

TITLE OF VIDEO: Carlos y Gloria Mejía
DATE OF VIDEO: 7-24-2018
TRANSLATED BY: Sofia Kearns
DATE OF TRANSCRIPTION: August 18, 2019

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<p>[0:11] Carlos Mejía</p>	<p>Eh, my name is Carlos Mejía. I am from Colombia from Medellín. There I was born and raised there in Medellin.</p>
<p>[0:19] Sofía Kearns</p>	<p>In the city of Medellin?</p>
<p>[0:21] Carlos Mejía</p>	<p>In the city of Medellín, Antioquia , Colombia. In the Antioquia Department.</p>
<p>[0:26]</p>	<p>I studied until age 17. At 17, I didn't want to study anymore and I went to look for work. They put me in, I found a job at Leticia Weaves. I started. I started to work carrying, they put me to carry those wefts. Wefts is spools of thread. These came out of one machine and were taken to the looms.</p>
<p>[1:00]</p>	<p>and I stayed there for several days until they asked me if I wanted to learn how to knit. I said yes. They taught me to weave in a machine. Then over time they give you one more machine, but that was all I was doing. That is, in charge of looms all the time. It was like a contract. After that, I worked in that factory for four years. They eventually moved me to a room that no longer had anything to do with looms</p>
<p>[1:30]</p>	<p>but I had already learned to knit. The other room that was called "presto." It is where the fabric comes out, the fabric is dyed or stamped, and then one has to measure it and choose which one is good and which one is bad and so I worked for a long time.</p>
<p>[1:50] Gloria Mejía</p>	<p>That is what they call "cloth inspection."</p>
<p>Carlos Mejía</p>	<p>In any case, due to a problem with a supervisor I had to quit there and go to another factory.</p>
<p>[2:00]</p>	<p>Anyway, there I worked until</p>

[2.05] Sofía Kearns	And do you remember the name of other factories where you worked?
[2.07] Carlos Mejía	Yes ma'am, I remember, I worked in several factories. Leticia Weaves was where I learned. Then I went to
Gloria Mejía [2:18]	Vicuña
CM:	to Vicuña looms, then Vicuña and then Sedeco. Sedeco, which belongs to Coltejer. After that I went to Fabricato.
[2:30]	When I was at Fabricato, they called me here [to the US] and I got the papers to come here.
[2:36] GM:	He came here, tell them, he came to Pennsylvania, to New Jersey. He arrived at the New York airport and from there he was taken to New Jersey. And he worked in a company called Magill [?].
CM:	Magille[?] Mills
[2:50] Sofia Kearns	And how was it? Did anyone go to recruit you from Medellin? How was that?
[2:55] Carlos Mejía	No ma'am, what happened was this.
[2:59]GM:	The friends who went ahead got him the work contract
[3:03] CM:	A neighbor once showed me a payment receipt, I think it was the way they used to pay. But I didn't have time to analyze all that data.
[3:11] GM:	Oh yeah. A Mr. Aníbal Gómez, who has already passed away.
[3:15] CM:	Yes, Aníbal Gómez, he died too. He showed me that and asked me if wanted to come to the US, that he would help me, that they needed people here. I wasn't very interested, but
[3:30] CM:	I told him, perhaps in the future. Another time he came back for a vacation and I told him "if you talk to the boss, whose

