

LIZETH ALONSO
La Michoacana – Nashville, Tennessee

Date: March 14, 2016
Location: Casa Azafrán community center
Interviewer: Jennifer Justus
Transcription: Deborah Mitchum
Length: 29:12
Project: Nashville's Nolensville Road

Interviewee: Lizeth Alonso
Interviewer: Jennifer Justus
Interview Date: March 14, 2016
Location: Nashville, TN
Length: Three audio files; 00:29:12

START OF INTERVIEW

[00:00:00]

Jennifer Justus: Okay, this is Jennifer Justus. It's March 14, 2016 and we are at Casa Azafrán, and I'm with Lizeth Alonso of La Michoacana, and I'll ask you to please say your name and date of birth.

[00:00:14]

Lizeth Alonso: Lizeth Alonso, and I [was] born in 1990, May 17.

[00:00:18]

JJ: Great. Okay, and to start will you just tell me about the shop.

[00:00:23]

LA: Okay. My dad's ice cream shop start about seven months ago, and it's here in Nashville, Tennessee, close to—. Well actually it's in the Nolensville Road. We have a lot of things, not just for Hispanic people, but we have products for people from other countries and we like to show them what we've been grow up. We have a little bit of everything and everything's fresh.

[00:00:57]

JJ: Okay. So it's ice cream and—.

[00:01:00]

LA: Popsicles.

[00:01:01]

JJ: Paletas?

[00:01:02]

LA: Yes, paletas. We also have some yogurts, some mangonadas. People love the mangonadas. It's kind of mango ice cream with Chamoy and chile stuff, and they're getting famous. *[Laughs]*

[00:01:15]

JJ: So, it's mango ice cream with—what was the second part?

[00:01:19]

LA: Chamoy. It's like tamarind sauce.

[00:01:21]

JJ: Okay.

[00:01:22]

LA: Kind of sour and sweet at the same time.

[00:01:24]

JJ: Sour and sweet and the same time. So, how did your family decide to start the shop?

[00:01:31]

LA: Well, my dad used to work for a guy in Mexico a very long time ago. He worked for many years with him and then he decide to move to United States, so he move over here. Well, he actually move to California and then he move over here to start a new chapter, and then my oldest brother came up with the idea, so they worked together and talked with the people with a franchise and, you know.

[00:02:06]

JJ: Okay. So, your dad moved to California first, or—

[00:02:10]

LA: Yes.

[00:02:10]

JJ: —the man he worked with? Your dad.

[00:02:12]

LA: Yes.

[00:02:13]

JJ: Okay. And then were you—? Let's see. Did you come with him at that time?

[00:02:19]

LA: No. He came when he was about fifteen years old, so he was working in United States for a very long time so he just went to Mexico to visit us.

[00:02:32]

JJ: And was his business, before he went into ice cream, was it the food business or not at all?

[00:02:40]

LA: No, he was working in the field in California and in some other jobs.

[00:02:45]

JJ: Okay. So will you tell me about how you came here? You were how old and how did that happen?

[00:02:51]

LA: It was 2002 when I came here with my mom and my sister, and I was almost twelve years old, and we just get together with the family, and that's it. We just stay here in this place.

[00:03:12]

JJ: So you came to Nashville, first place?

[00:03:14]

LA: It was actually in Smyrna.

[00:03:16]

JJ: Okay. So were you happy to be reunited with your dad at that point, brought back with your dad?

[00:03:24]

LA: Yes, because he was like never living with us. He would just go and visit every year—if he can because he wasn't working—my family and his family, like my grandma and my grandfather.

[00:03:37]

JJ: And so, the ice cream business, it was kind of your brother's idea and your dad? Is that right?

[00:03:44]

LA: Yes. My dad always wanted to have one, but he never have like something that push him, you know, because we already all grow up and have family. So my brother like saved some money, so he decide to help a little bit and grow up and have more money so he talked to my dad and they came up with the idea to have the ice cream shop.

