

MARIA del CARMEN FLORES
Estrellita's Snacks – San Francisco, CA

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Location: Maria del Carmen Flores's Home – San Francisco, CA

Interviewer: Amy C. Evans

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: 1 hour, 15 minutes

Translation: Dr. Julia E. Bussade, Director of Basic Spanish & Portuguese,
University of Mississippi

Project: Women at Work: San Francisco

[Begin Maria del Carmen Flores Interview]

00:00:01

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Tuesday, May 21, 2013 in San Francisco, California, and I'm with Daniella Sawaya from La Cocina. We're across the street from La Cocina at the home of Maria Carmen de las Flores [Maria del Carmen Flores] who has Estrellita's Snacks. And Maria doesn't speak English, and I don't speak Spanish very well, so Daniella is here to translate.

00:00:29

So Daniella, if you would please ask Maria to say her name and her business for the record, please?

Daniella Sawaya: Maria, what is your name and your business?

00:00:40

Maria Carmen Del Flores: My name is María del Carmen Flores and my business is called Estrellita's Snacks.

00:00:45

AE: And to state her name for the record, I should have warned her that this was happening but if she feels like sharing her birth date—?

DS: And your date of birth, if you want to share it.

00:00:56

MCF: [*Spanish*] I was born on August 1, 1953.

00:01:02

AE: If you'll ask her where she grew up?

00:01:02

MCF: [*Spanish*] 01/08/1953

00:01:13

DS: [*Question*] And where were you born?

00:01:16

MCF: [*Spanish*] I was born in a town in El Salvador called Berlin, which is a district of Usulután.

00:01:22

AE: And tell her I understand she grew up selling street foods.

00:01:26

DS: [*Question*] You grew up selling food in the streets. Can you explain how it was?

00:01:33

MCF: [*Spanish*] Since I was six years old, I have been selling in the streets. I sell fruits, food—everything that my mom would put for sale, I have been selling them since I was six. And all my life has been like this, working, making food, pupusa, tamales, tostadas de plátanos [banana

chips]. Walking through the fairs in El Salvador—we say fairs there—we walk everywhere, with my sons, always working. Always with the business, because I have always liked the business very much. Well, with very little I opened a business in El Salvador, with twenty colones I set up my sales close to Macocumbia [?]. We arrived in Mexico with four children and with 100 pesos I opened a business and built five houses. I arrived here in San Francisco in 1997 and with twenty dollars I have opened my business, which is called Estrellita's Snacks.

00:02:29

AE: Okay, could you give us a quick synopsis of that?

00:02:32

DS: Sure. Maria del Carmen was born in Berlin, El Salvador, and when she was six years old she started working with her mother selling food on the streets. She used to sell fruit, pupusa, tostado chips, and ever since then she's loved being an entrepreneur. She started her food business in El Salvador with about five *colones* and then moved to Mexico with four kids and with 100 pesos, started a business and built several homes and then moved to San Francisco and started her business here with twenty dollars and has always—always loved being an entrepreneur selling food.

00:03:17

AE: Now when she was selling snacks on the street in El Salvador at the age of six, was she also helping to cook those foods?

00:03:27

DS: [*Question*] When you started selling food at the age of six years old, did you help prepare the food or did you sell it only?

00:03:37

MCF: [*Spanish*] Yes—No, my mom cooked. My mom had like a small restaurant in the backyard, she cooked the food, and I sold it in the streets. We used to sell fruits, pelada, pupusas, tamales—everything that my mom cooked, I would go out and sell it in the streets. We walked all over San Salvador. We sold it in many places of San Salvador. We used to be twelve kids, and I was the oldest, so I was the busiest. I worked for my other siblings.

00:04:09

AE: Twelve brothers?

00:04:11

DS: Yeah, she had twelve siblings. [*Laughs*] And she is the oldest and so she grew up having to take care of them. So, you mom cooked and you sold, but you did not cook, right?

00:04:23

MCF: [*Spanish*] Yes, I helped her. I helped my mom cook the pupusas, the tamales—yes. All my siblings—We are eight women and four men, but I was—I am the oldest of them all, so I was the one that ended up working more. I worked a lot. I was the one who had seven kids too—compared to all my sisters.

00:04:46

AE: So the question I want to ask, and I don't know how to phrase it, is about, like, food as survival and then food—food as survival but food as, like, nourishing and enjoyment and how those things kind of circulate in her life.

00:05:02

DS: Okay, I'll do my best. [*Spanish*] She wants to know how the food has served as something that allowed you to survive, and also as something that keeps your health going. So, for you what does food mean in terms of a way of surviving and also as a way of having a healthy life—yes.

00:05:37

MCF: [*Spanish*] For me, La Cocina—well, it is my passion. If I don't know how to cook it, I make it up, I dream about it—and that is how I cook my food. And since I was a girl, I have always liked to be creative with food. My mom used to say that sometimes I was crazy, “Mama, can I do this with this pastry?” and I sell them all, thank God. And everything that I think about in terms of food is something wonderful. I feel that I can't do everything that I want with the food, but everything has turned out very good to me in Mexico, in El Salvador, in Guatemala—as far as my food goes. People really like what all the foods that I prepare. It is my passion.

00:06:26

DS: So for her, food is a passion. She's constantly curious about it; she's always experimenting, dreaming about it. Her mom used to tell her that she was crazy because she'd have all of these ideas of things that she wanted them to make and she always, you know, figured out how to do it. And it's always gone really well for her in El Salvador and in Mexico and in San Francisco.

Food continues to be a source of passion and something that she—she can't even imagine being ever able to make as much food or all of the things that she dreams of making.

00:06:59

AE: So in our very limited conversations we had across the street, Maria and I—because I—I understand more Spanish than I can speak—but the—the word *dream* came up a lot. So I wonder if she could describe one of her dreams.

00:07:18

DS: [*Question*] Can you describe one of your dreams? You have talked a lot about food as a dream. So, can you describe one of these dreams?

00:07:31

MCF: [*Spanish*] Yes, when I was a girl I dreamed about being a star, being on the cinema, on a movie, but since my parents were so poor, they did not send me to a school, and I did nothing but worked. But, I have always dreamed, and I thank God that through the food, I have been on television, on American magazines, internationally here I am, thank God—In Mexico, I was very well too, they had me on television, on magazines for what I used to do there, for my food. This is something wonderful. I know that there are a lot of people who dream about it but don't achieve their dreams. But I have fulfilled my dreams, I have been to all these places in the media, which for me is a great opportunity and also—I also had the opportunity in August to record with an actor, Woody Allen, who is very famous, and I am going to be on a movie in Hollywood.