	<p>name I can't remember, it was a long time ago, it's been 45 years since we moved here.</p> <p>And he said yes, that he would talk to him. And soon he sent me the papers. But some days he would tell me that there was no work, that "the job is not available yet, but I will tell you when it is." And there were times he told me, "I already secured a job for you, and I will notify you later ."And again he would say no job,</p>
[4:00] CM:	<p>But he also insisted: "If you want to come now, in Canada, there is plenty of work. Here [in the US] it is doubtful, but in Canada it sure is. But I don't like cold weather, because cold makes me sick, I don't like it [inaudible] I always told him no ... [inaudible]. Then I expected the one here, rather.</p>
[4:30]. CM:	<p>When I came here, outside of what I told you about the looms, the difference between Colombia and the US is big, the factory seems like a prison here, because when you look, you only see brick stuck with cement ... ugly, horrible, ugly. And I moved from one to the other both in Colombia and here too. I never found a factory that I liked.</p>
[4:58] Sofía Kearns:	<p>What year did you arrive in NY?</p>
[5:02] Carlos Mejía:	<p>I arrived in 1973, on February 4.</p>
[5:05] Sofía Kearns:	<p>And you said you arrived in New York.</p>
[5:12] GM: Mejía	<p>He landed in New York and was moved to New Jersey.</p>
[5:15] CM:	<p>I was taken to a mil in New Jersey</p>
[5:19]. SK:	<p>Sorry, what was the name of the mil?</p>
[5:21] CM:	<p>McGill Mills.</p>

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[5:22] GM:	There were severla Colombians there
[5:24] Carlos Mejía:	There were many, there were mechanics and
[5:28] GM:	weavers.
[8:30] CM	The mechanics here were very bad. The best were Colombians. All excellent. [inaudible]
[5:40] GM:	All the Hispanics were good.
[5:41] CM:	But I was so unlucky that I was not assigned to work with any of them when I just arrived. [inaudible]
[5:47] Sofía Kearns	And wahy were the Colombian mechanics better?
[5:53] Carlos Mejía	They knew their trade well. First they,
[6:00] CM:	In Colombia all mechanics learns to weave first. A mechanic that knows how to weave knows [inaudible] the loom's issues. In here in the US they used to assign anyone as mechanic. They would carry a set of tools everywhere to show off, but that is not sufficient to do a good job. They needed to work with their heads as well.
[6:30]	Really bad. Several people have asked me what time in my life I felt better: if when working or at school when I was Young. And I responded that the best life I have is now when retired. I dont earn a lot because the retiemnt funds are scarce. But as long as I don't have bad habits, I don't smoke, I don't drink alcohol, nor I gamble, I don't like any of those things. As long as one is able to manage the retirement money wisely
[7:00]	one can live comfortable with that. Knowing how to manage your funds. And now I don't have to punch cards, nor deal with difficult people. Because not everyone is fond of you.

<p>[7:27] SK:</p>	<p>There were some supervisors, bosses and owners who treated people badly, I would want to run away.</p>
<p>[7:30] CM:</p>	<p>Do you remember a particular incident?</p>
<p>[8:00] CM:</p>	<p>No, but the dirty looks and grumpy ways said it all. Another thing was that, for example, on a Monday I was ready to work 10 hours. "I'm going to produce as much as I can this week." This is what they liked, for us to produce a lot, and with good quality. I started working on Monday and did really well. My numbers were high.</p>
<p>[8:30] CM</p>	<p>And each fabric has a meter with small numbers that run and they write down these numbers. And it turns out that since I did very well on that Monday, the next day they handed me a paper at the entrance saying that they would give me more looms and reduce my units. A unit is the value that each loom has. If they reduce your number, you earn less money. I felt very bad because of this.</p>
<p>[9:00] CM:</p>	<p>I was demoralized. I had three school-age children. It was difficult to pay for all expenses. I always had to return money for taxation purposes. An I only worked 8 hours per day. Because I knew that If I worked 12 hours, since they were always asking me "do you want to work overtime?," but I got to think that the more overtime I did, the more money they would take for taxes. I don't like that system.</p>
<p>[9:30]</p>	<p>It was this way until a Hispanic person arrived and he helped prepare my taxes. He opened a tax firm. And I got my returns. But a long time had passed until I got them. So I realized that, he told me that what the companies were doing was wrong, that I was entitled to returns because I had three small children. So, if I were asked to work as a weaver again,</p> <p>I would not get the job because of my age, I am 86 now. But if I got the job, I would reject it immediately [laugh]. And</p>

