



Guadalupe Castillo
Highlands Bar and Grill
Birmingham, Alabama

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Eric Velasco: This is Eric Velasco for the Southern Foodways Alliance. I am in the dining room at Highlands Bars and Grills for an oral history interview with Guadalupe Castillo. His son Uriel is joining us. He and other family members also work at Highlands. Mr. Castillo is known around the Highlands as the shellfish whisperer. Highland customers know him as the man behind the Oyster Bar. Shucking bivalves and preparing shellfish dishes, including the Guadalupe special. But Mr. Castillo is one of the most important workers behind the scenes. He is among the first to arrive, cleaning, checking food deliveries, and preparing his work for the oyster stage that evening. It is a tough double shift. Today is Monday, February 11, 2019. Mr. Castillo, please introduce yourself, spell your name and give us your date of birth for the record. First you, Guadalupe, and then Uriel.

[00:00:56]

Guadalupe Castillo: My name is Guadalupe Castillo. My birth is 69-12-12. 12-12-69 [December, 1969] I am sorry.

Eric Velasco: Spell your name for me, please.

Guadalupe Castillo: Guadalupe is...

[00:01:18]

Uriel Castillo: Lo tienes que deletrear. Tienes que escribir todo.

Guadalupe Castillo: Si. My name is G-U-A-D-A-L-U-P-E C-I-S-T-E-L-L-O R-A-M-I-R-E-Z.

[00:01:52]

Uriel Castillo: Zeta.

Eric Velasco: Uriel?

Uriel Castillo: My name is Uriel Castillo. My date of birth is August 13, 1993. It is U-R-I-E-L C-A-S-T-I-L-L-O.

Eric Velasco: Thank you, gentlemen. One of the things you are known for here is creating the perfect— shucking the perfect half shelf oyster. How do you do it?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean... When I come here, so first time I work in the back of the kitchen for wash dishes for three years ago, three years. So after that one, I come to the front of the bar for shuck oysters. I mean I never shuck in Mexico City. So I start in Highlands Bar and Grill. So, my first day, I mean chef look at me and say, “Oh my God and your job is no good.” So because I never shucking, I never look at oysters at my face I never touch. Right here is my first time, so he told me, “I am sorry for your job is no good because oysters are a priority and the shell is in there.” I mean I told him, “Hey, you

wait for me for few days maybe no okay I come to the back to wash dishes.” He gave me a few days. So he..

Eric Velasco: And he was going to work with you on those few days?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, and someone help me speak before. Chris Conner and Jonathan. He speak exactly what I do. So, I mean everyday, everyday and few weeks my job is better. So everyday better, next day better, so it is not easy. I am nervous because my English is not great. So if somebody asking me something, I told “Hey Conner, please you help me” because I don’t know these guys with questions. Conner and Jonathan all the time help me for everything. So when I started in oyster bar, I mean maybe sixteen years ago, I like working. I don’t care where or what position. I mean, I do, I gotta do everything. Great for me and great for everybody. I don’t know.

Eric Velasco: You are proud of your work.

Guadalupe Castillo: Exactly. Yes sir.

[00:04:21]

Eric Velasco: So who taught you how to do it?

Guadalupe Castillo: Chris Conner before

Eric Velasco: Okay. And you say he is the bartender here, right?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, he is bartender. He knows. He shuck. While I am here he shock a little bit. For he is bartender so he shuck one dozen. He will make a cocktail. He coming to make a shrimp cocktail, he goes for cocktails. I mean he help me a lot.

Eric Velasco: So the oyster bar was open here before you started working?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Eric Velasco: When did you start working here? I guess about 19 years ago?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, in 1999.

Eric Velasco: How did you get hired? How did you know to come here? How did you get the job?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean, one friend working before was right here. Umm... I am not sure. I work in La Salia Restaurant and right now it is Ocean's.

Eric Velasco: Okay.

Guadalupe Castillo: And right now in the Ocean's.

Eric Velasco: Okay.

Guadalupe Castillo: He is manager of both. Asking him, “hey, I need one job.” I mean having one job but it is too hard. I need to make money.

Eric Velasco: So you needed a second job.

Guadalupe Castillo: Exactly. I needed a second job so he said, “okay.” I called. I don't know who, called Frank, Steve, or some manager in Bottega. He said “Okay, come in to look at job” okay, he told me, “You look at Bottega, somebody help you? I have job for you.” Okay. So I go Bottega. He said no. He needs somebody in Highlands. He said “You go downstairs, no, no I don't have Bottega.” So I come here. I talk to manager in kitchen. He said, “Oh yeah, I need somebody to wash dishes.” I said, “It's okay, I can do.”