00:08:30

DS: So, as a young child she always dreamed of being—being a star of being either a singer or movie star but her parents couldn't afford to send her to school, but she was lucky enough that through food she has been able to achieve that dream in that she's received a lot of press in, you know, print media, on television, radio, for making her food both in San Francisco, nationally, internationally, even in Mexico. And so a lot of people, they spend their whole lives not being able to achieve their dreams, and she has been able to do that. And this past August, she was actually featured in the—the up-coming Woody Allen film [*Blue Jasmine* (2013)], and so she's also now a Hollywood star, so she will be featured in his next movie.

00:09:26

AE: My goodness. So stars feature prominently: in the name of the business, Estrellita's Snacks, and also she has some—a child in—a daughter-and a granddaughter with the name Estrellita—Estrella - my apologies. So talk—can she talk about the symbolism of the star in her family and her business?

00:09:48

DS: [*Question*] The stars are very prominent in your life, in your business, in your family—so can you explain to us what the stars mean to you?

00:10:06

MCF: [*Spanish*] Well, when I got pregnant with my daughter, I didn't know that I was pregnant, so one day there was a prediction in an Evangelical church. I went to this prediction and they told me that I was pregnant. And that for the name—They said that I was a sinner, but that in my womb was saint, three times saint, and that for the name, I should name my daughter Estrella

Areli. And then all her dreams would become true. So, I named my daughter Estrella Areli and she named her daughter Estrella Nataly. So, when she was pregnant with the girl, I had a dream about her and I said, “Look, my daughter, I want you to name your daughter Estrella Nataly, because I am going to open a business—with the stars.” I don’t know why, but I have always dreamed of being a star, and thank God, I have fulfilled it, through my food, the clothes that I wear—people love them. These are simple things, but I feel like a star. I feel fulfilled—I feel fulfilled because all that I have dreamed about I am achieving now, step by step, I am achieving everything now. It’s like this photo. I dreamed about it. And I told my kids. But, well, not all of my children and grandchildren wanted to hear about it. I have twelve grandchildren and four children here. Well I have a few here. I wanted to have them all together here, because I have already dreamed about this photo that somebody was also going to give it to me. This is a wonderful dream.

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DS: So the origins of the significance of the stars came from when she was pregnant with her first daughter, Estrella. She didn’t know that she was pregnant, but she went to, I believe it was a psychic at a church, who told her that she was pregnant and that she should name her daughter Estrellita [Areli] and—which she did.

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And then when—and her daughter has been able to accomplish a lot of the things in her life that she had dreamed of. And so when her daughter was pregnant she told—she dreamed that she should name her daughter Estrella Natalie because she was going to start a business called Estrellita’s Snacks because of all of the good fortune that—that prediction had brought to their

lives. And, pretty simply, she's just always had this dream of—of being a star and—and she feels like she is a star with all of the things that she's been able to accomplish.

00:12:44

AE: I should go back to the Woody Allen movie and ask what role she played in the film?

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DS: So for a few months last year, Maria did a sort of pop-up out of a restaurant in the Mission District and she was, you know, selling her—her Salvadoran food and then some Mexican food. And they were scouting for this Woody Allen movie in the Mission. And they came across her and, obviously, they fell in love as everyone does with—with Maria. And so she played the role of the restaurant proprietor.

00:13:17

AE: Did she have any speaking parts?

00:13:19

DS: [*Question*] Did you speak in the movie?

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MCF: [*Spanish*] No, I did not speak, but the actress asked for some keys, and I gave the keys to the actress. The beautiful moment was when I asked them how I was going to dress, and they already had a typical dress for me. I don't know where they took my picture, but they were looking for me so that I could be in the recording of the movie with them. For me it was

something wonderful, that I didn't expect. It was like a gift for me. My birthday is on August 1st, and I had told Caleb [Zigas of La Cocina] that I wanted to prepare some food, rent a place in a restaurant, but the movie took place in a restaurant and that, for me, was like a birthday present. I turned sixty-one years old.

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DS: So, she did not actually have a speaking role, but they found her because—she isn't aware but they showed up with a photo of her in her typical Salvadorian dress, and they had been looking everywhere for her because of the photo. And her birthday is on August first, and they filmed around then and for—she had been talking about, you know, wanting to throw a party but this ended up being a bigger birthday gift than she could ever have imagined. And she turned sixty-one last August.

00:14:41

AE: And I was trying to explain to her how much I admired her dress in this photograph that you brought over today, and she was saying how she loves the colors and loves to be happy and project that through her clothes. Could you ask her to talk about that?

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DS: [*Question*] She was telling you about your clothes, how much she likes the colors and how happy you are, so can you talk more about it?

00:15:09

MCF: [*Spanish*] As I tell you, I have always dreamed about being an artist, so I love happy clothes, the jewelry, everything that shines—It's my passion. If I don't have the typical clothes, I make them or I embroider them—I don't know. I just love them a lot. All these happy colors—When I wear these dresses, I feel like I am fifteen years old. I feel as if I am born again. A new spirit is coming toward me, a light that sparkles. I feel that because everybody greets me, everybody congratulates me—It's something very beautiful for me. Wearing these dresses is like a dream.

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DS: So she—she has mentioned she has always had these dreams of being an actress or being famous, and so part of that has been that she loves, you know, jewelry and very colorful, intricate, and elegant clothes. And especially typical dresses [of El Salvador], and so, you know, she doesn't—has a thing or sort of comes up with these ideas she'll make it herself or she'll embroider herself, but she feels that when she puts these dresses on and this clothing that she is sort of reborn. She feels fifteen again, and she feels like she exudes this—this light and this energy, and she loves that feeling that the clothes give her of, you know, sort of a glow.

00:16:40

AE: Tell her she doesn't need the clothes to have the glow.

00:16:43

DS: [*Question*] You don't need the clothes to have this glow—and this energy.

00:16:53

MCF: [*Spanish*] [Thank God]. This is the energy that God gives me. Because some years ago, in 1990—well, I don't remember the date, but I was very ill in Mexico and I died. I was dead for two hours. And the doctors didn't have any hope, but God gave me a new life, another spirit to go on and arrive at this country. And when I arrived in Mexico, with my four children, I opened my business under a tree, with twenty—with 100 pesos. And some people said that I was crazy to open a business under a tree. We sold food, soft drinks and all, and that opened more paths for me over there as well. It's something for me that — God gives me [ideas], illuminates my mind on how to open a business with needing a lot of money. All that I need is to have the creativity that I have to do and that's it. And everything multiples, thank God. Until now, with twenty dollars in this country—When I arrived in this country, I lived in the streets, I slept in the streets, I slept in the parks, at night I used to work as a bartender in the bars, during the day, I slept in the streets, and that has given me a more stronger spirit. I have to go on. I have to show my kids that it is possible, with or without money, my word is the law, because yes, it is possible. Because when somebody wants to be somebody in life, you don't need a lot of money to open a business. And I have shown to all people who say there is no work. Yes, there is work. The only thing is that people don't like to go out in the streets.

