TITLE OF VIDEO: Nemesio Loaiza
DATE OF VIDEO: Summer 2018
TRANSLATED BY: Claire Griffith, Sam Johnson, Jordan Ingram, Marina Cox, Sofía Kearns
DATE OF TRANSLATION: November 2018, Summer 2019

[00:03] Nemesio Loaiza	My name is Nemesio Loaiza. I was born in a town called Salónica, Río Frío Valle. I was born on October 5, 1934.
[00:20] Sofía Kearns	How and when did you start working in the textile industry in Colombia?
[00:26] NL:	No, I was not a textile worker in Colombia. I was a shoemaker. Eh [pause] I came to learn and work in
[00:34]	the textiles here occasionally because I came, well we all came to look for a job, look for a new life. And I managed to [pause] work at the White Horse Mill plant and at the beginning, I did not know anything [pause] about textiles. I started sweeping, stringing thread on the
[01:01]	machines, which were the easiest thing I had, the most minimal jobs, and there I paid attention to certain people, I learned to weave the way they would do, and there I learned, in my about two years of my time there, how to work the loom.
[01:33]	And I worked the loom for twenty-three years [pause] there. I had to retire from the knitting because I started to get sick from my feet. My feet were swollen because [inaudible] we worked many hours.
[01:50] SK:	Standing?
[01:51] NL:	Yes, because that's how it was… walking...walking around the machines... operating twenty, twenty-two, twenty-five machines, twenty-eight machines, of which we worked on there.
[02:03]	Yes, my feet began to swell, so one day my boss said to me, "Nemesio, there is a better position. They pay less, but you are sick and it may be better for you." Then I moved, I worked on the second floor and then moved to the first floor, a room called the drawing room.
[02:33] NL:	I did not know anything about what I was going to do there either, but they explained it to me [pause] eh [pause] the biggest advantage there was that I knew how to weave. And there in that room you have to know all the steps that are made on the weaving machines. The Drawing Room is where the cylinders for the weaving machines are mounted.
[02:59] SK:	The cylinders of threads?

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[03:01] NL:	The cylinders of threads, yes. The assembly of the machinery to be able to start knitting, that is a lot of work, a lot of work and [pause] that's where they are planned, the fabric styles are planned, the sizes, the type of fabric because each fabric, each thread, depending on the caliber of the thread
[03:29]	needs planning and [pause] and that's what we did there. I did not work there by myself because the others were Americans. And there I was already in the last three, six, the last six years that I worked in that plant, because I left when they closed it.
[03:51] SK:	And what year was that, that they closed it, do you remember?
[03:54] NL:	It ... they closed it in 2001. There they closed the plant on White Horse Mill, it is the one that is there in front of the flea market. And there they knocked it down, they knocked it down, yes. I worked there for twenty-nine years, since I came from Colombia, I ... I came here on April 13, 1972 and I settled in on May 3, 1972, like twenty days later I started working there. I left in March of 2001, which was when they closed the factory.
	And how did you move to the United States?
[04:31] SK:	Well, I was a shoemaker in Colombia. I had my little shoe shop and I made shoes for short women or what we call sandals or
[04:36] NL:	“baletas”, which are flats. “Baletas” was the way we called them.
[04:53]	I worked as the owner of my workshop for many years because I came here at the age of thirty-seven or thirty-eight years old. I came because I got lucky. A friend of mine who was a dentist, or is a dentist. Well [pause] we were very good friends, and he was coming here. Because there was a time when they started bringing people who were professionals. And he was a dental hygienist.
[05:32]	He was a dental hygienist and a dentist, which were two different things but both worked to his advantage. He was an expert – his specialty was dental hygienist and he was wanted for his qualifications. So, he got the visa very easily... very easily and he came, and we continued to communicate. I was the one who facilitated communications from Colombia with his family. And he returned about a year and a half to Colombia and we talked and he asked me if I wanted to come.

