

TITLE OF VIDEO: Víctor Velásquez

DATE OF VIDEO: July 1, 2018

TRANSLATED BY: Emily Dotson, Parker Driggs, Marina Cox, Sofía Kearns

DATE OF TRANSLATION: Fall 2018, Summer 2019

Víctor Velásquez: [00.03]	Good morning my name is Víctor Velásquez Montoya. I'm from Colombia. I was born in the town of Buenos Aires Andes, Antioquia. I am 71 years old and I worked in textiles in the city of Medellín, in Bello, where I lived for 6 years. I was a dyer. I prepared the colors for the...the...the fabric, [pause] indigo or blue
[00.33]	jeans. And I stayed at that job for five years and then I went to another factory where I retired.
Sofía Kearns: [00.45]	And what was the name of this... this textile factory?
VV: [00.48]	This textile factory was called Fabricato. I arrived there on August 16 <sup>th</sup> , 1971 and left in March of 1970...75. And then I married Miss Luz Maria Posada, who had already lived here in the U.S. in
[01.18]	Greenville for about a year. And she traveled from here to Medellín in 1976 and we got married in 1978 [pause] 1977. And in the year 1978 she stopped going back and forth and I came here.
[01.38]	On March 4, 1978, I arrived in Greenville from Medellín. And here I returned to textiles, to a trade that I had basic visual knowledge, but never practiced in Colombia because there I did dye gumming and here, I came to work as a Doffer, or someone who removes
[02.08]	dofts, bobbins or spindles holding fiber. The bobbins would fill up the spinning frame and I would empty it. And here I worked for, let's see, from
[02.38]	[pause] 1980 [pause] until the year 1991. Let's see, from 1978 until the year 1991 with a period at the Woodside Mill. When I worked here in Greenville, they closed the company the [pause] I think it was on July 4, 1983. And some of us were transferred to different companies, and I was transferred to the Beatty Plant in Simpsonville where I worked from the following year until 1991 until I became disabled. And from there I went back and forth from the hospital to my home, and from my home to the hospital.
[03.08]	Uh, I spent my time then working in several... several services, for example I helped manage a lunch program to bring food to the construction workers, or I took them to the hospital or to a doctor. And I worked like that until today, or until now, doing that work. I worked managing a... a nightclub here. Then I worked in a bar here on Whitehorse for 8 or 7 months. And I was giving workers
[03.38]	or friends rides, taking them to the airport, bringing or taking them

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SK: [3.55]	to the hospital, or taking them to a doctor. And I worked like that until today, or until now, doing that work. [repeated from 3.12].
VV: [3.57]	And you also worked at the radio station?
[4.27]	Yes, at the station I began on radio 40 AM in all the [inaudible] with my friend Carlos Garcia. And from there we acquired a better place, a better station that became 1440 "La Brava" in downtown Greenville until we sold that station to another gentleman, Don Felipe Olave. He bought it and let me work there for 6 years. I worked there doing an "oldies" music program, but now he has sold the station so it's finished now. I also worked on "La Opinión," in the newspaper "La Opinión." There I contributed to the newspaper for 3 or 4 years, I don't remember. And then I went
SK: [4.56]	back to my usual routine: walk around the streets, doing favors, helping people.
VV: [5.07]	When you compare your work at the textile factories in Medellin and the textile factories here, how...how...how do they compare? What was that like?
[5.37]	Well, in the city in Colombia, at the company where I worked, Fabricato, there was a lot of organization, a lot of discipline, a lot of behavioral regulations. One had to accommodate to their company. Sometimes the was discipline here too, but it is more relaxed, like "I'm not going to work today." And call the supervisor to say "I'm sick." And you would not show up, even if you weren't sick anymore. There was no responsibility, no work ethic. On the other hand, in Colombia it was very different, it was not like someone was missing work because he wanted to. He would miss work because he needed to do so from illness or family issues. Showing up to work daily was very important. But other than that, it was a textile factory, textile factories are textile
[6.07]	factories. It is the same routine, the same work, the same environment, machine, cotton.
SK: [6.15]	And did you work more hours weekly here or there?
VV: [6.18]	Uh ... uh ... in Colombia there are 48 normal hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Eight hours a day. Once in a while there would be extra hours. Here

