TITLE OF VIDEO: Aura and Héctor Tabares
DATE OF VIDEO: July 25, 2018.
TRANSLATED BY: Sofía Kearns
DATE OF TRANSCRIPTION: July 24, 2019

[00:03] Aura Tabares:	My name is Aura Tabares.
[00:08] Héctor Tabares:	My name is Héctor Tabares. I'm from Medellin, Colombia.
[00:17] Sofía Kearns	And tell us Mr. Héctor and Mrs. Herminia, Mrs. Aura Herminia, how did you get involved in textiles? Did you work first in Colombia?
[00:28] HT:	Before coming to this country, I worked at Fabricato there in Medellín. I worked in the dry cleaning and stamping department.
[00:33]	That is, where the fabric is processed, to color the fabric and put all the chemicals before going to market. In '73 I came to this country, I arrived in the state of Rhode Island, there I also came to work in textiles
[1:03]	because I realized that it was where they paid best, then, but I no longer worked in a dry cleaner but worked with looms. And that's when I met the Draper loom, learned to weave and followed my routine as a weaver. I was there for five years and then later I came here to South Carolina, where textiles were so strong,
[1:33]	because this was the textile center here. In all of America, where they had fairs, they always did them here in the, in Greenville, South Carolina, which was where they showed the new technology, the new machines and everything, and people came from all over Central America, South America, for that textile fair.
[2:03]	Well, when I arrived here I started working at a plant called the Beatty Plant, uh, I tried there for a while, then I decided to try another plant in Easley, another in Greenville, and finally, for me the best plant was the Beatty Plant, where I then remained working. There I worked for thirty years, I started as a weaver,
[2:33]	then as a thread [?], also what they called pullover, when they changed the cylinder, until I wanted to learn the mechanics. They gave me the opportunity to learn the mechanics, and there I

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	continued until we took out the Draper looms and put Picañol looms, Picañol Omni, was the style of that machine. Then there, then for thirty years I was a mechanic.
[3:00]	Around thirty years of working there and the plant declared bankruptcy and offered us opportunities to study, they paid us for gasoline, they sent us to study in order to, as they told us, to be prepared because textiles were going to disappear.
[3:33]	and, that is, it was a good opportunity for one to forget about textiles. Many people graduated in other things and left textiles. I wanted to get into cars with the BMW but in 10 months I realized that working in textiles as a mechanic,
[4:03]	was easier, without stress and I worked alone, while working with the BMW I worked on what they call an assembly line and it was a lot of stress, a lot of pressure and since I was starting, well, I made more money with textiles than… eh at ten months I stopped collecting unemployment money
[4:33]	because I was studying and collecting unemployment money, then I stopped getting this money and I went to work with a company called Ferrer, which made parts for the BMW. I worked for ten years there until I retired a year ago.
[5:00] SK:	And you told me very interesting things about that company. Do you want to tell us a little? What does that company do, Inman Mill?
[5:03]	Well yes, ok. One year before I retired, that was about two years ago, uh, they called a meeting where they showed us what they were doing, new things with the fabric, not only fabric to make dresses or curtains, but they had another company
[5:33]	in the north which, assembling different fabrics together, to get a certain thickness to replace plywood, or wood with it. So what they were doing was that they adjusted the cloth thickness [sic] as requested by the client, as well as the length [sic] and the width. And they told us that they were doing very well even though they were just beginning.

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[6:03]	They were also producing the board where the entire electronic system of a machine or a computer goes, and customers were very satisfied, it is because the fabric is fireproof. It does not burn, nor does it suffer from overheating. So it is a very fine material for all types of industry
[6:33]	electronics, and also replaces many pieces, replaces wood, which is for example two by four, as I say plywood, and ...
[6:43] SK:	Do they use this material in homes too?
6:46 HT:	Well, so far, as I have heard, about four years ago they have been with that new system, but as it is more expensive, finer, and requires more processing, that's why it has not been marketed as much.
[7:03]	They are barely showing it around, but I know that the day will come when people will realize that it is a very fine material, it does not suffer from overheating, it is fireproof, so I know that they will use it a lot. The problem is that is very expensive, made out of cotton.
[7:33] SK:	And, well, we can ask for details, but would Doña Aura like to tell us a little about her story? Is your story similar to his?
[7:47] AT:	Well, my story is similar to his with the difference that he worked in textiles in Colombia. I didn't. I arrived in this country in 1977,
[8:03]	I came from Colombia and got involved in textiles in 1980, seeing those checks because textiles paid really very well. Eh, I got to work in the same company where he worked, at the Beatty Plant and I started putting batteries, that is, the threads that fed the machine
[8:33]	Over time, he was a weaver. So I started liking this kind of work and what one could earn. Once my boss told me: "You. ... I see that you are interested in knitting" and I said yes, I really like it. Then I started knitting. In my spare time and on Saturdays and so, I was studying English