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[06:10]	I told him that I did want to, but that I did not have any economic means to afford it. Then he said "well ... I'm going to see what I can do to help." And one of the times we talked he said "I can help you; I'm going to make a loan to the bank. And I'll lend you the money you need. You figure out how to get your visa, how much everything costs ... well, everything, he said he would figure out everything.
[06:35]	I did all that. And I got the visa before I came. I arrived directly to Greenville from Colombia. And here I was, I arrived and in twenty days I settled in the White Horse area. And for twenty-nine years I worked in the White Horse plant until they closed. And when I left there, I retired.
[06:56] SK:	What was the most difficult thing when you started, what was the most difficult and what was the best?
[07:06] NL:	The most difficult thing to learn was how to weave. Because what I did in the beginning, is what anyone can learn to do: to sweep. You have to keep sweeping because those machines throw out a lot of cotton. And the cotton must not accumulate, because it can harm the other machines.
[07:25]	And putting the thread to the machines is a thing that is also very easy. By watching someone ... you learn to [inaudible] do it too. So those were the easy things. On the other hand, to weave you had to be more careful and learn each step, make each knot, and those must be done quickly and know that when the machine stops you have to ask yourself, why did it stop? How do I turn it back on? Well...
[07:55] SK:	And who taught you all of that?
[07:57] NL:	Well, I started to learn there with the weavers themselves.
[08:03] SK:	Colombians?
[08:04] NL:	Yes, Colombians, more so at the beginning. There were a few Colombians there [pause]. During that time here [pause] I met a Colombian gentleman who worked there in that company. He was an old textile worker from Colombia.
[08:24] SK:	Do you remember his name?

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[08:27] NL:	That man's name was Saul Rivera and he was the first guy that I
[08:33]	talked to because I didn't know any English and he didn't speak English either. So [inaudible] we would talk in Spanish, I would ask him how to do this and that, and he would show me how to tie the knot and how to tie the threads [pause]. When the machine would stop, you would realize right away
[09:02]	If it stopped because of the weaving, the thread would stay inside, or if it stopped it was because the thread would get caught.
[09:11] SK:	And how did you make the knot? Can you explain it a little? What knot did you have to do? Where?
[09:18] NL:	You would tie the tips of the yarn. One would pick up the coil of yarn when it entered and add it in. Then you would pick up a strand of yarn, we call it "hebra", and with that strand you would tie it and
[09:34]	it would come back and you would pass it through with the needles. You have to stop to re thread the needle, it is a special needle, so you have to learn to how to thread it through. You have to learn to pass that thread at the same ... side where it breaks, because you can't thread it through another side because it causes the fabric to be damaged. It's useless. You have to do everything perfect.
[10:03] SK:	And is it something that has to be done fast too?
[10:06] NL:	Yes. You have to be...fast. You have to put the machine to work quickly, quickly, quickly. That's why you have to walk so much, and that was why my feet hurt. The doctor who I went to visit because of this problem told me, "this comes from the type of work you were doing at the factory." Because us Columbians, who worked there, worked fifteen hours daily.
[10:35]	Because our goal was to earn more... because you didn't make a lot if you worked 8 hours. On the other hand, they offered us a lot of over-time in all the textile factories, they needed people to work, and since they were short on staff, they would offer work to whoever was leaving. "Look, you want more hours? You want to work four hours, eight hours, you want to...

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[11:05]	What do you want to work?" They would offer extra work. And we wanted to earn more than that...and more than what the overtime was paid, then another goal was to work more, and we would work 15 hours a day
[11:26] SK:	And for how many years did you work like that? Working fifteen hours a day like that?
[11:30] NL:	Well, I will tell you, that was....that is a good question. I think we worked 15 hours a day, for about fifteen years. After that, I already started reducing my work, I no longer worked one or two days overtime....I was tired.
[11:55] SK:	And those early years. What did you do for fun? When did you rest?
[12:00] NL:	There....that's a good question. We, us Colombians, at that time... few of us were here, very few Colombians. Because when I came, I only knew one there...Mr. Saul Rivera. By the end of '72, some people came, some guys, no it was 1973 was the year. Some weavers came who were from the north, in Massachusetts, in Rhode Island, over there. And they realized when...
[12:36]	they got here, there were textiles here because these people had arrived from Colombia to other parts of the country, nobody knew this here. They didn't know that here there were textile factories, and that this was the textile center of the world. ..... they started the annual textile fair, and people would come from every part of the world. People would come from South America. From Fabricato in Colombia and Tedesco, all those factories from Colombia, people would come here. I had to deal a lot with the people.
[13:10] SK:	And you would go to these fairs?
[13:12] NL:	No, we.....I went to one. I remember I went to one, but us factory workers weren't given passes to go to those...those fairs. I went to one because.....
[13:33]	uh....[pause] a brother of my second wife, worked in translating textile advertising. He was the one who translated for so many people that came from Colombia, from the textile companies, to see machinery here. Already in '73, there was....no lack of