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<p>[6.48]</p> <p>[7.18]</p> <p>SK: [7.45] VV: [7.49]</p>	<p>there was a lot of overtime, a lot of extra time. Here, we worked 60...64 hours per week. We worked 40...48 normally, but there was more overtime here than in Colombia. I met coworkers at Woodside Mill and at the Beatty Plant that fit 75, 80, 90 hours, but I was not like them, I worked a maximum of 64, 70 hours per week. And that was when there was good work, because there was a time here at the Beatty Plant that there was a shift called the mini-shift, which was 12 hours on Saturday, 12 hours on Sunday, but a rest period on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. So that way I worked, 24 hours but the company paid 36. But, however, I could rest on Monday, and work on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Then, rest on Friday and return to do my shift on Saturday and Sunday. There was a lot of work at that time. But it came to a halt and textile factories closed. It was a pity because this was the cradle of textiles worldwide. Greenville represented something very big for textile workers, and for the textile industry. Many companies that had a lot of big factories. Both textile and sewing, manufacturing, and all that...but all that is history, there is little of that left, or little of that remains.</p>
<p>[8.19]</p> <p>SK: [8.23]</p> <p>VV: [8.27]</p>	<p>So then, how many years did you work here?</p> <p>I worked here practically from 1978, when I came, to 1991. Because in 1991, in August of 1991 they declared me "incapacitated" and said I had a disability. Because in the course of 1983 to 1991 my health was affected due to several diseases that left me in serious condition. I had a cardiac arrest, I had...I had a bypass, then I had a peritonitis...a...a disease called retroperitoneal. And that was the one that made me officially disabled. I could not walk, I was swollen, a lot of time in the house.</p> <p>And these diseases, did they have anything to do with your...work conditions?</p> <p>No. No. Well, I do not think so. I don't believe. But sometimes afterwards...</p>

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<p>[08.37] Víctor Velásquez:</p> <p>[9.07]</p> <p>[9.37]</p>	<p>...sometimes, after it happened, let's say, in '91, that retroperitoneal disease, someone made me realize that it may have been the chemicals, since I worked in Fabricato, because I was preparing the dye for the bluejeans as [inaudible]. So, there were many ingredients. I used caustic soda, ascetic acid, sulfuric acid, humectants, well, a tremendous amount of chemicals, and I had to prepare them all myself. The only protectant that they gave for us were gloves for our hands, and nothing else. Nothing for our face, no masks, and there was a color called nine ... three, ten, and nine which was "rapidogenic" blue. It is a flammable dye that you must immediately put in a pot with water. It makes a paste, but that paste creates fumes, which is invisible. That's a type of gas which sticks to your body, to your clothes, and you inhale it. Many times, I came home and took a bath and the water would turn blue. You would lay down in bed at night at the next morning your sheets would be blue. So, it's possible that this has had a long-term effect on my health. It is only a possibility no ... I am not saying that it was the direct cause, but because of my exposure to so many chemicals, it would seem that, as I told one of my friends, it affected my health. But some of us weren't affected. In Colombia, there were three of us split between each shift. The others were in perfect health, but I was not. So, I cannot be sure if that was the cause. But humans are all different.</p>
<p>Sofía Kearns: [10.01]</p>	<p>And at work here in Greenville, did they have better protection?</p>
<p>Víctor Velásquez: [10.05]</p>	<p>Well, here my work was different, I was a doffer, I removed bobbins. And no, no, no, one only needed to use ... only our hands, and speed. Lightness of our hands and the ability to work the machines, since there were no chemicals. None at all, it never affected me at all.</p>
<p>Sofía Kearns: [10.20]</p>	<p>Can you give us more details of that work? What did you have to do when you took out the bobbins?</p>
<p>Víctor Velásquez: [10.23]</p> <p>[10.53]</p>	<p>These machines are called "continuous", and in the textile industry they produce what is known as "continuous movement." Those are machines of about three hundred, I do not remember, of three hundred and sixty spindles. So, it is a long machine and it turns around. It is made of iron and has steel sticks. They are very close to each other at a distance of more or less two or three centimeters. In each of these sticks, you have to put in an empty bobbin, and take it out full. The thread wraps around it. That will go to gumming, where it will be turned into a cylinder. Then, they go for preparation, then goes to [inaudible], where the machine</p>