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[9:03]	and at that time, in this company, there was hardly anyone who spoke English, so my boss called me so that I could serve as interpreter. Until one day my boss tells me, uh, "I see you put so much love into your work, you're so responsible, uh, don't you want us to train you as a shift supervisor?"
[9:33]	Then I got scared, I said “no, I don't know if I'm going to be able.” And he said: “Yes, you're going to do it, you're going to be able, we're going to send you to Greenville Tech, you're going to get your certificate of supervision and you will do it. ”They helped me a lot, encouraged me a lot, and for fifteen years I worked as a floor supervisor.
[10:03]	Eh, when the company closed, it felt really sad because, well, we had a good working group, uh, one saw the bosses' support for all Hispanics
[10:25] SK:	Who connected you to textiles in the US, who brought you? How was it? Do you want to tell us some details?
[10:33] HT:	Well it's very simple. My parents and my uncles worked at Fabricato. One of them went to Barranquilla. Back in Barranquilla he met an American who was doing some job in Colombia and there was a connection. He was a gringo who went from here to Barranquilla
[11:03]	For, I don't know what kind of business he had, anyway, my uncle tells me that this man asked several weavers there if they wanted to come to work here in the United States. And of course, many of them said yes. Among them my uncle. So at that time everything was very easy and I think that in a matter of months they were already traveling
[11:33]	here for the United States. They arrived in the state of Rhode Island, they already had their job, they had everything. Then he requested a resident visa for my dad, and my dad also came to this country to work and he asked for a resident visa for me too. Of course, when I

	got the chance and they gave me the visa, I thought about it a lot because I my job at Fabricato was good.
[12:03]	But I also thought that it could be an opportunity for a better life than what I could have in Colombia. Anyway, I decided to come. I went to the embassy, they gave me the visa, everything, and I thought that I would return back to Colombia if I couldn't adjust in the US, or if I didn't see a future here. Well, I came to the US and little by little I got involved in textiles, and
[12:33]	I kind of felt in love or something with this country. And those dollars perform very well in Colombia. [laughter]
[12:41] SK	And then they gave you a resident visa?
[12:43] HT:	Yes, from the beginning. People began to come around 1968, 66 or so, and at that time as this country had a lot of work, and a lot of idle machines,
[13:03]	there was no problem for people to come here with a work contract, because there was a lot of work. So, people got work contracts very easily. People came with a contract to work here. I got to put up to 18 hours [per day] at a mill, working all the time because I had nothing else to do. And this was very good because those dollars paid a lot when you sent them to Colombia.
[13:33]	And this was one of the things I liked the most. But I also missed Colombian food, like dear chorizo sausage, corn cakes, the "calentado." But I adapted here little by little and by April the weather begins to change, less snow was falling, warmer temperatures, and I got familiar with the town, and with many English words
[14:03]	I was managing with the English language, and that is when I started feeling comfortable in this country, but I believe that I have always, always thought about returning to Colombia. I always thought of Colombia, I could not forget Colombia.
[14:30]. SK:	And how did you guys decide to come to Greenville, how did you get here?