Eric Velasco: So this is the second job?

Guadalupe Castillo: The second.

Eric Velasco: What was the name of the restaurant where you were...? The other restaurant where you were working?

Guadalupe Castillo: I was working in a few restaurants before. I move in six months. I move in maybe four restaurants in six months. I worked in Burger King first. And IHOP second and **Azalea Azalea**...

Eric Velasco: Okay.

Guadalupe Castillo: And Copeland's so Copeland's in the Highlands. So I stay right here.

Eric Velasco: Did you make the soup there? Your famous crab soup? [Laughter]

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes. [Laughter] Exactly. So somebody, manager of **Azalea**, he call for this restaurant for this job. So I am staying here right now.

Eric Velasco: Did you ever, when you started washing dishes, did you ever thought you would become a star?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes. I washed dishes for start.

[00:06:53]

Uriel Castillo: Dice ¿qué si pensaste en hacerte una estrella?

Guadalupe Castillo: Oh no!

Eric Velasco: You are famous over here now!

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, I mean I never think like that so... Right now, I know a lot of people talk my name, “hey it is Lupe, there is Lupe! Lupe!” A lot of people I don’t know face. I know, “Oh yes! Robert, John, or somebody. I don’t know everybody. But a lot of people call my name, “hey Lupe, how are you? Hey Lupe, how are you?” But yeah, there are a lot of people right now.

Eric Velasco: Well there are a lot of them and only one of you. So I guess that helps.

[00:07:30]

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I mean, I am staying here for a long time. I like working. And Frank Stitt, he love my job, too. And Pardis, all the time watch my back. Sometime you know, sometimes have little trouble for somebody. But fix it everybody, all together. Talk to everyone, easy for everybody.

Eric Velasco: I guess it is one of those things where you if someone has a problem, everybody pitches in? Is that what you are saying? Or does everyone help out or... ? I am trying to understand better what you were just saying.

[00:08:17]

Uriel Castillo: ¿A qué te refieres de lo que dijiste?

Guadalupe Castillo: A que todo el tiempo están atrás de mí y como ayudándome para salir adelante.

Uriel Castillo: He saying that they got his back, like every single time he got a little trouble they try to help him out.

Eric Velasco: Like if you were to get in trouble others would try to help you out.

Uriel Castillo: It is just like everyone is supporting each other. So if he has some troubles like in the back or something. Somebody is helping him out. Or if he needs to translate something, somebody else do it for him. Like they try to help him out a lot.

Eric Velasco: That sounds like that is part of the standard in the work place. This feeling of helping people out. Having people's back. This professionalism that I see in the front and in the back.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, yeah.

Eric Velasco: There is a lot of respect.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, exactly.

Eric Velasco: So how did you go from washing dishes to... did you did anything before you started at the oyster bar?

[00:09:17]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Que si como llegaste hasta los Ostiones de lava trastes?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean, somebody working oyster bar, he left. So these guys talk me, “hey, you can work in oyster bar.” I told him, “I don’t know.” He said, “you can, you can.” Because I never shuck so... He said, “You can. You working today. Maybe tomorrow much better. Or next day better.” So I start like that.

Eric Velasco: So someone just didn’t show up for work? Or they quit or is it like one day suddenly you are shocking oysters?

Uriel Castillo: Somebody left and then they asked him if he can work in the oyster bar but he said he didn’t know because he never, like, shucked an oyster before.

Eric Velasco: Have you ever eaten a raw oyster before?

[00:10:09]

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah.

Eric Velasco: Do you like them?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, a little bit. Yeah. A lot right now. Before, not so much.

Eric Velasco: It helps to have really good oysters.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah. Because I remember one party one day. Frank left a little bit of fried oysters. So he told me, “Hey Lupe you eating, just taste it is good.” I taste before and... Umm... no, no...

Eric Velasco: [Laughter]

Guadalupe Castillo: So I love raw oysters not fried. Yes. Because I don't know it taste a little different. Yeah...

Eric Velasco: The texture is not as good.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah. No, no. A little different but a lot of raw oysters are much better.

Eric Velasco: What do you like about the raw oysters? I can't say that word.

[00:10:55]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Qué te gusta más... de los ostiones?

Guadalupe Castillo: ¿Qué?

Eric Velasco: Why do they taste good to you?