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<p>[11.23]</p> <p>Sofía Kearns: [11.53]</p>	<p>takes the thread. Then it goes to weaving where [inaudible]. So, that's a matter of speed, and the machines are [inaudible]. There were machines that lasted ... [inaudible] the bearing lasted two hours, or an hour and a half, depending on the thickness of the thread. When it was too thick, it did not last as long. There were three hundred and sixty bobbins [inaudible], if I'm not wrong, I do not remember. You had to get them out, more or less, in a time of five to six minutes to make sure, because there were forty changes that one gave in each shift. Each machine gave four changes every two hours, and every two hours you had to take them out. I used to take out one and take it out again after two hours. I take a different one out of a different machine, and after about two hours ... [inaudible]. I used to work ten machines, and out of those machines four of them had forty changes that had to be made. So, the work was mostly physical exercise. My waist and arms would get tired.</p>
<p>Víctor Velásquez: [11.54]</p>	<p>Did you have to be on your feet the entire time?</p>
<p>[12.24]</p>	<p>Yes, standing, yes. Dragging a cart that had an empty bobbin and then I'd push the cart where you would throw it out when it was full. I'd take out the empty one with my left arm, pull out a full one, and replace the empty one with my right. When the whole machine was full of empty bobbins, you would turn it on and it would start to work, but it depends on the gauge of the warp. With the thread, it takes time to fill, let's say there were warps that were thirty-five, which is called "corduroy". Each machine is filled every twenty-five minutes, half an hour; it is very fast. On the other hand, the others were thirty-five, forty, then they filled up every two hours. And that was the challenge there, we had to make forty changes daily from Monday to Saturday, other times from Monday to Friday, and so on. But work like that was not ... it was not dangerous. No, no. I never saw it that way, no, accidents, no. They happened, yes, because in work like that there are possibilities but not many.</p>
<p>[12.54]</p> <p>[13.24] SK</p>	<p>And as for the co-workers, were there others there working with you? Did you relate to those people...Other people? Who were they?</p> <p>Many Hispanics worked there. Several Hispanics worked with me; good friends, good companions, and Americans too. Well, there were some Americans who wanted to try to make fun of us</p>

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[13.54] Víctor	because we were Hispanic. One of us was called an Indian, or they would ask if in the city where we came from they produced tomatoes. If they ate tomatoes ... nonsense. But always a good camaraderie, always good companions, Americans or Hispanics. No more, and everything ... everything, everything was quiet, all good, nothing abnormal. Many anecdotes yes, many. The first time, I was there in training, and I was taking out a machine, the supervisor tells me, the one who was training me, told me to take a "break." I went to rest and then I smoked. While I was smoking my cigarette, she tilted her head forward and I ran to ask her what she needed. She told me she was on break. So, I said to a friend who spoke English, I said: "Listen, this lady, every time she goes by here when I'm on break she does that to me" and he said no. That's how they say hello. I said to him, "they act like lambs" [laugh]". So, I was very naïve. [inaudible] My friends enjoyed my stories. [inaudible] They made fun of me because I didn't have an understanding of American customs, how they greeted each other, and so on.
[14.24]	
Sofía Kearns:	
[14.42]	
Víctor Velásquez:	
[14.47]	
	It would be nice to hear other anecdotes about how your experience was in the first years.
[15.17] SK	
[15.47]	For me, it wasn't difficult. It so happened that my ex-wife, Luz María, had been here for three years. So, as I said, she came single, she visited Colombia a year, we got married, and we stayed there for a honeymoon for about forty days. Then, she came back and started to process my papers for me. Then, when the papers went through, I came and went. I arrived here with great confidence. When she left, I lived in the house with my in-laws. We lived there around a year while we got settled...but I was already prepared. She told me "look, this works like this, the laundry works like this." She was my instructor here, so I didn't make so many mistakes, like a lot of people who come. Thanks to her, what she taught me has helped me a lot. She was good, she was a very good instructor. I ended up living over there in Berea, where there was only one place to do laundry. This was many years ago. Then, a friend of ours, who already passed away, was León Cardona. He would wash his clothes in that laundromat and would go regularly Monday from ten to eleven in the morning. That Monday, he went to take the clothes, put it to dry and we went to my house for coffee. Then another gentleman arrived, a friend of ours. This guy told us: "guys listen to this. My clothes were drying and I went to take them out, but I lost a white polyester shirt. I don't know how to ask the woman to manage the laundromat. Then, this other man said:" I know English.
[16.17]	
[16.47]	