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[14:33]. HT:	Well, I arrived in this country on January 13, 1973, hey, I arrived in January and in March I went on my first trip to Miami, on I-95 from the north, and there in March, more or less, someone told me that here in South Carolina,
[15:03]	in this town, it was the textile center of all America That this was the main textile hub. I brought two uncles, my dad, the family, while I was still up north. And all of them gradually came until the mill where I was there in the state of Rhode Island closed and that's when I decided to come here.
[15:33] SK:	Then your family came first and then you.
HT:	Yes. Well, I was the first one who first discovered this place before my family did. I told my dad and uncles, I told them about this place and they wanted to come and try it too.
SK:	What convinced you guys to come here?
HT:	because here you are paid better, and there was a lot of work. A lot. I could choose where I wanted to work. A lot of mills. I think there might have been around
[16:03]	six hundred textile mills. So many, a huge thing. Well, but they were not large mills, but small ones, with three hundred, four hundred looms, some had up to six hundred looms and most were Draper X3. And when my family came and started working, yes, afterwards
[16:33]	they told me that yes, it is true, here you earned better money than in the north and there were more options, more opportunities to work in one mill better than another, and then that was when I, well, I lived well and worked well there in the north, but when the mill where I worked, called the Pencil Weaving, closed, then I decided to come
[17:03]	here.
[17:04] AT:	And more than everything, northern textiles began to close earlier than the ones here in the south. Then almost all the workers in the north came here.

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[17:16] SK:	And you came with other Colombians outside the family, or did you know other Colombians who did the same?
HT:	Well, since I had been here several times, I came up to three, four times per year,
[17:33]	I had many friends, and many who I had already brought here, and I already had many friends who already lived here, until the day came when I have to come too, but when I came to Greenville for the very first time, I was told
[18:03]	there were no more than three Colombians here. Two lived here in Greenville and another I think lived in Woodruff. They were the only Colombians because I didn't hear about anyone else. But a year later, we began to realize that more Colombians were arriving.
[18:25] SK:	You told me that you met Don Salvador.
[18:31] AT:	Don Salvador Gonzalez. I was telling you that Don Salvador González was the one who gave me the knitting training at the Beatty Plant. He was my instructor. And he was the one who picked Hector up from the airport when he arrived from Colombia, right?
[18: 52]. HT:	We called him Paino, and I think it was because he was the father of all who arrived. Well, Salvador González was a very helpful person,
[19:03]	He was one of the first who arrived and he was very helpful and he was always there to see what anybody arriving from Colombia needed; he was also after the aguardientico (anise liquor typical of Colombia), because aguardiente didn't come through regular trade routes, but one had to go to New York. Or bring it from Medellin
[19:33] SK:	How many hours did you guys work? Did you work together in the same, in the same company? How was it?
[19:36] AT:	We worked in the same company, that was a blessing from God because he [Hector] told me: the day that the children have to go to a nursery, you have to quit your job. Then he worked the first shift,

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	he left at four in the afternoon and I entered at four in the afternoon. Many times he
[20:03]	started at four in the morning until four in the afternoon. Then I took the children to the company, and he returned with the children. Until we reached a point when the children did not see me at all, only him in the afternoon, when they entered kindergarten and first, they only saw him in the afternoon. So on weekends the kids didn't want me to bathe them, to do anything with them. So that's when I came to the realization that I had to do the first shift.
[20:33]	Then I worked the first shift, then, both of us were on the same shift and when the children were on school vacation, his mother took care of them.
[20:47]	
HT:	Yes, when she and I worked together at the Beatty plant, we did a very good job, these were the last years of the Beatty plant because when she was a supervisor and I worked in
[21:03]	maintenance, and I had to do large machines jobs, and quality control, so we reached a point where she was responsible for everything related to production and I was of everything related to quality. And we reached a point where she and I practically managed that whole room. In a shift.
[21:33]	Two years before the Beatty Plant closed, she became the overseer of the room, the boss. And they were going to put me in a higher position with maintenance issues. Then practically she and I were going be, as some people said, the tough ones of the Beatty Plant
[22:03]	It was then when the Beatty Plant closed. Otherwise, we could have done many things.
[22:14]	
AT:	We would still be there, ha ha
[22:15]	
HT:	Possibly, yes, we would still be there.
[22:19]	
AT:	It was a very good work environment. We had a very good working atmosphere, our bosses were very fond of us, all Hispanics, all staff. But they said that Hispanics did a great job for them.