Uriel Castillo: ¿Porque te gustan, porque saben mejor?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean. I can't speak exactly why because I love one kind. Johns Rivers is my best oysters so tastes salty, very clean. A lot of oysters not too thick not too big. So medium size is good.

Eric Velasco: Where are they from?

Guadalupe Castillo: [Long pause] Umm...

Eric Velasco: We are looking at a menu. They don't seem to be on there. I'll look them up.

[00:11:35]

Guadalupe Castillo: ¿No están en el periódico?

Eric Velasco: So when you got hired, who did you interview with? Who did you talk to before you got the job?

Guadalupe Castillo: Ummm. I think John, James... Duke. Duke is manager in the kitchen.

Eric Velasco: Do you remember his last name?

Guadalupe Castillo: I am not sure. Only this... Duke. Everybody, "Duke, Duke, Duke." I don't know his last name. [00:12:15] John Rivers es el último, el tercero.

Eric Velasco: That is okay.

Uriel Castillo: It is from Maine.

Eric Velasco: Maine. Okay. Great. So what do you do here, Uriel?

Uriel Castillo: I work in the morning. Prepping mostly. I work with my dad. I am trying to learn from him. You know. I can hear, after school, my dad got me the job. And I talk to Frank about it. And they gave me the job in the morning. I mean, I didn't even know how to cut an onion. So it was, like, a little different for me.

Eric Velasco: Who taught you?

Uriel Castillo: My dad. This man taught me a lot. Like now I can even cook the shrimp cocktails that he sells. Like, I even worked last week shucking oysters.

Eric Velasco: Oh, that is awesome.

Uriel Castillo: Yeah.

Eric Velasco: Is that your first time behind the bar?

Uriel Castillo: That was my first time.

Eric Velasco: How was it?

Uriel Castillo: It was great. I think a lot of people did not expect, like, that was going to be like, that good but he taught me very good, though. My dad just teaching me a lot of

things.

Eric Velasco: He is a good teacher?

Uriel Castillo: Yeah, he is a good teacher.

Eric Velasco: So what all do you prep in the morning. Tell me the different things that you prep in the morning.

Uriel Castillo: So well.... we work for bar, restaurants. Chez Fonfon next door. And we also prep for Highlands. After we are done with Fonfon we prep for Highlands.

Eric Velasco: You do Fonfon first because you are open for lunch?

Uriel Castillo: Yeah they are open for lunch.

Eric Velasco: Then the Highlands. Since both are opened in the evening.

Uriel Castillo: Yeah. I mean we do the hamburgers for over there. I mean they are fresh. We make them like everyday.

Eric Velasco: So you are grinding the meat for it?

Uriel Castillo: We grind the meat. Ah, my mom is the one that does that. So, I mean we make a potatoes, you know. The fries. We make ummm... sandwich. I mean, we make a lot of things for them. I believe that one day we were not here, I will be a big trouble for them.

Eric Velasco: [Laughter]

[00:14:35]

Uriel Castillo: To find somebody to help them out.

Eric Velasco: They probably need to hire twice as many people just to replace y'all.

Uriel Castillo: [Laughter] Yeah, well my dad to me counts like for two persons, you know. Because he does a lot of things. He is just something else. I think he is the hardest working in the entire company. And it is not because he is my dad but he is just something else, you know.

Eric Velasco: So what does that teach you going into the work world? How old are you, again?

Uriel Castillo: I am 24 now.

Eric Velasco: Okay, as you are getting into the work world as a professional, how does your dad's work ethic affect you?

Uriel Castillo: Well I use to, you know, when I came here I did not know nothing, you know, I mean I was young. When you are younger you just don't care about anything. Umm... but now it is just like he makes like more responsible, you know. In a lot of things. Not just working but outside, too. It is just that I have been learning a lot from him. And you know it is just really nice to have somebody like in the back saying "You are not doing this good, you need to do like this, this way." And that helped me out a lot to be honest.

Eric Velasco: There seems to be a lot of that from everybody from Chef Stitt to down the line cooks. That you know, if they see something they need to fix and they tell you. And then you adjust.

Uriel Castillo: Yeah, adjust. My dad even told the cooking guys in the back, "I just need this one." And they like, "Okay, can you teach me how to do it?" And he does that every single time he does something wrong. Like even if they are looking for something they always come to my dad. Because he knows where everything is so... Everybody is like, "Hey Lupe." They say, "Hey Lupe, I need this." So it is just like everyone is asking for my dad, you know.