00:18:32

DS: [*Laughs*] So—so she does agree that she has this—this glow and this light and she feels that it's a blessing from God and that she's always been blessed her whole life. When she was in Mexico she died for two hours [*Laughs*]. The medics claimed her dead, and then she was reborn and given sort of a new life source. And when she actually first arrived in Mexico, she had a dream that she should put this restaurant under a tree, which people thought was crazy, but she did it. And it grew. And you know, her whole life, she's always believed that you don't need a

lot of money to be able start a business—that you just need creativity, and she’s had this constant source of that creativity and that ability to dream and—and think big, and has had the good fortune of being able to do that with very little money. When she first got to San Francisco she would work at bars at night and then sleep on the street and in parks during the day because she wanted to—to grow and she wanted to make money and she wanted to be able to support her family, and she’s been able to do that. She’s been able to grow the business and support her growing family.

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And it’s all because of this source of creativity—and a lot of people sometimes complain that there are no jobs or there’s no work, but she says that that’s not true—that you—you make work and you make it happen for yourself.

00:20:09

AE: [*Question*] I want to know more about the restaurant under the tree.

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DS: Can you tell us about the restaurant under the tree—in Mexico?

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MCF: [*Spanish*] Well, when I arrived in Mexico, I was about thirty, thirty-five years old. We didn’t know anybody and I used to walk around with my four children. And I started thinking, “What are we going to do? We have to live on something.” In Mexico, it is hard for somebody to offer you a job. And I know how to work. And I looked for jobs, and nobody gave me a job. The children and I didn’t have a place to live. This day we were close to the railroads, and a man told

me, “Look, I sell you this property for 100 pesos.” Then I told him that I didn’t have any money, but that I could make monthly payments if he let me. So for 100 pesos, under this tree, a Conacaste, a huge tree. I have a picture of it. I climbed it so that I could take a picture of it. And we put a blanket there, some wood pallets from the railroad, that worked as a table and little benches; and with 100 pesos I bought a carton of beer—twenty bottles—some beans, a kilo of tortillas and I told my children. I am going to dress up. I had made myself a dress. I had surgery recently done back then and I used to carry a bottle of Coca-Cola for two years to drain the liquid from [here] from the operation. But God is with me and so I went to the corners of the street and I said, “Hey, young men, I am selling beer. I am not asking for money. I just want to buy it from me.” And other people would tell me that I was going to get myself in jail, because this is not your property. But God told me to set it up here. And that’s what I did. And people would say that I was crazy because how can she do that if this is not her property? Yes, but this is God’s property, and He told me to set it up here. Because as I told you, I had died and I had had that dream. On the other side, there was the railroad. So people would get out and buy things from me. So among friends, one day from one carton [of beer], now there were five cartons. And the next day, more—and all this under the tree. So I told people—And I was afraid to get myself in jail. So, there was a man who told me that he was going to take me to the railroad office to talk to an engineer. And I went to talk to the engineer. I said, “Look, sir, I have these many kids, I am a single woman, I just had surgery, I am selling on this property and I hope you to give me permission.” And he signed some papers for me and said that it was my property, that I could go sell on it. And it was a huge property! And they gave me the railroad papers. You see how God is? They gave me a signed paper saying that the property was for me. So my usual customers asked me how I was going to name my business. And I said that I was going to let my customers

decide. They named it “The dreaming rascal.” That was the name of the business. I am the dreaming rascal. And I tell you why: You dream and whatever you dream about becomes reality. And there they named me something else, “Hoping Veronica.” That’s what they called me because I used to sing, had live music, I used to dance—and the business was full of people, under a tree, with a colorful blanket. But for me it was something wonderful, and there were people living by the railroads. I don’t where so many people came from, but I was the first one to build a mud house. That’s how we build them in El Salvador. It’s a house made of small pieces of wood, small pieces of stones, and that’s how I built the first house with my children. I told my kids that I could build a mud house. And we said that we were going to build it, we walked around to find cardboards to put on top of it, and that was the first house of cardboard that I built with all my children. And you see that everything is possible. And I had just had surgery. Opened here, stitched here, and my kids telling me that I was going to hurt myself. God is with me. He has not left me. Neither have my angels. And you are going to see that nothing bad is going to happen. Until now, my surgery has never hurt. Thank God. I have had seven surgeries; two discs that hurt in my back *[inaudible]*. When I was two years old, somebody cut my hand. When I was two, they cut my hand. I have platinum here, but thank God I can grip [on things]. Look at my hand. Touch it. It’s cut. Look. But God knows why. He has given me so many wonders. I had no childhood, I had no youth, and now I can’t even complain because all my life I have been working, but I am happy. And I have been thinking about it all. I know how to embroider. I know how to knit. If I need to embroider, I can. I have looked for ways of making money. Yes, thank God! God gave me seven kids: six men and my daughter. My kids don’t like the business. My daughter works there but it is not her passion. But I tell you this much, I have come from one country to another country. At the borders they didn’t let me in because my kids

don't look like me. They arrested me. They said that my kids were stolen. I have run through all these mountains, through the rivers, rocky rivers. Once the river took us and a man came and helped us, me with all my kids. We have run through all these mountains, passing by all these borders. And I would like to find a person to write a book because I have so many stories to tell, to leave in writing for my grandkids. I would like to leave them sort of a legacy of the story of my life and everything that you can do to go ahead and be somebody in life. There are so many things that we don't need. We don't need luxury or beauty to be somebody in life, to go ahead. But I tell you something wonderful. I was in El Salvador carrying watermelons to the trucks, to the markets, doing so much—God has given me a lot of passion mainly for the business.

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AE: That was a lot, and we'll transcribe it as best we can, but if you could give us a synopsis and then also if any questions come to you that make sense from what she said that you want to ask—.

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DS: Sure. So I believe the original question was around the first restaurant that she opened in Mexico. So, she found this—this piece of land that had sort of come to her in a dream and, well, originally she—she came to Mexico with her four children and had a very recent operation. She had a Coke bottle that she had to carry around to sort of drain the operation. And amidst all that, she decided to start this business because she needed some way to support her family. So she found this piece of land and that was not hers that she couldn't afford. So, but she decided to open the restaurant anyway.