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[22:33] AT:	One of the things that I, that seemed difficult to me and that I always asked my God to never happen to me again is to work with family. Being the boss, it is very difficult. It is very difficult because there are people who do not know how to separate family from work.
[23:03]	So many believed they had privileges with me because they were my family or his family. Then I told them: "from these doors inside you are like any other worker. From the doors to the outside, you are my family.
[23:33] SK:	Comparing the work, and this question would be for Don Héctor because he worked in Colombia. So let's compare the work in textiles in Medellín and work here. Were there positive things there, positive things here? Something negative? Can you try to think of some differences?
[23:47] HT:	Well, for me in Colombia, as work is not abundant, it has always been like that, eh there are always many people outside the door asking for work at each mill,
[24:03]	Or requesting to fill out applications and all that. So because of that, companies are stricter in Colombia. You have to arrive to work at a precise time, you can never miss it, sometimes even sick people have to go to work, that is, it is more stressful, you work by the clock in Colombia. When you come to this country, here there is
[24:33]	a lot of work, there are idle machines in need of people to work them. So because of that, here they were more flexible, one could arrive late, leave early, skip work and not even calling to let them know. They knew that if they forced you, you would go to another mill that was two or three blocks away. Then the owners stood all that,
[25:03]	So working here was calmer and more relaxed because they did not force you. You worked because you wanted to. I worked eighteen, twenty hours straight. At the end of the day, when I was going back home, I would tell the supervisor and he would say, "Well, there is no one who else to work those machines. Stop them. "I did that.

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[25:33]	I used to handle 80 looms, so I stopped them all and went home. Eh, around seven o'clock they were already knocking on the door, offering me a ride, so that I would go to work because all the machines had stopped and there was no one to work them. And many times I stopped the machines and when I returned the next day the machines were off because there was no one to work them.
[26:03]	So, during the sixties, seventies, until the seventies, seventies and something in this country, there were a lot, a whole lot of textile jobs and not enough workers, so I think that's why it was very easy to come to this country because there were a lot of employment contracts and the immigration officials didn't bother so much because they needed people to keep the industry alive. But when I started in Fabricato,
[26:33]	there, then at that time, it was not like now. Today there are temporary jobs, the contract is over and if they want to continue with one, and if not, they tell you not to come back. At that time there was no such thing, I don't know in the nineteen seventies. One went to work and yes, one was entitled to everything, all
[27:03]	benefits, holidays, vacations, everything. And one withdrew from the company as I did and they gave me severance, vacations, because all the benefits were given to me on the last day I retired. In this country no. Here most of the plants or companies do not have that system. Some have them, they give bonuses and all that. When one retires,
[27:33]	the check they give you is the last hour you worked. Here in textiles there are no benefits or bonuses, nothing like that. The only thing they do pay is vacations, holidays, all that, but textiles, I have come to realize, are the worst kind of job in this country in terms of benefits.
[28:01] SK:	And you two, did you work overtime?
[28:03] AT:	We did a lot of overtime but when I started in the supervision job I worked for a salary, I didn't work by the hour, that is, no matter what hours I worked, I was paid the same, but before, when I worked hours, yes, we did a lot of overtime.

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[28:30] HT:	I earned a lot of money in textiles.
[28:38] SK:	And did that overtime work affect your family life with children? How did you manage to combine everything?
[28:46] HT:	Well, one has to be very careful with that. There were times, I did realize that I was neglecting the family because there was a time when
[29:03]. HT:	I worked every Sunday, sometimes I worked seven days, never stopped. Then, in order to take advantage of these opportunities, of course, one worked seven days without stopping and I got to work for up to three months without stopping. Then when I realized that I was neglecting the family, the children, then I tried to change, on the one hand, because one is already tired and on the other hand this could not continue like this.
[29:33]	Then I started working six days, five, and I asked for vacations, to go to Colombia on vacation or something. But yes, with so much overtime that it was available one had to be very careful because I heard of people and marriages that had problems because they were working too much.
[30:03] AT:	This country without Hispanics would be nothing, not only in the textile field but in all fields because you see Hispanics in all fields
[30:10] HT:	As a mechanic, I often had to train Americans and they themselves would say to me in the cafeteria, drinking coffee, "it is incredible that you,
[30:33]	from another country, without speaking English well, is teaching me in my country." Then these are great things that one has done in this country, to teach the Americans.