[00:04:13]

JJ: And they had worked with somebody who was in ice cream before, in Mexico, is that right?

[00:04:18]

LA: Just my dad, yes. He was working for a guy for many years.

[00:04:22]

JJ: What was that place like? Was it the same kind of shop, or similar?

[00:04:27]

LA: Yes, it was similar. In Mexico, in Michoacán, there's a lot of ice cream shops and some, they compete to each other, but they have kind of the same products. So, he know a lot of recipes so now he just went to Chicago to get more knowledge for, you know, the things change through the years, and now he's ready and he's the owner and he have the family working together for him.

[00:05:00]

JJ: Is that where you were born, Michoacán?

[00:05:03]

LA: No. I [was] born in Sonora, Hermosillo. It's close to the border. But when I [was] born, they moved to Michoacán, which is a little town, so I stayed there for about five years and then I move back to Hermosillo. Then when I was about to turn twelve, we move over here to Nashville.

[00:05:26]

JJ: So what is it about the town, where your dad had worked, what is it about that place that—?Why did they have the ice cream shops?

[00:05:38]

LA: Why did they put it here? Oh, because the Nolensville Road is very busy and a lot of Latinos live in this area and close to it. We have the zoo like behind, and I think it's—. They started the road first, you know. Mm. [Pauses] That's it. [Laughs]

[00:06:02]

JJ: Do you live in the Nolensville Pike area?

[00:06:06]

LA: No. We live in Smyrna. We love that place. We also love Nashville, but we always live in Smyrna.

[00:06:13]

JJ: So, did you expect that you would be in the food business when you moved here?

[00:06:22]

LA: No, never, never. I always knew my dad, that's what he wanted, but I never thought it was becoming true so I was working in warehouses, like my other brothers and my sister. When he start doing the business we were trying just to help him a little bit but never worked there, but when we start working there we love it. Yeah, you know, a lot of people, we learn new stuff, and it feels great to work for your dad. It's not just to help him but, I don't know, it's very satisfactory, seeing people's faces, because I think that's what Nashville or the Hispanic people needed because it's not just an ice cream or a popsicle or other products. It feels great when you see people's faces and [they] say, "Oh, thank you, thank you, because you bring me back memories since I was very little." They bring up a lot of stories and it feels great. I never thought it was like that.

[00:07:30]

JJ: So who all from your family works in the shop?

[00:07:34]

LA: My brother, my oldest brother, my sister, my mom, and that's it. My other brother was working there too, but he decide to go [*Laughs*] to where he used to work before. So, it's just us, but it's all the family and we're together. We work together. We're a team and we're working for the same thing, to [*Pauses*] to have a better life and a better future.

[00:08:12]

JJ: Can you tell me some of the—? Well, first of all, is your clientele mostly Hispanic who live here, or is it all different types of people, or what is the clientele like, and I believe I heard that Sundays are a big day at the shop. Is that right?

[00:08:34]

LA: Yes. Yes, our goal was to get the Hispanics, but now we're trying to get people from here and now we're getting people from other countries, like Asians, Iraq, and people like that, and we love that because they're knowing our culture. And, yes, Sunday is a very, very busy day. I don't know if it's because people get off for church and go there, because it's for the family. It's not just to —. And they also relax and they get what they want. Yeah, Sunday is a very, very busy day. We have a hundred people sometimes. We still have to work on some other stuff because some people wait about fifteen, forty-five minutes. So, it just feels great because they want your product, but we're still, like I say, working on how to get the things better.

[00:09:31]

JJ: Can you tell me about the actual product and what makes it different from the ice cream that you might just find in the grocery store here?

[00:09:43]

LA: Everything is made there and it's not just ice [cream]. We have the quality of the products to make the ice cream or the popsicles. It's not about how much we're going to spend but it's how much we want to give the people. It's like, I know maybe you can go to another place and get it for a cheaper price, but it will never taste the same if you get a cheaper cream or sugar or things like that.

[00:10:10]

JJ: So can you talk a little bit too about the difference in the ice cream and yogurt and the paletas?