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So they draped a sheet over this tree, bartered for a case of beer, a kilo of tortillas, some beans, and then she sewed an outfit and would stand on the side of the road and tell the truckers or the people passing by that they had beer. And then from there, you know, she took the one kilo of tortillas and then the next day had five and continued operating like that. And then, you know, once they had sort of established themselves, she went to the owners of the property and explained what they were doing and they signed over the land to her—with no money, just put in her name, an enormous piece of land and that's how she—she operated this whole time.

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She's sort of had to move from place to place, taking all of her children. She has seven children—seven children and has had to climb—literally climb mountains, you know, swim across rivers, all with her children in tow. And [*Laughs*]—

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MCF: [*Spanish*] I have seven children. The father of my children has never been a responsible person. I had them at home. I never went to a hospital. It's very hard; it's not easy. Living in the country, work on the land, I know how to do all that, seeding corn, beans—I know well everything about the country, because we used to live in the country.

00:29:20

DS: And she said it's been very hard to be—to be a mother and to have her seven children without any support. They've lived in—in the country and she had all her children at home. And something that she mentioned earlier that really struck me is that she has, you know, out of all of her children, four live here and none of them are as excited about running a business as she is. Her—her daughter has always worked in—in food and works, you know, with her and actually has other businesses in La Cocina, but it's not something that she's passionate about, which I

think has been a source of—it's been rather difficult, you know, to be so passionate about something and to not have someone to be able to take that on.

00:30:12

[Question] You said that your children are not very passionate neither about the food nor the business. What do you think about that? What do you—?

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MCF: *[Spanish]* I feel sad. I feel sad when I know that something is not going to come true. I feel sad because they do not share the joy that I feel for my food, to be on television, to be in this—They don't. My children don't—They see me as—I don't know. This is the worst sadness that I have. It hurts my heart to know that my children don't support me in this aspect— They don't value it. I don't know why. I don't understand why if they have grown up by my side and I have never left them. We have walked from one country to another, always with a business, but I don't know why they don't like what I do. I feel that they don't like it because— Well, my daughter is working with sales, but if you ask her about my food, she doesn't know how to explain it, because she can't. As I said before, she doesn't like cooking. My son, José, helps me with what he can but it's not his passion either. It makes me sad because tomorrow, when I am not here, all my work is going to the garbage. The same happened in Mexico. In Mexico after I made my business famous and everything, all went downhill. I left and everything was gone. Nothing was done because neither one of them like it. I left it to my oldest son and his wife. Before a month was up, everything was gone. And they left the business with nothing. They quit. It was a huge gazebo that fit more than fifty tables. There was a parking area for more than fifty cars, made by me. And it was a famous place. The most famous place there in the town of Guajaca. It was famous because I was the first one to build a huge gazebo there in Mexico. We

had live music but I was the only one who served, always, but my children never liked it. And this is very sad.

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DS: She said that one of the biggest tragedies in her life is that her children aren't as passionate about food or about, you know, their business as she is. And it makes her the most sad because when she thinks about, you know, if she's not here tomorrow, it's all going to disappear, all of her hard work and passion and everything that she's put into this business is going to disappear because there is no one to carry it on afterwards. And that happened, actually, with the business in Mexico that when she came to San Francisco she left a couple of her children in charge of the business over there and, you know, they—she built a very, very large and famous establishment and within a month, you know, it was gone. And so, for her, she just wishes that there was someone that was as passionate about what she's doing and someone that could carry it on afterwards.

00:33:21

AE: Would she—since her family isn't interested, would she take on apprentice from the outside to—to teach her recipes?

00:33:29

DS: [*Question*] Since your family is not interested in your business or in your food, have you thought about having an apprentice or somebody who can continue with the business?

00:33:43

MCF: [*Spanish*] Now my idea is, I say, to sell it if there's somebody who would buy it. Sell it, because you never know if you are not here tomorrow. It would hurt me that all the sacrifice

went to the garbage. Because I have more than 100 stores where I distribute the banana chips and I tell my daughter that this is a little gold mine, that she has five kids, that she could sell it, but she says she doesn't like it. What you do does not please me. Yes, they help me but I can't say that they like it. I tell her that I am going to leave the business to her and my son José, because they are the ones who help me the most. But they both tell me not to worry about them, that I can sell it so that you can enjoy your money or do something else. Don't give us this responsibility because we don't want this. It is very sad. It is very sad to me.

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DS: She's thought about selling the business because the thought of it all going to waste, all the sacrifice is very sad and so she's—she's talked to her two older children, Estrellita and José, about giving them the business and leaving it to them if anything should happen to her, and they are not interested. They don't want that responsibility, and it's not something that they're interested in doing. They'd rather she sell it and be able to sort of enjoy the returns from that. But she says it's just a heartbreak for them to not be as interested in it and for it to go to waste.

00:35:27

AE: Well, with the success she had with the restaurant and owning land in Mexico how and why—how did she get to San Francisco and why San Francisco?

00:35:38

DS: [*Question*] How did you decide to come to San Francisco? Why did you choose San Francisco, and why did you decide to leave your restaurant in Mexico?

00:35:50

MCF: [*Spanish*] Because when I left El Salvador, I had the idea, the illusion of coming to the United States, but when somebody offered to bring me, they would bring me with only two of my children, and I said no. When I can cross the border with my four children, I will go. So, I stayed put in Guajaca, that's where I opened my business, but I have always dreamed about coming to the United States. One day, a man passed by bringing people, and he asked me if I could take a lady in Tapachula. "Ah, yes," I said. "I have Mexican papers, and I am going to dress like a Mexican." Since one knows the traditions of crossing the borders and since I was friends with the immigration people, so I told them that I was coming by a certain day, that I was going to bring a lady with me and that I was going to tell them that she was my mother. And that is how I went to get the lady, and I was able to cross the border with her. So her family told me that if I took her to Tijuana, they would pay for my crossing the border. And that's how we arrived in Tijuana. And I said, "I am already here, in Tijuana." And I told my daughter that the business was going to stay there. Anyway, tomorrow when I die, everything is going to remain there. I have the opportunity to arrive at the United States, I will arrive at the United States with or without money. I came with 1,000 Mexican pesos. And I did it! I crossed over with a suitcase and nobody asked me anything. I crossed over as if I were legal. And I bought my ticket afraid that they would arrest the lady that I was bringing. And I kept thinking that they were going to arrest the lady, and I didn't know what I was going to do to arrive there. God will say. Nothing happened. I was able to cross over walking with the lady that was supposed to be my mother. We crossed the border and right there I bought my ticket to Santana. And from Santana, they brought us to Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, the lady did not want to pay for the crossing. So I told her, "No, you either pay for the crossing, or I will take you back. I have Mexican papers. I am married to a Mexican, and they will not do anything to me." I was strong. And that's how the

