EA:	Eh, Weaver.
SK:	Weaver. What was his name?
EA:	Mario de Jesús Álvarez. Here he worked at Woodside and then he quit, when he left for Colombia, quit with um (pause) Ah, what is this other company called?
SK:	He returned to Colombia?

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[14:33]	He returned, yes, after they closed it, he had to go because mom was very sick, and then, ah, he left around nineteen eighty three and...
EA:	what is that other company called?
SK:	In Coltejer, Fabricato?
EA:	No, in here.
SK:	Ah, in here sorry.
[15:03]	
EA:	When he went there he started his own business, had an ice cream parlor, had a marquetry and things like that.
SK:	So, he didn't stay here?
EA:	No, he returned to Colombia and after that mom died, ah, he remarried, his new wife died and I brought him to live me because he was already by himself and it was better for him to stay with me.
[15:33]	
SK:	That's interesting, because other stories we have heard, well no, they didn't return, they stayed here.
EA:	Mmm yes, my dad returned because mom was very sick. The cold weather did a lot of damage to her.
SK:	Mmm, and for you his daughters it must have been hard to see them go, right?
EA:	Very. But we were already settled, married and [pause] I first came in seventy-five, and I began to go back to Colombia again thirteen years later. Yes, and ah, we missed them terribly.
SK:	Listening to your father's story, how do you compare experiences in the textile industry in Medellin and here? If, if he ever shared this with you, if he compared.
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EA:	No.
SK:	No?
EA:	No, ah maybe one about the, the cleanliness, tidiness and the organization of all that. Yes, it's different.
SK:	Why was it different?
EA:	Because ah, I was able to go to one of the factories where he worked, he would take us when we had to work on Saturdays and the...
SK:	In Medellin?
[16:33]	
EA:	In Medellin. Disorganized. They allowed workers to take the children.
[17:03]	Yes, and very dirty, very dirty. On the other hand here there is a lot of cleanliness.
SK:	Better organized.
EA:	Yes.
SK:	Something we heard in other interviews was that they were surprised that when they arrived in here the looms were not as modern as those in Medellin.
EA:	Well, not me, I came to see the machines where my dad made the designs, very different from here. It was here where I come to know those machines. Ah, now I imagine that there must be more modern ones, other kinds because first the coils had to be placed and installed somewhere by hand, and I think now it is something different, I think now they put them in a drawer and it will automatically fill up. Same as the spinners: first we had to stop the coil with our finger, now they push a button, and separate the coil and then you can thread, everything is changing.
[17:33]	
SK:	Yes, (laugh) more modern.

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EA:	More modern yes.
SK:	Yes.
EA:	The doffer, first had to remove the coils like this, now no, now they stop the machine, push a button and the coils lie down and automatically go.
SK:	More automated.
EA:	Mhm.
SK:	Yes.
EA:	Then our jobs are going to disappear. (they laugh).
SK:	Yes, more mechanized.
[18:03]	
EA:	Yes. Yes, mhm.
SK:	And in general, what you remember about your dad, was he in, in better working condition here than in Colombia?
EA:	Yes. Here there are more sources of work, there more opportunities for, for everyone.
SK:	Well, thank you very much.
EA:	Thanks to you all.