[00:10:17]

LA: A little bit different?

[00:10:20]

JJ: Or how those products are different?

[00:10:22]

LA: Well, they're kind of the same, because we have like almost the same flavors, like if we have, like, the very famous ice cream tequila we also have the popsicle, so, and the yogurts, what makes a difference, we put real fruit on it. We only change the yogurt flavor, like strawberry, pecan, or piña colada, and everything is made fresh daily, so people love that. I know they can make it at home but they like, you know, a very different taste.

[00:11:00]

JJ: Are there any stories that you could tell me about people who come in and recognize this product from home, any stories that you remember of people talking about how they appreciate you being here?

[00:11:18]

LA: Yes. We have a lot of people that says that they love our products and we also have people that just came from like Alabama, Kentucky or Indiana just to get our product, and that means a lot. We've been having some families, like we also have two that they have cancer, and there was one little boy that have cancer, and he is on therapies and all this stuff, and they drive all the way here because every day he wants a lime popsicle. So the family makes a road trip just to get here and get the boy that is in a process to get more healthy.

[00:12:03]

JJ: And where do they come from?

[00:12:06]

LA: They came from Kentucky.

[00:12:08]

JJ: And where are they from originally?

[00:12:10]

LA: They're from Mexico, except we don't know what part, but they came here maybe every week just to get this boy happy, and we like that. We like not just to sell for people. We like people to get—. You know, we're like a family, because some people don't have all the family here. So, we know each other and, you know, it's not just customers. Like I say, we're a family. *[Laughs]*

[00:12:41]

JJ: Can you tell me a little bit about your father? I remember you said he went to California and then Chicago. Was he learning about the business in Chicago, or California, or both, or how did that go?

[00:12:57]

LA: No, he know about the business in Mexico, because he used to work for a guy. So, then he stopped what he was doing to get a better future for us, so he moved to California, work in the field, and then he move over here to Tennessee, and then when he decide to get an ice cream shop business he go to Chicago and have more knowledge about the ice cream.

[00:13:28]

JJ: Was that through the franchise that he went to Chicago?

[00:13:32]

LA: No. Well, yes. Yes. And also they're kind of—. Like I said, there's a little town in Mexico, and they're from the same place, so they know each [other's] families. They never [met] before but they know the family, so that's how he get the name of the franchise and get the support also because they help him a lot with the product and creating all the stuff, so that's why we have the kind of ice cream shop he dream about.

[00:14:07]

JJ: So there are other locations of the shop that you have, correct?

[00:14:14]

LA: Yes.

[00:14:15]

JJ: And where are those?

[00:14:16]

LA: In Nashville there's only one. They're trying to figure out and find out if they can put another one in another place. But the other ones are in California, Chicago, Aurora, Illinois, and, I'm pretty sure it's Indiana, but I'm not a hundred percent. [*Laughs*]

[00:14:40]

JJ: Do you have memories of eating ice cream or paletas when you were little in Mexico?

[00:14:48]

LA: Yes. In the town of Michoacán every December they used to give paletas for free. It was like a festival or carnival where people go there in the town and give paletas for free because all of the people who work in the franchise want to give the people back a little bit of what they receive. So, that was every December, and it was pretty awesome because they have like playgrounds, music, and it was really, really beautiful, especially because you spend time with the family.

[00:15:33]

JJ: Do you think you all will do something like that here eventually, maybe? [*Laughs*]

[00:15:39]

LA: I hope so. [*Laughs*]

[00:15:41]

JJ: I'm going to stop this for just one second.

[00:15:50 *Break in recording*]

JJ: Okay, so can you talk a little bit about when you came to Tennessee? How did that work and how did it feel?