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	<p>now this persecution against Hispanic people, not only Mexicans but everyone...</p>
[9:51] GM:	<p>My name os Gloria Mejía, I took his last name. I came to the US in June 1974. I arrived in [inaudible] Pennsylvania.</p>
[10:00] GM:	<p>Some friends brought us here, Mr. René Dupont, who has passed away, and Mr. Michael, who has passed away as well. They brought us here and we arrived in Pennsylvania, Easton, Pennsylvania, and there we had some issues with neighbors who did some things to us, well, things that we did not like, like throwing stones at us. One day they set fire to our apartment, we lost everything .</p>
[10:30] GM:	<p>We had [inaudible], only [inaudible] our clothes.</p>
[10:35] SK:	<p>And these incidents, do you think they were ...</p>
[10:41] CM:	<p>That was not against us. They knew we lived there but, on the one hand, we were Hispanic and they were American. But what happened with that man, as I was told later, is that he had problems with his wife. If he had problems with the wife, why did we the neighbors have to pay for his actiosn?</p>
[11:00] GM:	<p>Well that is [inaudible]. But well, then the apartment was already on fire, and some Cuban neighbors took us out in the middle of the night barefoot and put us in the car to warm us up. I had to take the small children out. At midnight. And the police arrived and a child told them that it was his father who had set the apartment on fire. The man was drunk.</p>
[11:30] GM:	<p>Then we stay like that. In one of these appeared these gentlemen friends who brought us here and we arrived here [Greenville] at night and I liked it because at night this place was quieter and then I started working at a company called Woodside Mills and I worked on one thing called "spooler" where are the cheeses that go to the looms, they are called cheeses, which are like cones that go to the looms.</p>
[12:00] GM:	<p>I worked for 4 years in this and from there I moved to another factory called Poinsett, which was close by but then it was also closed. Doing the same. I liked that company</p>

	because the thread was very good to work with. From there I went to work in sewing, and I worked in sewing all the rest of....
[12:25] SK:	And when you started working at Woodside, did you both work there?
[12:29] GM:	Yes, he worked the shift, the second shift and I worked the third. But well, we managed until I started working in sewing, which was better during the day shift. The kids were already at school and when I would arrive from work, they also arrived. And from that, from there, sewing, like ... Ah, I also worked on, in this [inaudible] where the rods were for golf players, but they moved it too, they took it [inaudible]. Then I went to work in a bedspread factory,
[13:00] GM:	They also moved it to Mexico, [laugh]. [inaudible] another company that was called [vinca thousand?] making seats for children, with foam, because we sewed the linings. And from there, ... they closed for fraud because they had taken the safety features of these chairs away. They could catch on fire even with a cigarette.
[13:30] GM:	Then this fraud was discovered in California and the government had the company closed. From there I returned to sewing. And after I left sewing, it was also over, because they moved it far away and I didn't want go over there, [inaudible] I went to work at Goodwill. Terrible to work at the Goodwill.
[13:53] Sofia Kearns	Why?
[13:55] GM:	Because in Goodwill they demand too much even though they sell things that are donated. They demand too much, they ask for a lot of production, and it is also a job that is very dirty. Very dirty, super dirty, that's work there. Well, there I worked for almost 13 years, I left because one, yes, an assistant manager, who caught my attention in front of customers, because supposedly I knew I could not buy anything at Goodwill, while being their employee, I could not buy. I had to buy at another store. Then she called me,

[14.30] GM:	There was a cashier and there were some ladies paying and then she called me, like I were a puppy. I went and then she said "You are not supposed to be here, inside the store "[inaudible] I was with my friend, I was not buying. She said: "You must stay outside." She already gave me, I already got angry with her, so I quit the job. I didn't want to work with her anymore, to see her face every day, I don't want to work there. When I went to the main office to see if they had paid me for my vacation, they told me no, that they had deducted 34 hours because I had not notified in advance.
[15:00] Gloria Mejía:	Then I explained to the lady there, what had happened to me. And then she tells me that was not supposed to happen, she was not supposed to treat me that way [inaudible] and to ask me to wait outside. This was my day off. And I was not buying. Well, however they didn't pay me. They exploit the workers. People hardly last there because they demand too much. Although they are donated things and they are not producing them, they exploit the worker a lot. When I had
[15:30] GM:	I had very good bosses, I had very good ones but I also had very bad ones, and now
[15:35] SK:	And in terms of exploitation, going back to the textile industry, then how do you feel about it both in Medellin and in the factories where you worked here [in Greenville]?
[15:50] GM:	Well, as for the, I did not work in textiles in Colombia, It was in the US where I worked in textiles. But it went well for me at Woodside, I didn't have problems like that. The technician was very good and had the machines always running well, and the thread
[16:08] CM:	The difference between there and here is that here you get paid in dollars. And the exchange rate is very favorable when taking dollars there [to Colombia]. Here prices go up and up and up and never down.
[16.00] GM:	Ah, that is, because in there, you are earning pesos and spending pesos. Here people earn in dollars and spend dollars.