lady paid. When I was in San Francisco already, the first area where I lived was in Daly City. I knew a lady from when I was a girl, and she treated me the worst. She sent me to sleep in the basement. She denied me food and my diabetes was at 300, I fainted, I used to get up at four o'clock in the morning. I used to go to bed at two o'clock in the morning. This lady exploited me for three months. And she would make fun of me saying that I should get to know other places, but I had no idea where to go to. But one day, I said, "No, I have to get out and learn how to get to a bar, to work—." Because I heard the lady's conversation. Because they isolate somebody who has just arrived—our own people, the people from El Salvador. So one day, I remembered a tale that my dad used to tell us when I was a girl. He said that when we don't want to get lost, we should tie bags of sweets on our path to be able to go back from where we left. So, I remembered this tale that my dad used to tell me. So, the lady gave me ten pesos—ten dollars. And now, where do I go to? I looked at the streets, and they all looked alike. So I remembered and bought a bag of sweets. Everywhere I passed by, I tied a little bag of sweets on the way. I tied sweets everywhere, because the sweets were not going anywhere. And so I arrived on the top of the hill, and I saw a bar. And I asked myself, "Now what? What am I going to do?" The bar looked so big that I was afraid. So I asked a young man if he spoke Spanish. And he said that everybody spoke Spanish there. Since [the lady] had said that nobody spoke Spanish, I would cry and I was afraid. He asked me if I had any cash. "Yes, I have twenty dollars." It was a lie. I didn't know—. And he asked, "Does it bother you if I give you ten dollars?" "No", I said. Then he told me to put two dollars to get passes and that was going to give me a pass to take me to a bar. "So, where do I get out?" I thought, "Where the wind takes me to." I didn't know where I was going to and where I was going to arrive at. But when I got on the bus, a man told me, "Don't pay." And I said, "I am glad you speak Spanish." And I told him my story. Then the man told me that he was

an evangelical and that he was going to talk to me in English and in Spanish in every bus stop. He kept me in the bus all day long. He said, “This is the 24 [Street]. You can get out.” Then he gave me a lot of passes and told me to look at the numbers. “Can you read?” he asked. And I said, “Yes,” I told him. “So, pay attention to the bus number. I am going to come back for you and take you back to where I got you from.” So, I sat down on the 24 [Street] and I told a man that I was looking for a job. The sad part is that I was hungry. I looked at McDonald’s, but they told me that they did not speak Spanish. I looked at Chinese food, but I could only look—here and there. “And how can I eat if they don’t speak Spanish? What am I going to do to eat?” I was embarrassed to ask until a man told me that in a bar they needed a bartender. “Do you speak Spanish?” I said, “Yes!” He said, “Come to work tomorrow.” “I have never worked with a cash register, but if you teach me I can learn fast.” I said. “And tell me what I have to do that I learn fast.” And that’s how I started working. And when I left, I would sleep at the bus stop. When I was bored, I would go down the street, to the 16 [Street] and come back. I slept in parks some days. It was very hard. It is very sad. But thank God I didn’t get any alcohol addiction or anything. Everything for me is embroidering and making dolls from the napkins. I sold them for fifty dollars. I would embroider things, little fabric tablecloths—I know how to make those. And I would embroider things and sell them, over there in the Mission. People would buy all the little tablecloths that I embroidered.

00:41:38

DS: So she originally left Mexico because she had this opportunity—she had Mexican papers because her husband was Mexican, and she had this opportunity to escort a woman across the border because she had papers and she could—she was going to pretend that it was her mother.

And she said that she would do it on the condition that they would take her to the U.S. and that they would find a place for her and eventually in San Francisco.

00:42:14

And so she—she did it. They were able to pass the border with no problems. In Los Angeles they tried to swindle her, but she told them she would send her packing if they did that, and so she eventually ended up in San Francisco living with a woman who is very—very cruel to her and so, you know, she was trying to figure out a way to get out and she, you know, would walk the—or before she—she figured out a way—she remembered that story that her father had told her about, I think, a fairy tale where the kids would wrap or tie candies and then sort of drop them like bread crumbs or like Hansel and Gretel, and so she bought a bag of candies with ten dollars that this woman she was staying with had given her, did that, and she ended up at the top of a hill in Daly City and this man approached her and he spoke Spanish, and she was shocked because they had told her no one in San Francisco spoke Spanish. And he explained to her the bus system. He gave her ten dollars to add to those other ten dollars that the woman had given her and explained the [bus] transfer system. And so he went with her and he explained each stop in Spanish and English so that she would start to understand what the names meant. And then they got to 24th Street, and he left her there and he explained to her that he could be back to pick her up along this bus [route] at this time. And she sat at the bus stop for a while and was starving but didn't know how to ask for food because they had again told her that no one spoke Spanish. So she was looking at McDonald's and, you know, wanting to go in but didn't know how she would communicate. She looked at all the Chinese restaurants. Again, didn't know how to communicate.

00:44:19

And she was sitting at the bus stop and a man approached her, and she said that she was looking for a job and he mentioned that there is a bar down the street that was looking. And she asked if they spoke Spanish, which they did, and so she started working there at nights, and she learned how to operate a cash register, which she had never done, and learned how to tend bar. And then, during the days, she would sleep either at the bus stop or in the parks, and she would make these dolls out of napkins and then sell them to the drunk bar patrons for fifty dollars each. **[Laughs]** And she would also, with the money, buy thread and material and would embroider things. She embroiders pillows and tablecloths, which she would then sell to be able to make a little bit of money on the side.

00:45:12

AE: So let's talk about Estrellita's Snacks. Maria that's such an amazing story—life story, but so she came to San Francisco and worked in bars and made dolls out of napkins and then started selling fried plantains? Is that how the business started?

00:45:33

DS: Yes, so she would sell, yeah—I can ask her? I've heard this story so many times. **[Question]** How did you start selling the banana chips? It was because you arrived in San Francisco and started to work in bars and to sell the banana chips, right? It was the first thing you started to...