Eric Velasco: You are proud of your pop aren't you?

Uriel Castillo: Yeah, I am.

Eric Velasco: Who else works here in your family?

Uriel Castillo: Umm... my mom.

Eric Velasco: What is her name, please?

Uriel Castillo: Umm... Veronica.

Eric Velasco: V-E-R-O-N-I-C-A?

[00:16:45]

Uriel Castillo: Yes

Eric Velasco: Anyone else in the family?

Uriel Castillo: My sister use to work here.

Eric Velasco: Used to work here? Okay, what is her name?

Uriel Castillo: Anayele.

Eric Velasco: Would you spell that for me, please?

Uriel Castillo: Ana-Y-E-L-E.

Eric Velasco: Okay. So let's kinda switch to morning. Walk me through your day. When do you get here?

[00:17:06]

Uriel Castillo: ¿A qué hora llegas?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean I have been here... my time is eight o'clock. But sometimes it is a lot of prep for next store so I come in very early. Before six or six thirty. So because I can finish eleven o'clock. Eleven o'clock is open next door for lunch. So I need hamburgers. I need shrimp. I need steamer, fries, and croques so it is a lot of prep so I need come more early than normal. Sometimes it is very easy, very relaxed. I know for next day. Tomorrow I do that one, I do that one, okay. I come in very early.

Eric Velasco: How do you find out? To look ahead, how do you know? How do you find out what you need to do the next day?

[00:17:50]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Cómo es que sabes lo que necesitas?

[00:17:53]

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, I look at it before how much I have at night. I know for next day how much I need it. So everyday I am looking at night for next day. So one day Pardis told me and told me, “Who makes your schedule?” “What schedule?” “For looking at what you do everyday, everyday?” I don’t need a schedule. I am looking at what I need for the next day.

Eric Velasco: So you are looking at what is in the coolers...

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes.

Eric Velasco: And how are you thinking of how much are you needing for the next day? Are you looking at numbers from what you have been doing over the week? Years earlier? How do you come to those numbers?

Guadalupe Castillo: I am never gone something because I am Lupe no prep. Never do like that. I prep everything my team is working, working for the restaurant. So I am

looking at night for what I am doing the next day. I do for two or three days. I mean hamburgers make everyday, everyday. So she, his mom, makes ground, makes little balls. So I looking at how many hamburgers I have in the walk in. I think for next day, how many I am making. So I slice cheese for hamburgers. I ground cheese for croques. So I have everything for everyday.

Eric Velasco: So you kinda have a feel for how the business goes.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah.

Eric Velasco: What are some of the busier days where you might need to come in earlier at six thirty?

Guadalupe Castillo: Every Tuesday.

Eric Velasco: Every Tuesday.

Guadalupe Castillo: Tuesday umm... Thursday and Friday because it is more busy. More prep. Because Tuesday I make the fries. Four or five cases of fries. And before I do every morning fries. Not right now because right now... I mean, Tuesday I make fries and I cook a lot of shrimp. Umm... looking for croques. I mean steamers and fries. And the next day, a little relaxed. No much prep. So I do something, not so much prep. I clean the walk-in. I clean somewhere. I do everyday something. It is no stop. I stop when I

believe it one thirty, two o'clock, two thirty. One busy two thirty, three o'clock I leave my house for something. I shower. Coming back four thirty, five. So I prep everyday. For next door, for Highlands. My team is exactly where I need it.

Eric Velasco: Is part of what is affecting how you are thinking in prep the daily specials at Chez Fonfon?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah. I mean right now, crab cakes on Thursday and lobster on Friday.

Eric Velasco: So those is why those days are big?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, yeah.

Eric Velasco: So Tuesday is the first day of the week?

Guadalupe Castillo: Tuesday there are a lot of fries. Fries I make Tuesday for Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. I make fries on Friday one more time for Friday and Saturday. So I make maybe ten cases all week. For week, ten boxes of potatoes. So its a lot of fries. Sometime Frank catch me in the kitchen, check and check and check it. Goes and do something comes back one more time and check it, check it, check it. [Frank asks:] “How are you Lupe?” I am good, thank you. [Frank asks:] “You are okay?” “Yes sir, Yes I am good. I am good. So if he looking at me moving all day. Someday I make a

chicken stock, too. Every day, depending how many I need it. So I roast the chicken bones. I roast the beef, too. Sometimes Frank catches me on the side, back for strain the chicken stock. And people looking right there, “hey, somebody right there help Lupe.” He is hard-working. A lot of people help me, too.