[16:27].CM:	But that is what ... the god of the world is money and the dollar is king. Many people, as seen in movies and stories, all those people who come from other countries through a desert or a ship and
[16:48] GM:	They are in need, perhaps their need pushes them, one cannot criticize that because, truly, people are forced to make those decisions.
[16:54] CM:	And that persecution here, because here they say that foreigners are taking jobs from the Americans,
[17:00] CM:	Anyway, but that is a chase that does not stop, day by day worse, crushing, crushing, crushing
[17:08] SK:	And then do you think that possibly, if you had stayed in Colombia, would it have been better?
[17:17] CM:	Well, I don't think that, I don't really think so, I tell you why: we have two children in the air force
[17:20] GM:	I have to thank this country very much. There are many people who complain about this country and say things, well, that is not,
[17:30] GM	
[16:53] CM:	I have a lot to thank for in this country. I have lived peacefully, because even though you see tough situations, one lives in peace. Our daughter graduated from the army, our two sons are retired from the Air Force. Our other son, unfortunately passed away. He left two sons and the oldest is already in the military. The other is starting to study.
[18:00]	He finished high school. He graduated with honors. An he is going to start studying something like psychology, something like that.
[18:10] CM:	Our daughter has already retired, Her husband is also working in the air force. So that son-in-law and two children are three family members who are working in the air force.
[18:26] GM:	I believe that if we were in Colombia they would not be where they are now. [inaudible] I thank this country very

	much and we are thinking of going to Colombia, but actually, there is much to thank the US. Despite the work [inaudible]
[18:44] SK:	And have you returned to Colombia?
GM:	Right now we are planning to go around August
[18:49] SK:	Visiting, or
[18:50] GM:	No, we will see. We are going to check and see if remaining
[18:53] CM:	I was in Colombia
[18:55] GM:	And if things don't work well, we'll return again [inaudible], All depends on how things are.
[18:56] CM:	I was in Colombia in 2014 for prostate surgery. And in 2016 I returned to have eye surgery in Medellín. Cataracts.
[19:11] GM:	Nowadays, since we are practically alone here, and unfortunately the grandson who was more, ... the grandchildren who were closer are already in the military [inaudible] no longer here and the other begins to study and soon is getting married, so we are completely alone. We no longer have children here [in Greenville].
[19:27] SK:	So you see that here you were able to raise your children more successfully than it could have been in Colombia.
[19:35] CM:	Yes, yes, that's fine, that can be recognized.
[19:36] GM:	I recognize it. [inaudible]. I cannot be ungrateful, with God also because he brought us here. First God, right?
[19:45] SK:	And Don Carlos, in which companies did you work here in Greenville? Do you remember the names?
[19:52] GM:	Yes. He worked at Woodside, [inaudible] at Woodside here in Greenville, at Easley, and at the Beatty Plant in Simpsonville. He worked at the Mayfair in Spartanburg