00:45:57

MCF: **[Spanish]** It was the first thing I started to do with twenty dollars. One day my grandson asked me “Grandma do you have a dollar?” So I told him “I only have twenty dollars but, since you are a little boy, we are going to ask God to help us to grow this bill. And tomorrow we are

going to use it”. I did not know what to use it for. I went to bed and I asked God to enlighten my mind to find out what to do with twenty dollars. Early next morning my grandson told me “Grandma is morning already. Did the bill grow up?” “No,” I told him, “We are going to go to the store, and there is where God is going to tell me what I have to do.” When I arrived at the store with the twenty dollars, I remembered that in El Salvador I used to make the banana chips. So I bought ten pounds of bananas, oil and plastic bags—those that make a “click” [when you close them]. I started to fry the bananas in a small frying pan, and I went out to sell them. That day, just that day, with my twenty dollars, I made 200 dollars. I sold them cheap—that was a time when I used to sell them cheap, we used to sell them really cheap, two dollars per bag—one dollar for the small bags, and two dollars for the big bags. The next day I bought a banana box [of bananas]. The next day I bought two. The next day—. Then the stores started to ask me for some. I was the first one in San Francisco selling banana chips. Nowadays, I have a lot of competition. There are people who have come to work and to learn [how to make the banana chips], but theirs are not the same. And I tell them, this is such a big country that we do not have enough, meaning that there are not enough banana chips sellers—even when some people sell their banana chips cheaper—I sell it more expensive because qualities are different, that is why we have a lot of costumers. People love my banana chips.

00:47:40

DS: So it all started with she had—she had twenty dollars, and her—her grandson asked her for one dollar, and she told him that she only had this twenty dollars—that they were going to pray for—for that twenty dollars to grow even bigger. And so she spent the day trying to figure out how they were going to do that. The next morning her grandson asked her if it had grown and it had not, and so they went to the store to figure out, you know, how they were going to do that.

When she got there, she remembered that in El Salvador she used to make the tostada chips, and so she bought ten pounds of plantain chips, oil, the little bags, and then a very small pan, fried up all ten pounds of plantains, and in that first day she made 200 dollars from that initial twenty.

00:48:32

So then she kept doing that every day—would sell the plantain chips—and then pretty soon, all the stores started asking her to carry them. And she was the first person in San Francisco to bring the tostada chips to stores as a packaged product. And now there's a lot of competition, but they don't taste the same. They don't taste as good and, you know, the U.S. is so big and there's so much opportunity for people to do similar things that there's, you know, a lot of opportunity to be able to go around, so that doesn't worry her too much.

00:49:08

AE: So can—can we go over the timeline quickly? Do I remember—did she say she got to San Francisco in 1997? Is that right?

00:49:16

DS: That's correct.

00:49:18

AE: And then when she first started selling the plantain chips and then when she connected with La Cocina?

00:49:26

DS: [*Question*] Can you describe to me when— What year did you start selling the banana chips? And when did you start with “La Cocina”. What was the—?

00:49:37

MCF: [*Spanish*] I started to sell on the street in 2002, and in 2005 I arrived at La Cocina. I had my restaurant in 2003 but because of lack of good information, I failed and I lost about \$15,000 and I was at zero point again. But that was not—Yes, you need money and everything—because there are people who know that you do not know how to start a business in the United States, those people took advantage of my ignorance and flew away with my \$15,000. But I continued to work and with my banana chip bags. Being so close to La Cocina, I did not know what La Cocina was until a friend told me that La Cocina was there. At that point Veronica Salazar, from [the La Cocina-supported business] “Huarache Loco” was there. I asked how to be part of La Cocina, and she is the one who gave me all the information to get in. And in 2005 when I graduated from ALAS [Al Llegar a San Francisco (ALAS); Women’s Initiative for Self-Employment (WISE)]—I graduated from ALAS, because I went to study at ALAS, it helped me to understand the business here in the United States. And that is how I arrived to La Cocina in 2005.

00:50:43

DS: Okay. So she arrived in 1997 and started selling the tostada chips in 2002. In 2003, she tried opening a restaurant and invested about \$15,000 with a business partner, who eventually took advantage of her, not understanding the—the permitting and sort of the industry here in San Francisco and then made off with the investment that she had made, which left her back at having nothing.

00:51:17

And in 2005, she had been living here across the street from La Cocina and didn't know it existed and someone in the building mentioned—mentioned it and at that time Veronica [Salazar], one of our first participants who runs [El Huarache Loco], she had just started, and Maria approached her and asked her, you know, “How do I apply?” And Veronica gave her all of the information. And then she went to one of our partner organizations, Women's Initiative for Self Employment, who has a Spanish-language program called Alas, and she worked on the business plan there, and they sort of helped her navigate how to start a food—start a business in San Francisco and what that meant, and then she applied to La Cocina to further be able to work on her food business.

00:52:05

AE: And now she's—she's obviously a La Cocina success story or one of a few, I'm sure.

00:52:11

DS: Absolutely, she—Maria is really one of the most entrepreneurial people that I have ever met.

00:52:19

AE: So what is that—that determination, that never-give-up spirit?

00:52:25

DS: [*Question*] You said you loved the business and you have been successful in your life. Where do you find that energy, that effort? Where does it come from?

00:52:43

MCF: [*Spanish*] God gives it to me. Because sometimes I feel like I am falling down. You have seen me crying while I answer the questions. Sometimes I feel desperate, but at the same time I go to bed and ask God, saints and angels to give me strength and energy. For example, yesterday when I went to the doctor, the doctors said that I looked like I was going to a party because I was happy. Yesterday I woke up really happy and renewed. When I feel that I am going to faint is when my children— Because sometimes my children do not share what I do. That is when I feel that I am going down but— But then I say to myself, “No! I got to be me and do things because of me, I do not have to think about someone else, my kids, my family or my brothers. I got to be me.” And that makes me have energy and be positive. I have failed, I have lost two restaurants, I have lost a lot of money but, it does not make me faint, quite the opposite, it gives me strength to show I can go on and that always I got to be me, and that I should not be negative.

00:54:02

DS: So it's—she believes that it comes from—from God. You know, she has experienced a lot in her life and, you know, on a daily basis she—she cries. There's, you know, something happened in La Cocina, the business, you know, there is always something going on, but she just—but she just doesn't let that get her down. She said that she—she went to the doctor yesterday, and they told her it looked like she was going to a party—that she was, you know, energetic, that she was glowing, that she was happy, and she had this sense of energy and it's—she just, you know, it—it comes from her. And sometimes she gets very sad that—when her children aren't interested in the business and are not passionate about it. You know, she's lost two restaurants, had a lot of trouble in her life, but she—instead of using that or letting that get

her down, she uses it as a source and more motivation to keep going as a source of energy. And, you know, she can spend time worrying about other people and thinking about what's not working but, at the end of the day, she just needs to focus on herself and keep herself going.

00:55:24

AE: Is she familiar with the term *soul food*, and would she consider the food she makes soul food?

