

TITLE OF VIDEO: Mercedes Gómez
 DATE OF VIDEO: August 8, 2018.
 TRANSLATED BY: Sofía Kearns
 DATE OF TRANSLATION: July 14, 2019

<p>[00:07] Mercedes Gómez:</p>	<p>Good afternoon. My name is María Mercedes Gómez. I came to this country in 1969, July 29 and we ... we emigrated to this town in 1974, and I started working in Woodside, the textile factory that was called Woodside, I worked on "Spinning." I did not like that job a lot because it is strenuous</p>
<p>[00:37]</p>	<p>and as a result of a supervisor who arrived there, who didn't like me, I spoke with a Soto guy who worked there and was the interpreter. I talked to him and he helped me. We went to the office. He told me ... then they changed my position because the new supervisor did not like me and changed my hours. For example, he told me "Lady, what time do you come to work?" I said: "at 4 o'clock in the afternoon."</p>
<p>[1:07]</p>	<p>And he says: "Starting on Monday, you are going to enter at 8:00." And I said "at 8 o'clock? I can not come at 8:00, I do not have transportation. " I did have it but I told him I could not and I said "That shift does not exist here." And he said" Well, you must come here at 8:00" Then I went to talk to Soto. Soto told me "Let's go to the office." I went to the office with him and there in the office they asked me if I spoke English and I said no.</p>
<p>[1:37]</p>	<p>Then the supervisor or the boss, I do not know, the one who was in charge, he told me ... he says to Miguel Soto: "And what job can we put her in?" And then he said: "Well, if you want have her working with me, I will teach her." And that was a relief for me because I was going to work in a much cleaner, smoother place and with air conditioning. Lucky me.</p>
<p>[2:00] Sofía Kearns:</p>	<p>And what job was this?</p>
<p>[2:07] MG:</p>	<p>I had to check the fabric. In the room where the fabrics are checked. The fabric rolls and one had to spot any defects. So, I stated working there very happy and glad.</p>
<p>[2:21] SK:</p>	<p>An this job was at the Woodside mill?</p>
<p>MG:</p>	<p>This was the Woodside, which was on Woodside Avenue. And I kept working there until I got married. And when I got married my</p>

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	husband told me that ... I was going to have my first baby and he told me to leave. And I left.
[2:37] SK	So, how many years did you, Doña Mercedes, work at the Woodside?
MG	Oh I think I worked like ... I worked from 74 to 82
SK:	Oh, okay. And what things did you like most about your work? And what things did you like least?
MG: [3:07]	Well, the spinning work I never liked because my machines were always down. That was very difficult for me. And the heat. And when that supervisor arrived who put a lot of demands on me, that ruined everything there for me, he sent me to clean coils, he made my life impossible, in other words. Since he saw me. Since I never paid him any attention, it might be, that since I did not allow him to bother me, so he changed my schedule, he wanted to fire me. But I was ahead of him.
[3:37]	And I did not have papers when that happened, which was very risky for me.
Sofía Kearns:	And that incident with that supervisor was something you observed frequently or ...?
MG:	No, it's just that that supervisor came in, say Monday. And by Saturday he already wanted to change my job. He wanted this, as I said, to change my schedule so that I would enter at 8 and from 8 pm to 4 in the morning.
[4:07]	And I said, "But, that schedule does not exist here." One would stay until 4:00 in the morning, but working overtime. But not because that was one's schedule. And I said no. And I did have a car, but I told him I had no transport and who was going to take me home at 4 in the morning. And that supervisor did not last long there either. They moved me to the first floor on Monday. Oh, because they told me in the office, "You see, you are going to work at the same time on Monday. You get to your job like you did not hear anything said to you." When I arrived the supervisor already had someone doing my job. Do you know that one arrives and at four and they stop and
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5:07]	<p>finish that shift and start another. And he said: "Didn't you hear what I said?" I replied: yes I heard, but I went to the office and the man from the office told me to come here to work at 4:00. He did not like it. But he had to put up with it. Because I worked there only two more days or three. And when I went down and they taught me to check the fabric and everything ... Better for me. That was a very good change for me. More money, cooler, and better.</p>
SK:	<p>And you told me that before coming to Greenville you worked in sewing</p>
MG: [5:37]	<p>Yes, when I came to this country, my brother did not want me to work. My brother wanted me to study. But I wanted to work. I worked in Colombia about 6 months as a judge's secretary. And my brother told me "that old man is stealing from you." True. He was stealing from me. He was paying me a pittance and giving me a personal check. And one day I told the secretary, I said: "Oh, my salary here doesn't even cover my socks." Fortunately, I was a girl who did not need much. Then my mother told me: "No way, that job is so bad I'll have to give you money for clothes because it demands you to be well dressed." Then I realized that the man was stealing from me and I left. That's when I wanted to come here [to the US]. And then I came, and ... then, well, I wanted to work. I was young and I wanted to ... My brother did not want me to. My brother used to tell me:</p>
[6:07]	<p>"Study, I'll help you, you do not have to work, I'll pay for your studies, I'll pay for the house and I'll pay for ... You do not have to work, go study." But I did not want to, I started working and then I worked. A man, Oscar Marín, who was a mechanic from that (Streshini?)</p>
[6:37]	<p>factory, I asked him to please get me an application. He got it for me and he practically helped me. And I started working and there they asked me: "do you know these machines?" and Oh, and "Do you know how to sew?" and I said "ah, yes." I did not know how to sew. In other words, I knew how to sew but in my sewing machine at home, but these other machines were a very abrupt change for me.</p>
[7:07]	<p>Then when I got there those machines scared me. Never in my life had I worked with one of those machines. And then the supervisor tells me: "Are you sure you have sewn before?" I tell him "I have sewn, in my machine, in my house." Then they gave me an opportunity and taught me.</p>