[00:22:22]

Eric Velasco: How often do you see Frank Stitt?

[00:22:26]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Qué si cada cuando lo ves?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean everyday.

Eric Velasco: Everyday.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah everyday.

Eric Velasco: And how often do you talk?

Uriel Castillo: ¿Que si cada cuando hablan?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean... when it is necessary.

Eric Velasco: Right.

Guadalupe Castillo: When I ask something, “Hey sir I have too many of that one. I have too many greens. I have too many potatoes so you use it for tonight in the menu because it is a lot of for a couple days.” [Frank responds:] “Okay Lupe, thank you so much.” Too much, so he put it in the menu. Sometimes he asks me, “Hey Lupe, what do you have for the menu tonight?” So I have brussels sprouts. I have a lot of turnips. I have a lot of green. “Okay, I put all that tonight in the menu.” So all the time he asks me something. I mean I like to work together, me and him.

Eric Velasco: And you are helping him think through what is going to be on that nice menu because you are trying to turn your product over, turn your inventory over.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah.

Eric Velasco: So you are an important part of that decision making.

Guadalupe Castillo: I think so [Laughter].

Eric Velasco: That is interesting.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, yeah, yeah. He ask me all the time, “Lupe you have something two minutes?” [He responds:] “I am looking. Yes sir, I have that one, I have that one. I have that one.” Okay push it. So he changes the menu. He organizes menus. He talks to chef Zack, “Okay you put that one on the menu.” Okay, yes sir. Yes chef.

Eric Velasco: What days of the week do you work?

[00:23:50]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Que días... de martes a sábado?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes. Tuesday to Saturday.

Eric Velasco: And sometimes I see you here on Mondays.

Guadalupe Castillo: It’s for cleaning. Only cleaning the kitchen.

Eric Velasco: So you really are working Monday through Saturday.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah. Monday through Saturday.

Eric Velasco: And then you just come in and clean in the morning?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir.

Eric Velasco: I guess that is only a few hours?

Guadalupe Castillo: Ummm... Four hours.

Eric Velasco: Wow! What do you do to clean? I have seen you mopping in here, what else do you do?

[00:24:17]

Guadalupe Castillo: Cleaning all very nasty in the grill and stuff. Oh my goodness! It is very bad! I clean it. So it is my job, so I do it. I do it every Monday morning. Sometimes a company comes to clean the top, you know the big one?

Eric Velasco: Right.

Guadalupe Castillo: So not every... he come in every month or every two months.

Eric Velasco: Is this the inspector?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes.

Eric Velasco: The health inspector?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah. I think professional.

Uriel Castillo: It is another company.

Eric Velasco: A professional cleaner company.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah.

Eric Velasco: Clean up the hoods and all.

Guadalupe Castillo: The whole company. Yeah so he come in, I think, every two months. So I do every Monday. Every Monday every top and the stove and the grill and the floor.

Eric Velasco: So that total clean is just Monday? Or every days?

Guadalupe Castillo: Mondays.

Eric Velasco: Right, because when they shut down at night the pretty well get it. Get it clean.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes sir.

Eric Velasco: Pretty clean.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, a little bit. Yes, sir.

Eric Velasco: Now, um.... How many days you do work, Uriel?

Uriel Castillo: I work Tuesday through Friday, also. Sometimes Saturday mornings.

Eric Velasco: And how many hours are you working?

Uriel Castillo: I don't know. Maybe like.... Maybe like almost thirty in the morning and almost like twenty eight at night. And I also have on Saturday afternoon. And then Sunday and Monday we are closing.

Eric Velasco: How about Veronica? Is she working daily as well?

Uriel Castillo: Yes, she works from Tuesday to Saturday.

Eric Velasco: Okay. How many pounds of hamburger is she making?

[00:26:15]

Guadalupe Castillo: Um.... Four.... Como cincuenta libras. Maybe fifteen pounds.

Eric Velasco: Fifteen pounds.

Guadalupe Castillo: Every day.

Eric Velasco: That is a lot of grinding.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes. I make about 120 hamburgers everyday. So it is a lot of, too.

Eric Velasco: That is a lot.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah.

Eric Velasco: And I guess you are getting the onions, the tomato... The set up ready?

Uriel Castillo: We help each other, you know. My dad is doing fries in the bottom. I am doing shrimp on the top. My mom is doing the hamburgers. He is doing cheese sometimes. I am doing something else. It is just us three in the morning.