00:55:30

DS: [*Question*] Do you know what soul food is? It's something like food for your soul— In general, it is food from the south of the United States—it's the kind of my made by Dionne [Knox of Zella's Soulful Kitchen] and by Fernay [McPherson of Minnie Bell's Soul Movement]. Do you know them? Yes? What does it mean to you?

00:55:56

MCF: [*Spanish*] It's something that—I think it's something God gives to everyone—something as being creative with food, it's—it's a passion. For example, me and the typical food in El Salvador—there are two types of pupusas, but I have ten different kinds of pupusas that nobody makes in El Salvador. It is just now that I am selling these kinds of pupusas here in San Francisco. Every night when I go to bed, I am thinking about what I am going to be cooking next day— something creative, something that is not in restaurants that nobody else has. To me all these [ideas] come out of my head —it's— It's—how can I explain it myself? It's like God is telling me what I need to do. I think He also gives people a passion about cooking food— Because just by myself, I cook on two grills. How? I do not know. I do not know how just by

myself I can prepare the dough and do this and that. My mom used to say that she did not know how I had all this imagination and how I was able to do so many things at the same time. She used to say that my ears were in the back of my head and my eyes in the front, but it is the way I am. I am often mad at my kids because —, but you got to be like that. I think it's a gift, a gift that you are born with because of God— to have all these skills. Out of twelve brothers, just one sister that is in Oregon, she also knows cooking like me, but nobody else has these skills. She likes to work; she does not want me to put a business for her. Cooking is a passion that is inside of you.

00:57:52

DS: She thinks that—that passion for food is something that, you know, everyone is blessed with. It's something that comes from within and a gift that people are given. So, you know, and her family is not as passionate about the food it's—it's because they don't have that sort of passion in their soul or that, you know, love of food and energy and imagination.

00:58:19

In El Salvador there are typically only two kinds of *pupusas*, and she serves ten different kinds, which is a testament to—to how passionate she is about inventing new flavors and—and constantly growing and learning about food and, you know, her—her mom used to also—was just amazed at the sort of lack of an end to her creativity. And so that's sort of her take on soul food is that it comes from the people that make it, from like deep within them, and it's a gift that they've been given to be able to make food so passionately.

00:59:05

AE: Did we just get a delivery of plantain chips? [*Laughs*] So let's talk a little bit about—more about the food because it's not just the snacks and the plantain chips but the pupusas and tamales

wrapped in banana leaves, and I made a note of the beef liver and onions. Can we talk about some of those things?

00:59:25

DS: [*Question*] Beside pupusas, tamales and tostadas, you do a lot of other meals. She took notes about the liver with onions and salsa that you make. Can you talk about more about things like that?

00:59:44

MCF: [*Spanish*] We also make chicken with onions, liver with onions, beef stew. I have a good variety of tamales that we cook too. I can also make you Mexican food, Guajaca food, everything that is from Guajaca, thanks to God, I learned it too. Tamales Huatantecos—I learned how to make them. As I told you, I love cooking so, wherever I go I learn just by seeing. I can make a wedding cake, a quinceañeros cake [cake for fifteen-year-old girls]. And what I learned in Mexico was through a hole in a wall, because they did not want to teach me. A woman was cooking all the cakes while I had to wash all the dishes. So I told her “I am going to pay you to teach me how to make cakes, because mine are—.” “No, that is something I cannot teach you,” she said. Mmm—This woman does not know me. So through the hole in the wall, I was looking at all the measures she was using. That is how I learned to make wedding cakes, quinceañeros. I learned how to weave. Since I really like crafts, if there is something that I see, as a flower or something I imagine it and I do it. As I told you, just by seeing, the same with the food, just by tasting the food, I know what is on it and, I know that I can do it. Sometimes, when there are classes at La Cocina, there is a guy who does not want people looking around but, just by looking at the plate he is washing, I know what he puts in his food, and I know I am going to be

able to do it. When we teach, I love it too because all the people I have taught leave the class so happy and excited for all the things I taught them how to do. I would like, someday, not to have my business and, like you, to have an organization that provides support to Latino women who suffer because they do not know how to do their things. Because sometimes, when they are in their countries, they go to school but their mother or father does not teach them how to cook or how to make crafts. I would like to teach others. It would be something extra to my passion for cooking, to teach other people how to go on with their lives.

01:02:00

DS: All right. [*Laughs*] So she makes a lot of other typical El Salvadorian dishes like the liver and—and onions and chicken and onions and a lot of other *guisadas*, which are meats stewed in sauces. She also makes Mexican food from Oaxaca; it's where her restaurant was in Mexico, and so she can—she can make that as well. And really, any food that she can taste, she can recreate.

01:02:34

So she—she loves trying foods from—from other cultures and sort of sitting in on some of the cooking classes that we have at La Cocina because, you know, just with one taste, she can tell what's in it and things that, you know, she recreates it.

01:02:52

And she would someday really love—it's been like that in all parts of her life, you know, and when she was in El Salvador she was helping a woman. She was washing dishes for a bakery, and she asked the woman to teach her how to make the cakes, like she would pay her to teach her, and she turned it down. And so while the woman would prepare the cakes, she would sort of peer in through a hole in the wall and watch all the measurements, and then that's how she learned to recreate it. So that's how she knows how to make cakes.

01:03:24

The same with sewing and embroidery, and so she eventually would love to be able to work with an organization that, you know, works with women on sort of household and artisan skills to be able to teach women how to cook, to embroider, to do all these things that sometimes they don't—they aren't able to pick up in their countries in Latin America, so that when they come here, they can gain those skills.

01:03:52

[Maria and Daniella gesture to help get something that's fallen on the floor.]

AE: I dropped my pen. That's fine. So I would like to know—and we can wind up here because I know we're probably all exhausted from this long conversation, but it's been fabulous. But what would she tell young women who—who came from a place similar to where she came from and her experiences and what would she—what advice would she give them?

01:04:14

DS: *[Question]* What advice would you give to other Latino women who have come to the United States from other countries of Latin America?