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[7:37]	<p>They hired me, and trained me for a week. Mostly to train me for speed. And now, I stayed there working there, they put me in production. At first I worked in quality. And then they put me in production and since I did not do very well in production, they put me in quality.</p>
[8:07]	<p>Looking at it, it is better to be working in quality control because it is not as fast but you have to do things well, so as not to have to send items to be fixed. And I was one of the employees who never had a pair of pants returned. Anyway I made production. Then I got out of production and I started working on quality. While being in that job Amparo Muñoz or Rojas, she brought some friends here. And Jairo, whom at that time I knew but we were not in a relationship, he came here. And he came for a break [from New York to Greenville] and when he went back he said "no way, that little town [Greenville] was very sad and too quiet, one of those that does not, that you won't get used to easily" he told us. Then I said "Ah well then I'm going to request a job for only a month." And my brother said to me: "Well, if you go for a month, I'm not going to go. I'm going there [Greenville] and I'm staying. "That's what he told me and since I depended on my brother...</p>
[8:37]	
[9:07]	<p>However, to me when I saw this, I got off the plane and I saw this place so nice, so green, I loved it and also another thing: when we arrived we got an apartment there in Bromoor? [inaudible] They were luxury apartments. And it was not the roach infested place we had there in New York, where we all lived tight and could not live anywhere else because there you have to live four or five in an apartment to be able to pay for it. So here we came to live in a nice apartment all new, clean. I fell in love with that. When I started working I started to work the first days, "Okay, they are giving us training." One does not earn that much money, but afterwards, when I finished the training and all that, what I got was 87 pesos . But hey, it was more, it was easier to live here than there [in NY] with that money. And besides, I lived with my brother, it was not because he had given me ... And later here I married my husband Jairo Gómez.</p>
[9:37]	
[10:07]	<p>And when I got pregnant with my first girl, he told me to quit the job. And so I did, I left. I did not return. Because I came to work after about 14 years, when my daughters were 14 years old is when I started working again.</p>

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SK	And what was social life like in those early years in Greenville?
MG: [10:37]	Well, really we were so many Colombians that at parties, for example, you had a party and all Colombians gathered there. That was because all the Colombians were at that party, because they invited each other and that's the way it was and also when Mass was over in the Santa María cafeteria. There they offered us coffee with donuts. Sometimes some people brought the donuts, others brought the coffee, well, that's how we stayed for a while there socializing.
SK	Can you give me details on what specifically you had to do in the machine?
MG: [11:07] [11:37]	Well, the machine has some, it's a long, long machine. It's longer than this house, maybe, and that machine has a lot of threads, a lot of rolls, of cones. Those come from above. They put a cone and then that thread comes down and you have to tie it with the bottom one, then one comes and pst! Take the thread and pan! You tie them together. You can tie it and right there it bursts, so then you have to have them really aligned. It is very difficult, for me it was super difficult. There are people who do not find it difficult, but for me, for me it was very difficult, I lasted very little there. As I say, that supervisor wanted to hurt me and I ... He told me to clean coils. I did not like that job because one day that machine almost ripped my ponytail off. I had long hair. And that machine, because a friend saw me, and stopped the machine and if not, that machine would have pulled my hair out.
SK:	And, did workers have any protection?
MG: [12:07]	Well on that machine, of, well, I do not know, I think not. I do not remember, truly.
SK:	Because they say the machines were very noisy, right?
MG:	Oh, yes, but you were given a few things to put in your ear, but it was more horrible there in the textile factory below, in, what is it