[00:00:11]

LA: Well, I was really scared because it was something different, and it feels weird at the beginning because you know I was trying to speak to other kids and have new friends but, you know, the language, it was like a little bit of a struggle. In Mexico we had like a little bit more freedom to play in the streets. It wasn't about the money, you know, because there we played with everything we had. So when we came here, we just stayed at home and we didn't go out a

lot, and my parents [were] always working, and, you know, actually we were just at the house and, you know, it was different. We miss Mexico a lot, and we always be moving because, like I say, when we went—. My first five years, I spent it in one city, and then we moved to another one and then we came here. We love that because all the family was together, because it was separated for many years, so I was happy for that side. For the other one, they [were always] working.

[00:01:32]

JJ: So when you came it was you and your mom and your brother, is that right?

[00:01:38]

LA: No, it was my mom, my sister, and I, yes.

[00:01:43]

JJ: And when did your father move to California?

[00:01:51]

LA: It was in 1976 when he moved to California.

[00:01:56]

JJ: And how did he make that decision?

[00:02:00]

LA: Because he had some family members who move over here, who moved to California, and then he get this job in the field, so he stay there for a couple years, and then he move to Tennessee because he have a friend, and he likes it. He loved to stay here so, you know, here we are.

[00:02:27]

JJ: Did you speak any English when you moved here?

[00:02:30]

LA: No, nothing at all. [*Laughs*] Zero.

[00:02:34]

JJ: Are there places that you feel like you can go, besides your shop, like other restaurants and places where you can go to feel like you're back home in Mexico?

[00:02:50]

LA: Yes, yes. There's a restaurant that I love. It's called Las Cazuelas, and I love that place. It's awesome. It's awesome to spend it with the family too.

[00:03:03]

JJ: Is the food more authentic than some places, maybe?

[00:03:09]

LA: Yes. I love the food, and I love to take my girls. I have three girls and they love to go there too.

[00:03:15]

JJ: Oh, what ages are your girls?

[00:03:17]

LA: The oldest one is six, the other one is two years and two months, and the youngest one is one year and three months.

[00:03:26]

JJ: So are there things that you like to do to try to teach them about your heritage?

[00:03:33]

LA: Yes.

[00:03:34]

JJ: Does food play a big role in that?

[00:03:38]

LA: Yes, because, well, with the oldest one I have a lot of problems, because, you know, she's old and she's very picky, and she likes the food from here. I don't have nothing bad with that, but she's kind of picky, [*Laughs*] like I say, and I try to teach them how to eat different stuff, and natural.

[00:04:03]

JJ: Do you cook at home very often?

[00:04:07]

LA: No. [*Laughs*] I try my best but I work for many hours in the ice cream shop, so. I almost live there. Right now I'm not spending a lot of time with my family, with my girls, but I know it's for a better future too.

[00:04:25]

JJ: What are your roles? Can you kind of describe for me what your day is like at the shop?

[00:04:31]

LA: Very busy. My mom [*is*] the one that runs the place. She does a little bit of everything and now I'm trying to help her because she's getting old. She's not the same and, like I say, we didn't have enough money to have many employees, so I'm trying to help her so she don't get tired because at the beginning she used to work for about maybe eighteen hours. She had some breaks but she worked for many hours, and now I'm trying to do that, and I still get tired, but I know that things will get better. It's only about seven, eight months that we have the

ice cream shop, so I'm just waiting for that [*Laughs*] to happen, so I know we have to work hard and give her a hundred percent.

[00:05:24]

JJ: Are you making the ice cream, and serving the ice cream, and talking with the customers?

[00:05:30]

LA: No, I don't make the ice cream. My dad and my brother make the ice cream, he makes the popsicles; I just make the fresh waters and I serve the customers, and I'm also like the manager of the other girls and have everything done, clean, and everything, you know, where it's supposed to. That's what I do.

[00:05:53]

JJ: What do you like most about the work, and what do you like least about the work?

[00:06:00]

LA: What I like, it's—. I like to do—. I like to organize, that's what I love, and I love the way it feels. You know, I can pick up trash, and clean, you know, everything. I love to have everything organized. Now I have the—. They give me the power to make schedules, to be, like I say, more organized in everything, you know, from the small to the biggest things. So, that's what I love, and the less is that I have to work a lot. [*Laughs*] But, you know, I feel very happy. I feel very happy to help them because sometimes they're very busy. They don't have time to think about other things. So I know I'm in the back of them trying to have everything ready so they don't have to worry about.