Eric Velasco: You are a team.

Uriel Castillo: So we are just a team. So we are helping each other out.

Eric Velasco: How long have you been working here?

Uriel Castillo: Five years.

Eric Velasco: Five years now? And how about Veronica, how long has she been working here?

Guadalupe Castillo: Ten.

Eric Velasco: Ten years. How did she come into the picture? How did she get the job here? Is it somewhere they said they need more help?

Guadalupe Castillo: No, I told Frank, “Hey, I need help” because it’s a lot of stuff. Before it is just me. So I look for a few people in the kitchen he talking, not help. So wrong everywhere. So I told Frank one day, “I am angry” so I...ahh! A little cry for oh my God! I told Frank, “Hey señor Frank, I need somebody to help me.” “Hey guys! Somebody help!” And it was right there for that day. For next day, same!

Eric Velasco: Right.

Guadalupe Castillo: So I need somebody to help me everyday, everyday stay here. Everyday.

Eric Velasco: Without being told.

Guadalupe Castillo: Because coming a lot of people. He is talking and talking and talking. So I am angry so I told Frank, “I need somebody to help me because it is a lot of stuff.” So coming in Sysco every Tuesday and Friday morning. And produce is coming every day. Fish coming every day. Oyster coming every two days. So there is a lot of stuff and then I can work and organize. Okay, I can organize some in store. It is a lot of work. So I told Frank, “I need somebody to come help me.” [Frank responds:] “Okay, who? Do you have somebody?” Yeah, yes, I have somebody. Okay. Veronica come here. So Veronica come help me and in a couple of years he is coming because it is non stop. Every day more people. Every more people come.

Eric Velasco: Well it is getting bigger and bigger.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, exactly. So when I start I make maybe twenty croques for two or three days. Right now I make about fifty or sixty croques for two or three days.

Eric Velasco: What is....

Guadalupe Castillo: Ham and cheese sandwich.

Eric Velasco: Claws, claws, okay.

Uriel Castillo: Yes, it is the sandwich.

Eric Velasco: Okay.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, so I make, okay, ham and cheese sandwiches every two days. So right now it is a lot of prep.

Eric Velasco: That is a lot of prep. So you have just kinda been expanding jobs, too? Throughout the years you are getting more and more help?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, exactly.

Uriel Castillo: When Fonfon opened my dad told me he use to do like twenty crabs. But now there are a lot of people. You know? More people and more people everyday. There is a lot of to prep, you know?

[00:29:39]

Eric Velasco: How long have you been working here before Fonfon opened?

[00:29:42]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Qué si cuanto tienes aquí desde Fonfon abrió?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean, I been here 1999 and Fonfon open 2002?

Eric Velasco: Right. So that gets you right away, then.

Guadalupe Castillo: Right. Yeah.

Eric Velasco: So you were talking about a produce and fish and oysters coming in. How do they get here, first of all? A lot of time farmers are delivering. You mentioned Sysco, the food distribution people. Talk to me about when something comes in what do you do? Or what does the family do?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean...when coming produce, I am check before everything okay. I check everything fresh. You know, sometimes some bad, so I can return back. So sometimes he checks it, too. Produce and fish. And Sysco, so he help me a lot, too. I make fries. He checks upstairs for coming something.

Eric Velasco: If it is not fresh you send it back?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, I send it back. Yeah. Frank, told me to check. If something comes in frozen. Fish frozen. Uh-uh, no, send it back, okay. So he told me like that, okay. He tells me it is no good, it is no good. So sometimes he helps me a lot, so when I make the fries he checks upstairs the produce, Sysco, fish, meat from Evan's meats. So, there comes a lot of produce everyday. Everyday.

Eric Velasco: What are you looking for on the fish?

Guadalupe Castillo: I am mean... Frank told me to looking in the eyes, fish eyes. Fred said this color is good. Maybe a little red one or yellow is not good. Is not good. So I am looking. I know I could touch it, but I am looking. I need it. I know if it is good or not good. So he taught me like that. So I do like that everyday that. Sometimes coming fish cut. No bones. Some... salmon come in like very, very nice, color, no crash so it is good. So sometimes coming you looking at the meat, it is opened a little stray, it is not good.

Eric Velasco: Its like its has been frozen or something?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, yes, yes. Exactly. I do like that.

Eric Velasco: Now, a lot of farmers bring their own produce in, things they grow their own. Do you get to know these people fairly well?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, Jones Valley.