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SK:	called? in the weaving machines the noise was more horrible than in ours. Upstairs it was not so much but downstairs yes.
MG: [12:37]	Spinning?
[13:07]	We were in spinning because there are some that are in spinning, Doña Gloria worked in one machine that looks like a harp, which is the one that makes the rolls of thread, it does some things, they are like coils. [inaudible]. They were many coils. I really did not like that job because one came to the house all sweaty, perspiring, then, that the heat of those machines, and the heat of one's body, and the hot temperature outside, that was horrible.
SK:	There was no air conditioning?
MG:	Possibly yes but since those machines are hot you would not feel any AC. I do not really know. To tell the truth I do not know if there was air conditioning, and with all the steam that those machines produced, and all those threads, I imagine that there is no air conditioning to quench it.
SK:	Yes, and the second job you had that you liked the most, was it a very different machine?
MG: [13:37]	It is a machine that seems as if one were in a what, as in a large television. It was like a canvas and then they put the roll in the back and one made the cloth run with the foot. One put the cloth here and then you would make the fabric run with your foot and one would run the cloth and one would look at it and write down the defects on a piece of paper. One would register all the defects, I was taught how to recognize defects. That guy Miguel Soto taught me how to best recognize the defects, that is, there was a lot of fabric downgraded to second category. But some fabric was not, depending on the defect. Then one marked the defects, I do not even remember the defects. Then one marked the defects. When the coil was done one would write down all the defects that one saw. I had to have very good sight because it is a lot of fabric. Very fast. But I liked it
[14:07]	because on the one hand I was young. I had good eyesight and it was cooler there. It was not hot. Everything was cool there, I liked the work.
[14:37]	

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SK:	And what did you guys do when you found flaws in the fabric?
MG:	They pass it, ... when the fabric is very defective they put it in second-hand category.
SK:	Is there no way to fix it?
MG:	Oh, yes, they fixed them. For example, if a cloth had a large defect, it was sent to second-hand; but if there was a fabric that had defects but they were easy to fix, they would come back and give it the ok and fix it.
[15:07]	
SK:	Did you do overtime too?
MG:	I did, but not very often.
SK:	On average, remember how many hours a week?
MG:	Well I could do around 45 or 60 hours sometimes, but not always. Because sometimes my husband for example doubled his hours. He worked up to 16 hours per day or worked from 4 to 4 almost daily.
[15:37]	
SK:	Greenville has changed a lot, right? When you arrived here, how was it?
MG:	Oh, a lot and a lot and a lot. Because when we came here, there were very few houses. There were no malls, the only mall that I know is the what's it called? Mcallister Square. When I came in, when I got off the plane and saw everything so beautiful, it was so green and so clean, and we were used to seeing all that filth in New York. I don't like New York. I like to visit because I have family there, but I'm not going to say that I'm going back to New York to live there, never. No chance.
[16:07]	
SK:	So it was a good thing to have moved here?
MG:	Yes, for me yes. Because I had, we lived with a lot of fear there. We were even afraid to go outside. Do you understand? Because
[16:37]	

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	<p>migration was very horrible back then. We had to see a boy die who threw himself from an apartment because he saw that he was being chased by immigration and killed himself. Easier dead than to give in. That's hard. I suffered a lot of things. It seems to me that immigration at that time, for me, was more difficult than now. Or it might be because I don't have that concern anymore. It may be, but I lived in a state of terror those years.</p>
[17:07] SK	<p>When you got here, did you notice any of that? Of immigration?</p>
MG:	<p>Here we came, as I said, for a training. I never saw anything, although my brother was caught. Twice: once at the Beatty Plant and once at the Woodside. First in the Woodside they found him but they did not take him away. That is, he escaped from the</p>
[17:37]	<p>immigration people. But when they caught him in the Beatty, he got into the car and we almost did not even notice. And a boy tells me "go go to that car" and I "no no I won't go to that car." And what if I had. An he said "Lend me the keys" and I said no, I do not have a key. "Your brother has a key, look for a key" then we went And my brother was locked in that car and had we not checked he would</p>
[18:07]	<p>have died there. I did not want to go because I was illegal and [inaudible]</p>
SK:	<p>A very hard life, right?</p>
MG:	<p>Of course, but as I say, we were lucky. The lawyer said to my brother, "Look, don't you, by any chance have a relative who [has a green card]?" And my brother says: "Of course, I have my mother and my brother." He said "your mother?" Yes. And he said: With</p>
[18:37]	<p>them, what are you doing here? You don't need to worry about anything, this means you already have a visa. "And he prepared the papers for us. They cost 250 dollars. Because of the intervention of the lawyer. He was the one who prepared us the papers and everything. I had to go to Toronto for the visa.</p>
SK:	<p>And was it fast?</p>
MG:	<p>Yes, that did not take long. And since my mom was legal and she was here, that was easy, she... This is the way it was. I believe that</p>

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[19:07]	we got the visas in two or three months. They sent us to Canada and they gave us the visa.
SK:	Very different from today
MG:	Yes, yes. And we lived very sad those years that we did not have papers, we lived very poorly because we could not even get out of the apartment. It seemed that they were going to catch you in the street. There on this[porch?] where we lived, there was a Cuban restaurant. Many people went there, that restaurant went down
[19:37]	because people stopped going because there had been several raids against undocumented people at it. The restaurant was good, one wanted to go there but could not. Nobody could get in there.
SK:	Well, something else? Any memories of work in textiles?
[19:53]. SK:	
MG:	No, I worked quietly, but no, I do not really have many anecdotes
SK:	Well, thank you very much
[20:03]	
MG:	You are welcome.