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	Colombians, he would tell others over there and here and he started to spread the word
[14:04]	and then they all started to come work here. In '73 was when the factory brought the first ten Colombians directly from Colombia here to work in the factory. The factories needed staff and after the first two or three started working, they realized that us Colombians were very good workers, and
[14:37]	that we liked to work a lot. Then, the boss of that company searched for someone who was Colombian, who would speak English well enough to interview the workers and tell them about what they were thinking, in order to bring people from Colombia here. And here there was a guy who happened to be the boss of my...of my friend, the one who helped me come. That guy was very businesslike, very lively, very....he would speak a lot of English, very good English, and all that.
	Do you remember his name?
[15:14] SK:	His name was Edgar Chávez.
[15:16] NL:	He would bring Colombians here?
[15:18] SK:	He didn't bring anybody to the factory. He would just communicate with the boss of the factory and exchange the information to the two or three Colombians who had come from there.
[15:20] NL:	Then they would talk to the staff, the people that were in Colombia, good workers [pause] specialists in various things, in the yarns, in weaving. And so, the boss from the company told him to see how many people he could bring from there.
[15:34]	Then, he was almost like an intermediary?
[15:56] SK:	At that time, there was a man that I don't remember the name of. That guy was the son of a textile company owner, in the Valle department, in Cali. And he was studying law here. But when he graduated, he wanted to stay here more, to experience and learn things, and he connected with the Columbian textile workers
[15:59] NL:	

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[16:37]	and he would be around them quite often, but he didn't work in textiles...and this man, Mr. Eddie Chávez, Edgar Chávez, he talked to him, and he helped him in Colombia with how to ask people and communicating with the consulate so they could give these people a visa to come and work here
[17:04]	because at first, they would not give them out. So then, they figured out the visa procedure, and they brought ten specialized people in textiles, and they arrived in '73, and they tried to bring more, and there was a group of 25, but when they asked for those 25, the consulate stopped them. The consulate e began to question
[17:34]	Why were they bringing 25 more in if they had just brought other 10? And the consulate didn't want to give them visas, so they couldn't work at the factory, but the ten that had been given a visa could remain here for a year. A year later, they were given a permit to be here another year, but after two years they weren't given another visa.
[18:00] SK:	And then, what did those do with the visa?
[18:03] NL	Eh... some returned back to Colombia, and some remained here undocumented, but they left for other factories.
[18:09] SK:	But the factories didn't help them (with their papers)?
[18:11] NL:	No, they couldn't work here .
[18:13] SK	They needed them but..
[18:15] NL	They needed them but immigration services did not give them the visa.
[18:18] SK:	Why were there so many positions available here? Why wasn't there enough American staff? Do you know the reason?
[18:29] NL:	Well...the thing is we didn't know much about that because there was...too much work....and....and people did not like to work that much. I imagine then that....that a lot of Americans....did not like that job because it seemed very hard and you had to walk a lot, you got tired a lot.....or...or because of the dust that accumulates everywhere, that cotton,

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[19:04]	The noise the machines made had..... I'm a person that's been somewhat deaf. I'm somewhat deaf.
[19:10] SK:	Why? The machines were very noisy?
[19:12] NL:	Yes, the noise of the machine, and at that time... they didn't force anyone to put in earplugs, nor did they have any, and nobody knew anything here. Over the years, the factories began saying "you have to use these earplugs" because the noise of the machine was detrimental.
[19:30] SK:	So, at the beginning there weren't any regulations?
[19:32] NL:	No, there were no regulations for any of those things.
[19:36] SK:	And afterwards, did this change? Did they give you all ear plugs? What else did they give you all? What other changes did you see?
[19:43] NL:	They forced everyone to have ear plugs, the factory started making everyone wear masks, cover their noses because of all the dust from the machines. This was mandatory for everyone. The weaver had to clean the machine and the mechanic had to clean the machine. When the mechanic changed the parts, he had to blow on the machinery.
[20.08] SK:	So, you breathed in a lot of dust for years?
[20:10] NL:	Oh, a lot, a lot, a lot.
[20:12] SK:	How many years until you all were given masks, the um ... earplugs?
[20:20] NL:	Well. Not many years, but yes there were years we worked without them. Sometimes, sometimes people, um, who were already used to not wearing them, did not want to put on these [pause] but if the boss saw someone without them, he would make him put them on.

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[20:34]	Maybe, these were the things that a lot of Americans did not like [pause] because I do [pause] I sometimes wonder about this: why is it, that there are many job openings in textile factories, why do Americans do not work? Why? Someone said that they did not like it.
[20:59] SK:	And tell me, who was the boss and how did you get along with him and how did he communicate with you? Was he American?
[21:06] NL:	Yes, he was American.
[21:07] SK:	Or was he someone that spoke Spanish?
[21:08] NL:	He was American and no. There was no one there who spoke Spanish. [pause] It was hard for us because [pause] we did not understand anything. There were people who came from the north who spoke some English already, but none of us who came from Colombia knew how to speak any English. [pause] No one.
[21:31] SK:	So how did the people communicate with each other?
[21:34] NL:	So ... Here's the thing [pause] that in the, in the trade of the weavers. I'm specifically talking to you about the weavers, because the other rooms where the yarn was spun and other jobs, there was not as much noise in that area. It was hard for us in the sense that we did not [pause] we did not know English [pause] and nobody spoke there because sometimes there was someone that
[22:08]	wanted to tell you something or warn you and so they had to yell because the noise of the machines was so loud that you could not hear. When the boss needed to tell you something, he called you to the office, but if [inaudible] I was called to the office, there needed to be someone who spoke English because if I was called up there, I did not understand anything, I did not understand that I was needed up there. That's why there were certain [pauses]
[22:37]	certain things that one had to go to like a meeting, for example there were meetings. I had to go to them, but I did not understand anything they were talking about. At that time when we did not speak English, we worked fifteen hours a day [pause] and we did not have time to go to school ... that was the problem. In the Sullivan, they started offering courses