Eric Velasco: Jones Valley?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, Jones Valley. And other company. Other people bring something. Michael Dean. So sometimes Paradise farm, too. I mean... Freddie, he brings food, too. He brings eggs.

Eric Velasco: McEwen.

Guadalupe Castillo: McEwen brings eggs, too. He brings every 2 times per week. He brings Tuesday and Friday. He texts me , “Hey Lupe, what do you need for tomorrow?” “Hey Lupe, what do you need for tomorrow.” I know he brings eggs, grits, and cornmeal. So I know ... I check order to see how much grits I needed. How much cornmeal I needed. How much eggs for both restaurants I need. Sometimes, I order 15 dozen for next door. Sometimes 15 for Highland. Or 30 dozen for next door. Sometimes 15 for Highlands. I check everything when he text me or when he call me I am checking, “I need 15 dozen or 30 dozen or 40 pounds of cornmeal or 50 pounds of grits or 60 pounds of... depending how I use it a night.” So he is staying a lot.

[00:33:33]

Eric Velasco: So what else are you ordering?

[00:33:38]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Qué es lo que ordenas?

Uriel Castillo: He just checks on everything. Like what we need. So, he always make the list. Sometimes he is helping with Sysco. Sometimes we tell Zack or, you know, the other guy that orders stuff, “Hey, we need this one for tomorrow.” So we try to tell him what we need for the next day, you know?

Eric Velasco: And is this based on what you are seeing in inventory? Or the chef de cuisine is saying this is what we are going to need so we will be going in that direction?

Uriel Castillo: Yes, we also tell the chef of the cuisine, “Hey, we need this for tomorrow.” Sometimes they order stuff. But sometimes they forgot something so my dad calls to ask for vegetables and fruit products. Even like the meat products that he needs he just talks what he needs, like, “I need this, can you bring it to me? Do you have this?” So he also texts with those kinds of people. So we always try to help him when he needs something.

Eric Velasco: Kinda helping each other out like we have been talking about through the whole thing here.

Uriel Castillo: Yeah.

Eric Velasco: Talk to me about preparing. What do you do in the morning to prepare for the oyster bar that night?

[00:34:46]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Que sí que haces para preparar los ostiones para esa noche?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean I check the cocktail sauce or ginger sauce with cap closed. I put in the morning... when I have time, I put in the morning oysters in the oyster bar. So, I have time.

Eric Velasco: You keep them on ice.

Guadalupe Castillo: Exactly. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I do like that.

Eric Velasco: Then you make the sauces, the dips, and all. Are you doing anything to prep the crab claws at all?

Guadalupe Castillo: I pick claws or he pick. Coming every week. Coming one time a week, coming Wednesday. So sometimes 5 pounds for Tuesday for start. And 20 pounds for Wednesday or for the rest of the week. So I know how many pounds I need for the

week. Maybe 25. Sometimes busy. Sometimes I order for Friday and Saturday more. For normal is 20, 25 pounds for all week.

Eric Velasco: And these are the claws?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir.

Eric Velasco: Just the claw and not the rest of the crab, right?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah.

Eric Velasco: Okay, what do you do to prep the crab claw?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean when coming... he know he need to pick. There are a lot of pieces of shells in there so he needs to pick. Everyone is happy. This week asking for crab claws and I don't have crab claws. People are not working, so it's too cold.

Eric Velasco: You are not able to get crabs to serving claws.

Guadalupe Castillo: Exactly. A lot of people coming. I don't know if they coming to taste crab claws. "I am sorry but I don't have crab claws. I have ceviche right now."
[They respond] "No, I need crab claws." [Guadalupe responds] "Okay, so maybe next week. I am not sure. Maybe next week so wait." There is a lot of crab claw sales. A lot of

crab claws. So I make it for crab claws so I put it my sauces. I put it the olive oil, chopped parsley, black pepper, Tabasco, and lime, lemon juice. I am checking and checking. So when it tastes good, it is good. Maybe a little bit more salt or a little bit more Tabasco. Taste it. Taste it. Okay, right now it is good so...

Eric Velasco: And that is the marinade for the crab claw?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

[00:36:59]

Eric Velasco: And you are doing that in the morning as well? No?

Guadalupe Castillo: No, I do that fresh, very fresh.

Eric Velasco: So you do it on the spot upon order?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes sir.

Eric Velasco: You make the sauce?

Guadalupe Castillo: Exactly. Yes sir.