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[17.17]	<p>Come on, I'll help." So, I went with him. I believed him, even though I did not know if he spoke English. But, I believed him, and we went. That man arrived at the door of the laundromat, and the lady said "Can I help you?", or something along those lines. He stood right there, with a very manly voice, and very seriously he says: "Excuse me, será posibilidad recuperation camisa polyester Leon?" [Lady:] "Why?" Because the shirt was made out of polyester, it was white and it was Leon's. But the lady already had the shirt kept, she had already picked it up. She asked if this was the shirt and he said yes. We left happy, and when we arrived at the house, Leon was happy because he had recovered his shirt. Others spoke of a man who came to Miami. His daughters taught him how to operate a Coca-Cola machine. They told him to use the little twenty-five cent coins and to press a button so that a Coca-Cola would come out.</p>
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[17:34]

Víctor Velásquez:

But he had mixed up a twenty-five-cent coin with a five-cent coin. So, the machine would be asking him for more money and when a sign that said “dime” appeared, he thought the machine was asking him to tell him what he wanted. In Spanish, ‘dime’ means tell me. So, he said “a coca cola please.” So, then a woman came by and put a dime in and grabbed the coke. Imagine how he must’ve been... Anyways, a lot of anecdotes, a lot of things that at the end are stupid, but when you’re with friends these are stories to be enjoyed all together.

[18:04]

When I arrived to this country, when I left Colombia, the truth, the truth is it was really hard for me, um, [pause] for my mom and for my brothers. Sadly, I had to go back after forty days to bury my mom.

[18:34]

Yes, I had been here for forty days when they called me [pause] it was April fifteenth, 1978, and they told me that my mom had died, a Saturday morning at eleven. I had only been here for forty days. About fifteen days before, I had sent her a twenty-dollar bill, so that she could spend it downtown in Medellín. And that day when she took a shower and was getting ready to spend those twenty dollars, she died. She had a heart attack in the bathroom. Thank God that I could travel that Saturday, with the help of my wife Luz María, with the help of my father-in-law, I traveled to Colombia to bury her. I stayed there for eight days, I came back and I had lost the affection and care for what was here. But, aside from that, I had a good life in Colombia [pause].

[19:04]

[19:34]

But I’m not going to complain, to have arrived to this country because this country has given me everything. Everything. Poor or rich, but it has given me everything, everything and I can’t complain. And I love the United States because here I have received, let’s just say, what I couldn’t have gotten in Colombia because of a lack of money or whatever circumstance. This country has advantages.

[20:04]



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<p>[20:13] Sofía Kearns:</p>	<p>And I and those who during that time had that advantage, to enjoy all these benefits that give all the health benefits to everyone who's in this country.</p>
<p>[20:19] VV:</p>	<p>In terms of salary, how would you compare what you would earn in Medellín and what you would earn here?</p>
<p>[20:20] SK:</p>	<p>It was better here.</p>
<p>[20:21] VV:</p>	<p>Really?</p>
<p>[20:34]</p>	<p>Yes, logically. In Colombia for one to earn money, you had to have a high salary to live comfortably. On the other hand, one would earn, I don't remember if it was one hundred and eighty a week.</p>
<p>[21:04]</p>	<p>[inaudible] I don't remember. My first salary here was about one hundred and eighty dollars for forty-eight hours. But to buy a liter of milk and a gallon of milk was fifty cents. I smoked Winston cigarettes and would buy a pack for twenty-five cents. I thought that the pack was big. The prices were lower than one would earn. That is to say, what you would earn a week you would use it to live. A person</p>
<p>[21:34]</p>	<p>would earn today three hundred dollars a week, which one wouldn't live rich nor poor [pause] if it wasn't this way [pause] we wouldn't have that many Hispanics here. And I'm going to say something from a Mexican, a friend of mine. He said to me once, "Man, the biggest mistake us Hispanics have made was to meet the dollar. Because we hung to that bill more than our mothers, more than our brothers, more than our family.</p>
<p>[22:04]</p>	<p>We love the dollar more than our family. Because in Mexico or in el Salvador, or wherever in Central America or South America, you're not going to earn the same compared to here, never. Never because here I earned seventeen cents, three dollars and seventeen cents an hour. That's equivalent to..., at</p>