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[23:07]	for Hispanics who did not speak English. There were several, several of us who went to the Sullivan, to learn English. We went to the first classes but [pause] people did not, could not continue to go.
[23:24] SK:	Because they were really tired?
[23:25] NL:	At first, we were very excited because we were going to be learning the language, but no. People would go but, imagine these people who left work at eight in the morning, put on clothes, and went to school at ten.
[23:40]	But there was not time to sleep because you had to go back home to eat something and then go to school and then what happened? You would be at school nodding off to sleep. You would be sitting there and get sleepy and nod off to sleep and the teacher would be talking and everyone would be falling asleep. How were we going to learn? Because of this, many stop going to school. We would say, "No, no, we cannot do this. We need to work to earn money."
[24:07]	That was the reason why we did not learn much. I was one that [pause] that, because I did not study in my childhood, only to third grade. [Pause] I arrived here already somewhat old, I arrived at thirty-eight years old. Started to work at the factory, I couldn't even study, so all I did was work and become deaf.
[24:38]	The noise of the machinery was so loud. Something else that a person lost was their vision [pause]. The textile workers, but more than anyone was the weaver. The weaver lost his sight and hearing a lot.
[24:54] SK:	Why the sight?
[24:55] NL:	Because you strain your vision a lot to weave and to check the fabric so there are not any mistakes. You have to look at these all day. They have to do this because otherwise they are not doing their job as a weaver.
[25:08]	Passing the thread. These have to be very ... [Applause] very packed together like a book. The sheets... You have to pass each thread through piece by piece. That strains the eyes a lot.

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[25:23]	I [pause] I married an American lady [pause] who had been a textile worker when she was young and she told me [pause] about when she worked in textiles. The work that went on here for the workers to go to the factories was very inconvenient, it was very far away. That's why, she told me, the first textile factories would make houses. Maybe you've noticed where there were textile factories here. There were houses that all looked the same.
[26:10]	The [pause] the factories would make neighborhoods filled with houses for the workers, so they came to live there, near the factory. Why? Imagine a worker who lived in Marieta here. To walk from there to here. Who lives in Pickens? In ... in Travelers Rest? On foot it was very hard. And at that time, not everyone had cars like today.
[26:41] SK:	Did you live in one of these houses?
[26:43] NL:	Yes. I had to live in one of these houses, where I arrived, coincidentally, where my friend was living. It was a block from the factory, [pause] Mills Mill. That was the name of the factory.
[27:00] SK:	How did life change later? I see that the first years were a bit ... they were good, but a little difficult, but little by little ... you were adapting and life improved afterwards? Or…
[27:16] NL:	Yes obviously.
[27:17] SK:	Or did it get harder? How was it?
[27:18] NL:	Yes, life was improving because then, imagine, then, I'm going to tell you about me. In Colombia the only thing I had was a bicycle. I rode around on my bicycle. I never drove a car there. I had to learn to drive a car here. The first thing I got was a car [pause] I remember
[27:40]	so many friends of mine helped me to buy it for two hundred and thirty pesos ... dollars. Two hundred and thirty. And there I learned to drive and I got my license. And that was what I used as transportation to the factory.
[27:53] SK:	And you met with your friends often? Um...
[27:57]	

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NL:	Every week we saw each other, because during the week we could not because we were textile workers and we worked a lot.
[28:07]	We met on Sundays to play soccer [break] I remember the place where we were going to play football there in downtown. We formed what we used to say, a team of Colombians, and there were a few Greeks there too. There was also a lot of them, and they formed their team. [inaudible] and we played every week, Greeks against Colombians.
[28:33] SK:	And you, I imagine, you've seen some big changes here in Greenville, right? Since you arrived until now. Right? What was the city like then and how did you see those changes?
[28:47] NL:	There has been a lot of changes in Greenville. Well you can see how much cities have changed and grown. Every town has grown and Greenville was, had been one that ... when I came here this was a small town [pause] a very small one.