[20:04] CM:	And the America Spinner that is already closed, in too. I worked there. That was the first year when I came, I worked a year there. The other was the Monagan, 4 years.
[20:11] SK:	In your memories, was there one that was the best, and one that was the worst? Can ... or ...
[20: 13] GM:	He never liked any mills ... [laugh]
[20: 19] CM:	In my memories, none served me.
[20:24] GM:	[inaudible] I did move from job to job because of the fact that so many companies were closing, not because I got bored or that I didn't like them, but because some of them were moved to, [inaudible] the one with the golf clubs and also the one with the bedding, they were all taken to Mexico, and the other one that was closed was the sewing one.
[20:51] SK:	And was there any company that you liked best? Or another one he liked less?
[20:57] GM:	No, I liked them all. Although Goodwill was so dirty, and all that, I worked there and the [inaudible] problem was with the boss. But there they offered me that if I wanted to go back there [inaudible] no. They offered me a job somewhere else but I refused. At Goodwill I knew all my colleagues. There are no longer any of those who worked with me. All have retired for the same reason, too much work. They demand too much
[21:25] SK:	And I want to ask you a little, again going back to the past, your first years here at work,
[21:32] GM:	Oh, it was hard due to the language.
[21:34] SK:	What difficulties, how was your social life? Well, the problem with the language ...
[21:35] GM:	That was the main one. Of course, luckily, where I worked, there were people who translated, Hispanic people who spoke English. But the language is hard. [inaudible] I understand but it's hard for me to speak English. As they say, "old parrot does not learn to speak."

[22:03]. CM:	[inaudible] because I don't hear. That is another thing that, I lost my ears in textiles.
[22:10]. GM:	The noise, the noise
[22:11] CM:	Those devices to wear here [hearing aides], the factories where I worked should be paying me this. Hearing aides are worth a lot of money, this.
[22:18] GM:	But they gave one some protectors, but they don't protect much.
[22:19] SK:	They don't.
[22:20] CM:	They don't protect your hearing, I tell you why: because one had to be tested. When one, when one is being examined on the ear on one side, the ear canal, [noise] enters through here, the back of the ear. If one has the ear covered with earplugs, you still hear through the side of the head.
GM:	Yes, if you cover your ears, you are able to hear, anyways.
CM:	Clearly, over here [shows back of ear] you can hear.
GM:	Looms made more noise than where I worked. There was less noise in the room where I worked.
SK:	And there was also the problem of lint?
[23:00] GM, CM:	Oh yes, yes.
SK:	Was this cotton a problem for you?
CM:	Yes. It flies through the air, so that is also a problem.
GM:	Yes, yes.
SK:	And were you protected in some way, or not?
GM:	No, there we were not given a mask to work, no.
SK:	And how was your social life? Did you have time to socialize? It seems you worked very hard.

GM:	I [inaudible]. We had a break at two in the morning and at four and at six.
[23:30] CM:	She had breaks. I did not have them. In looms there is no time for that. In looms you have to work without breaks, without breaks
GM:	Because the machines work so fast.
CM:	Logically, one should take a quarter of an hour to eat. Logically, then. I mean, I had to do a lot of production but [inaudible]. I had to work non-stop because the looms could not be left alone even for five minutes. Because that looms stops.
[24:00] SK:	So, when did you eat?
CM:	One eats, one eats in five, whatever one eats in five minutes. I would bring something to eat from home, and I went and warmed it up and ate it in five minutes quickly and again. And when one returns, half of the looms are stopped. For one to start over, start one from here, it takes about four hours until you have everything under control.
[24:30] SK:	And were they eight-hour days?
CM, GM:	Eight hours
CM:	As for social life, for example on Sundays, we could not, instead of going for a walk or, I do not know how to drive far, I could not go to parties because then one goes on Monday and does nothing because he is tired, the body is tired. Whoever drinks a lot, that's very difficult on Monday or Tuesday. Then all I did was to try to sleep. The most I could. There was not a social life.
[25:00] SK:	And the children?
GM:	I worked and I had to do with them and do everything.
SK:	What time did you see the children?
GM:	In the afternoon.