01:04:28

MCF: *[Spanish]* I advise them that like in our countries, where there are a lot of things that we can do, we can do it here too. Here we do not need—Myself, for example, I do not know English, but it has not been an obstacle for me to say, “I cannot do this, I cannot enter to this

place because I do not know English”. If they understand mute people, it is not possible that they do not understand what I am saying! I tell to all women, Latinos or not, and to anybody who wants to go on, I tell them that “el querer es poder” [“Where there is will there, there is a way”]. Here in this country, everything you make can be sold. You can cut a Coca-Cola bottle and make plastic flowers to sell here in the Mission. I know it because I have done it. You can buy a yard of fabric, make something nice to the edges and, you can sell it for five dollars. There are many ways to make money. I used to sell tamales, pupusas and little cakes in bars just to go on. And I am going on with my life. I am not ashamed of picking up a plastic bottle or a can from the floor, because I know that is money. And I got to sell it. Why should I be ashamed? In my country I used to carry big baskets with food on top of my head. That is how we work over there. You do not have to be ashamed. But there are people that because they are here, they are ashamed of wearing clothing from their countries, or they are ashamed of wearing an apron. Once you are in the United States, people are ashamed of doing a lot of things, but not me. That is why I have been able to go on. I do not have a lot of things or millions but, I am happy and, I do not depend on my children or a partner. I live with my son but, I pay my rent, my bills, my cars, I know how to drive. In a little bit I will apply for a license *[Laughs]*. I have not had obstacles. It would be like saying, “I cannot drive this car—It is not possible that I cannot drive it. I have even crashed with my kitchen *[Laughs]* but, there has not been an obstacle that I cannot overcome. I plan my life and I say, “I am going to do this because I can”. How is it that I am going to do it? I do not know, but I do it. So that is the advice I give to many people. The government in this country helps a lot of people, maybe because they have kids, or for other reason, or because they are crazy looking for money. It makes you to have an easy life and, easy is not good, is not the same as earning it the money. My advice is that there are, there are many organizations that help you

to learn; I would support people who want to learn how to cook, I can teach them how to cook, how to weave, how knit, things you can do to make an honest living without harming anybody. Until this day, I thank God because I have not depended on help from the government and, I hope not to need it and continue fighting to go on with my life.

01:07:38

DS: So I'm going to rely very heavily on the transcript to give life to Maria's eloquence but briefly, she—what she would tell other Latinas coming to this country is that a lot of times there's a tendency to be embarrassed or timid about the fact that they don't speak English and that they don't know how things operate in this country. But, for Maria, it's—it's *que eres es poder*, which is, you know, to want is to be able to do. And so she does not speak any English [*Laughs*] as you can tell through this interview, but it's never been an obstacle for her.

01:08:22

And I've actually heard her, a lot of times, say that her food is how she communicates with people and it's—it's definitely true. But you don't need to be able to speak English to be able to operate. You know, you—you're able to communicate in other ways to get your point across and to make yourself understood. And what she admires most about the U.S. is that you can sell anything. You could take a Coke bottle and cut it in half and make it into a flower and into a vase, and people would buy it. She—and she knows because she's done it. [*Laughs*]

01:08:59

And, you know, there's always an opportunity, and there is always a way to make money and to—to grow and so for her that's—that's really what's most amazing about the U.S.. And the advice she would give other women is to not let things intimidate you or stand in your way—that there is always a way to make it happen.

01:09:23

AE: Will you ask her—and we can end on this note, unless she has something to add, and I have a feeling she might—but will you ask her what she dreams about now?

01:09:31

DS: [*Question*] What are your dreams? What are your dreams right now?

01:09:37

MCF: [*Spanish*] [*Laughs*] [*Emphasis Added*] My dream is still far away. [*Laughs*] Well, right now my dream—and I hope it does not take longer than this year—is to obtain my driver's license to drive, because I am driving like this [without license] because I have not had enough time. I want to get wherever God tells me. I know I suffer from diabetes. Sometimes I am fine. Sometimes I do not feel well, but I do not give up. I ask God to give me one more chance that he is already giving me and, let me have it again. [*Laughs*] If there is an opportunity, but I know there is. God gives second chances. English just do not stay [in my head] because it is really hard because I did not go to elementary school. I know how to read and how to write—more less because in El Salvador there was an elementary school but my mom used to send me to sell and, hidden [from her] I used to go to learn with “ABC” book and, that is how I learned a little bit of reading and writing. But as I am telling you, it is not an obstacle. I thank God because my food speaks all the languages I cannot speak. It helps me. I always say, people should try my food and, if they like it, that's it, we are selling in all the markets. Thanks to God.

01:11:07

DS: So, first on her list is that she'd like to get her driver's license. She's almost there and, actually, I forgot to include this in the—in her answer before, but she's slowly been learning how

to drive and sort of had an accident in front of La Cocina in which she crashed into the garage door. [*Laughs*] So it's been a process.

01:11:30

She would also really like to be featured in a movie again someday and, lastly, she talked about, you know, being able to communicate a little bit more in English. She can sort of read and write in Spanish. She—when she was a kid, she couldn't afford to go to school, but her mom would send her to sell at the schools and she would hide and—and learn while she was there selling. And I think this is a really great note to end on, but she, again, reiterates it's never been an obstacle for her to not be able to—to speak English—that her food speaks all of the languages that she isn't able to speak.

01:12:31

AE: Perfect, but I will ask you to ask her if she has anything to add that we didn't talk about.

01:12:38

DS: [*Question*] Is there anything else you want to say?

01:12:45

MCF: [*Spanish*] I want to thank you for making time and for your patience, Daniella. God bless you and, to her, too, for being patient and for recording me. To me, it was another present from God having this chance to talk about my story. And I would like to—my last dream is to be able to record my entire childhood story because I cannot write it down—or someone who helps me to write it, or write a book, that is another dream I have. Writing a book with the stories I have lived in my childhood, [those stories] are unbelievable, no anyone has seen what I have seen.

01:13:27

DS: She just wants to end by thanking us for our interest and patience in her story and doing this interview. And sort of one of her ultimate dreams is to have someone record her childhood and her life because a lot of people that have not experienced or seen the things that she has—and she would like someone to be able to record all of that and to create a book. And she would love to be able to eventually share that with her grandchildren and with everyone, really.

01:13:57

AE: Well, I hope this is a start. We'll share this with you and [*Spanish*]— ¡Qué magnífica! Or magnífico, I do not know, but muchas, muchas gracias, Maria.

01:14:07

MCF: [*Spanish*] Thanks for supporting me and for giving me this opportunity of recording part of my story, part of my life because I love talking and telling my stories about what I have been through. I thank God, as I told you, because I do not have money but I am happy—. With the little things God gives us we can go on. So far I have no debts and the little things God has given to me, is what I have. It's a big opportunity that God has given me.

01:14:42

DS: She just, again, wants to thank us for—really you, for the opportunity to tell her story. And that, you know, she thinks it's amazing she doesn't have any money, but she's happy. And she doesn't owe anyone anything, and everything that she's built has been from her, and it's been really a blessing to be able to do that in her life.

01:15:02

AE: Well, thank you, both. Many, many thanks, Daniella, for being here, and muchas gracias, Maria.

01:15:08

[End Maria Carmen Del Flores]