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<p>[22:14] SK:</p>	<p>that time the dollar was at about sixty pesos en Colombia, so that would mean one hundred and eighty pesos a week, more or less. A person with that money wouldn't eat in Colombia. On the other hand, those one hundred and eighty dollars would be useful here.</p>
<p>[22:16] VV:</p>	<p>And were there any social benefits with fabricado?</p>
<p>[22:34]</p>	<p>Yes, those... What happens is that here the comprehensive salary is the one that does not help and harm. Look, in Colombia everyone works with benefits, they have their minimum wage, and premium, bonus and payment.</p>
<p>[23:04]</p>	<p>And the bonus and tip are an average of two weeks of work. Here, there is no way to guarantee that you leave the company and the company is going to give you ten million dollars because you worked thirty years. No. In Colombia, yes. Nowadays, things are very different here [in the U.S.] from that time when we arrived. You would directly go to the factory, ask for an application through the window</p>
<p>[23:34] [23:43] SK:</p>	<p>And they would give it to you right there, right there they would give it to you. You would fill it out, right then and there and turn it in, and the interview would be there too. And they would say: "Can you work today at four in the afternoon? Can you come tomorrow?" When I went into work and I went to apply Monday at nine in the morning and the other week I started working at Woodside and I went at nine in the morning with a friend who already passed away. He took me there, with a girl, Amparo Estrada. I filled out the application and mister Davis, who was the manager, told me to come at three in the afternoon, for an exam. I went at three and was examined. My hearing, breathing, grabbed the tools and started working there.</p>
<p>[23:55] VV:</p>	<p>Everything was really easy all day. Nowadays I see how things have changed.</p>
<p>[23:57] SK:</p>	

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<p>[24:04] VV:</p>	<p>But still with these differences that Colombia had certain benefits and that there was certain security for a professional future...</p> <p>Yes.</p>
<p>[24:27] SK:</p>	<p>While there wasn't that there, the work was good temporarily, but even then, lots considered the work better here.</p> <p>Yes, for the security in Colombia. For your family's well-being, for education. A lot of people look at those kinds of people, people who had money and people who didn't have any money, but it was for physical and economic security and for the improvement of their lives, for their wife and for their children; or for those who are alone, for their family, for their mother, for their brothers.</p>
<p>[24:31] VV:</p>	<p>And we are also talking about a period of violence in Medellín.</p>
<p>[24:34] SK:</p>	<p>Yes, clearly, that really affected the country.</p>
<p>[24:37] VV:</p>	<p>You left right before it started to get worse, right.</p>
<p>[25:04]</p>	<p>Yes, yes, it did not affect me. The, the, the...well, in 1978, I arrived to this country when there was nothing of that sort happening. There was nothing [pause] but, of course there were robberies, subversive people, and things like that. But what happened after the eighties and nineties, that did not affect me. This country opened their hands with kindness and abundance. What Colombia [inaudible] is closed. Here, the economy is one hundred percent favorable for everyone. Where you eat, many others can eat too. The important thing is that you find money and here you can find money by working to get it.</p>
<p>[25:22] SK:</p>	<p></p>

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<p>[25:28] VV:</p> <p>[25:34]</p> <p>[26:04]</p>	<p>Anything else you would like to share about textiles specifically?</p> <p>Here, those of us who came in 1978... forty years ago a lot [pause] of beautiful friendships were created. Here, I met people, friends of mine that gave 100% of their care, their affection. The textile factories here, the companionship was a beautiful human force because we all came together for the same cause. We fought for the same dream. And we helped each other for the same cause. And all of us from forty years ago, whenever we see each other, wherever we find each other, we are all still the same. These forty years have been lived well. I feel satisfied in this country, very happy, and I'll stay here.</p>
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