CM:	She saw them but I couldn't because my turn started at four, until twelve. Then they had to come to the house alone and I couldn't help them because they were already studying and knew English. And without knowing English, I couldn't help them, I couldn't explain anything.
[25:30] GM:	Yes. They practically learned alone.
CM:	Yes, they learned alone.
GM:	Because [inaudible] and for example, like here, for example, mathematics is very different from how they teach it there, [inaudible]
CM:	It was a problem. But they got up alone.
GM: [26:00]	Yes, because in addition, in Colombia they teach one to count like this and not to write the number you carry over, you just keep it in mind. And here it is so, very different. All the other way around, the leftmost [inaudible]
SK:	Any other thing, some anecdote, or some other comment?
CM:	We get along well with all Hispanics, we don't throw big parties but go to receptions or celebrations
GM: [26:30]	We did, when previously, when the Knights of Columbus had a Hispanic section, so every month it was, with the Knights of Columbus, we had a pleasant time. But it was every month. But something is something, right?
SK:	Clearly! Yes.
GM:	But since the Knights of Columbus was over, now we went to little parties around in friends' houses, for birthdays. They invited us and we would show up.
SK:	And, did you always socialize with Colombians only?
GM: [27:00]	Yes, always Colombians because they were Colombian friends who invited us. Las Posadas, Myriam and Luis Carlos, they were the most, we were very close. But later, each one formed their own families, so all of that was gone.

SK:	And did you interact more with the Colombian group or have you met or socialized more with other groups? Has it been difficult?
GM: [27:30]	With Mexicans, and from Guatemala, there are many Guatemalans around.
CM:	And Salvadorans, and from other countries.
CM: [28:00]	I have worked with Mexicans, with, after retirement, after I retired and I went to work in restaurants washing dishes, and there one really gets to know different people. I worked with Salvadorans, with Italians, with Iranians, with Spaniards, and they are good people.
GM: [28:30]	And luckily I, because in textiles, despite the fact that Mrs. Restrepo burned her hand every time because when you put the small cones when the machine passes by, you wrap the thread, then there are times that they get away from there, they get out, or when they fall [inaudible] then it burned a lot. I never got burned, but once a large cone got loose and hit me here. [inaudible].
GM: [29:00]	And after that there was a time when the coils got stuck and then I reached in with my hand, the machine was moving and I reached in and it blew my fingernail. And what the mechanic did was that he took me to the office, and what they did was that they put a paper towel to dry my hands and wrapped my finger there. That was it. [laughter]. They didn't take me anywhere, [inaudible] they wrapped my finger and that was it. And I with my very sore finger. That ...
SK:	So, to avoid burning your hand or hurting it, didn't they give you gloves, or something?
GM:	No, you couldn't work with gloves here. Because one has to, it is a machine that goes fast and one has to ... I even had some pictures and I threw them away. [inaudible]. There are several little boxes, they were 144, and one would put the coil there.

<p>[29:30]. GM:</p>	<p>So that machine had something to tangle the thread. Then when the machine passed [inaudible]. The machine tied the thread and began to wrap. But there were 144 coils to be placed. But yes, at the beginning those coils accumulate at the ends, oh my God. But after one gets to practice, um, the machine passes and everything is clean.</p>
<p>SK:</p>	<p>And it was work completely standing</p>
<p>[30:00] GM:</p>	<p>Standing. Yes. I had to do all those jobs standing up. Not in sewing.</p>
<p>SK:</p>	<p>And don Carlos, did you also work standing up all the time?</p>
<p>CM:</p>	<p>[inaudible]. One can never sit down, you cannot, because you are patrolling the machine and then the next, then another, and you have to patrol, because the machine can get entangled. If one does not look at it from the back, the machine becomes entangled. A thread bursts and sometimes it does not stop. That is a way of,</p>
<p>[30:30] CM:</p>	<p>It is a little metal thing that when it bursts, the thread is loosened and lowered and it makes the machine stop. But there are times when the thread doesn't go down and that can make a mess and do tremendous damage. That's why you have to be watching constantly. In that job, I don't know, but many, many said to me: "Man, how is it that you don't work more than eight hours.</p>
<p>[31:31] CM:</p>	<p>Work 16 hours, work 12 hours a day and you will see that your situation will improves." And there are many of those who have already died or are ill. I am sick, I know, I am sick because of work. Everything hurts. But there are others who are worse. I only worked eight hour shifts, twelve hours occasionally, but then I had to pay taxes for those extra-hours.</p>