[00:06:54]

JJ: Do you feel like in a way you're helping represent Mexico here?

[00:06:58]

LA: Yes.

[00:07:00]

JJ: And how is that? Can you talk a little bit about that?

[00:07:05]

LA: We represent Mexico, like I say, with the products, because so many things are made there. And some other cities are similar, and what we have here, it's like we have a little bit of everything to give the option to the people to make it their own idea or, you know. It's kind of like a Subway. You have a little bit of everything and you know what you want to put on there.

[00:07:41]

JJ: Great. Well, is there anything else that you want to tell me about your shop or about yourself or your experience coming here?

[00:07:54]

LA: My experience coming here is —. It's—. [*Pauses*]

[00:08:17 *Break in recording*]

JJ: Okay, so just a couple more questions. Can we talk about food that you had growing up and what your experiences around food were like when you were younger, before you came here, and how it's different now? So, what was it like—? What were your experiences around food when you were younger?

[00:00:27]

LA: My experiences? Hmm. I wasn't—. Well, I never learned how to cook in Mexico, so I just—and I've never been picky, so I have a little bit of two cultures. Like, it was, you know, Mexico but, like I say, I grew up in two different cities so they were completely different. So

when we came here, it was another type of food. Like I say, my family was working, my parents, and it was kind of hard because you know when we came here it was kind of getting more fast foods. So, I think the food is very important to get, you know, healthy and, you know, everything, learn how to cook. Sorry about my English. *[Laughs]*

[00:01:29]

JJ: No, it's good. It's good. Can you tell me a little bit about how the two cultures were different in the two places that you lived when you were younger?

[00:01:43]

LA: Yes. One is in Sonora, the one close to the border. Everything is like made with *[Pauses]* *[Unintelligible]*, like tortillas or things like that, and corn, and the other place is more like bread, rice, and on everything they put avocado, maybe because that's the place of the avocado, and it's more—. The climate was completely different. You know, the other one was the opposite. It was like a desert. It was really hot all the time and we have a lot of oranges.

[Laughs]

[00:02:24]

JJ: That was in the second place.

[00:02:25]

LA: Yes.

[00:02:26]

JJ: Okay. Great. And then can you tell me [some] of your favorite foods from home—well, from Mexico—and then some of your favorite foods from here?

[00:02:42]

LA: My favorite food from Sonora, it was like carne asada with tortillas. That was kind of —. They make some kind of quesadillas, so it was very delicious. [*Laughs*] And they make very big tortillas, like, I don't know how long it was, but it was very long tortillas and very thin, so it was very delicious. Here, it's like a little different because, you know, we have our Hispanics but they always change. You know, everybody have their own way to do stuff, so. And here I would like to say soup, something like that. That's what I like.

[00:03:38]

JJ: Okay. When you were younger do you remember your father making ice cream, or did that happen later on when you were here?

[00:03:47]

LA: No, that happened before, before I was born, and I never saw him make ice cream. He always used to talk about the ice cream and the popsicles and everything he learned because, [the guy he was working for,] he worked for many years but, like, he just decide to move to another place, so I never saw him doing that and now that I see him it feels great because, you know, I know that's what he always wanted.

[00:04:24]

JJ: It's inspiring to see him—

[00:04:26]

LA: Yes.

[00:04:26]

JJ: —follow his dream?

[00:04:27]

LA: Maybe that's why I love to work there, because it's not just a job. Like I say, it feels great to have a smile on the people.

[00:04:35]

JJ: And how old is he now?

[00:04:39]

LA: He's about fifty-five years old, maybe fifty-six.

[00:04:43]

JJ: Okay, great. Well, I just want to thank you for your time today. I really appreciate it.

[00:04:49]

LA: Thank you. Thank you for your patience. [*Laughs*]

[00:05:05]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

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