Eric Velasco: And then serving it from there? So what is the perfect crab claw? What do you looking to produce here? You make these crab claws. What are you looking into to avoid? What are you looking to achieve for the diner?

[00:37:25]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Qué quieres lograr para hacerlo mejor?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean.... I asking it is not frozen the day before.

Eric Velasco: Right.

Guadalupe Castillo: Asking before... sometimes people ordering and the back and chef also know. Asking the company, “hey I need 20 pounds of crab claws. Check please no frozen.” Because when it is come in frozen sometimes I use it when I am mixing. All meats are separate from the bones so it is not good. Sometimes looking only claws no meat in my bowl. So that is not good so I ask for no frozen, I need fresh. Yes, his company Lee fish. He brings every week. He is very responsible for the job. So he brings exactly the crab claws the way I need it.

Eric Velasco: What is the name of the person bringing in the crab claws?

Guadalupe Castillo: Lee Fish.

Eric Velasco: Lee Fish?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes. It is his company. I don't know exactly his name. First company that sells fish, okay. So I call him Lee Fish. [Laughs]

Eric Velasco: But when you are preparing it. You want to make sure there are no shells there. And you have to clear out a little bit so that people can get to the crabmeat. Describe what you do to prepare?

Uriel Castillo: Well that is why we clean the crab claws in the back in the kitchen in the mornings so we can take off the shells. So we take the shells, it is already clean. So when my dad toss the sauce over here, he just makes the sauce because the crab is already clean. It has no shell on it. So everything is good. And everything is ready for him to just prep the sauce.

Eric Velasco: And you are getting the claws with the whole shell on and you are just removing the shell and then they are scrapping them off with their teeth, I guess?

Uriel Castillo: There are a lot of places that sell crab claws but with a shell on it. And you can't really like take the meat off from it so that is a big thing in there.

Eric Velasco: So those are the little things that Highlands does that makes it one of the best.

Uriel Castillo: Yeah.

Eric Velasco: So when you are shucking an oyster, describe the process of shucking an oyster. What you do to shuck an oyster?

[00:39:43]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Qué haces para preparar el ostión?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean, Conner, he showed me before so I try everyday. So now everyday so now everyday is better, everyday is better. So, in Mexico I never shuck so I start right here. When a couple weeks later Frank showed me or watched me [he said], “Oh my god, your job is good, thank you so much.” He gave me a hug. I mean, I love it, working. So when you don’t like it, you don’t do something good. So, when you like it, you do everything great.

[00:40:22]

Eric Velasco: So you got the oyster in hand and you tried to shove a knife in the that little valve there to open it up.

Guadalupe Castillo: To open it up, to cut the muscle up and one more time down. It is moving it is good. I clean that one. No shell. Something else.

Eric Velasco: You scrape it up with the oyster knife? Or something else?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I scratch it with oyster knife. So I saw one people and I go a couple years ago Mobile... Gulf Shore. It is the same. Almost close the bar. His mom, he told me, "Hey, do you want oysters?" My sisters in law say, too "Hey, do you want oysters?" He is watching. He shucks it and wash it. Shuck it in water. Shuck it in water. He asked me, "Hey do you need it?" No wash it second is gone. It is nothing. He washes and it is gone. He asks me, "Do you need it?" Uh-uh, nothing he washes, nothing is gone. So I said, "no." He says the ladies order that. I look at the oyster bar guys, he washes, he shucks it. He washes, he shocks it. Because the oyster is very dirty. So, I mean maybe okay. Tastes nothing, tastes water.

Eric Velasco: Do you prewash your shells to get the mud off? Because they seem to come in fairly muddy.

[00:41:48]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Que si los lavas?

Guadalupe Castillo: No, no. Because I ... when I don't know before what kind of oysters great so people in the back of kitchen warn me, "I need a Apalachicola and I need that one kind so I am shucking. Right now, no, I am ordering. Right now, I know what kind of oyster is good. Right now, I know what kind clean. Taste is good. So I am ordering oysters every day, every day, every time. So I need Beausoleil the best oysters, the small one. A lot of people use that one. Johns Rivers... Sweet Jesus... Hollywood. So that one from the company the Inland, Inland... And another oysters, Murder Point ... Salsa Lady. Yesterday, two days other kinds of oysters from Evan's chef. He tasted. He told me, "That one is good." So order him two bags. I said, "If it is good, it good." So I respect your decisions. I tried Saturday night almost gone, all bags. It is good, it is clean, it is good. It is not too big, it is medium size. So all oysters are good. I don't need to wash them. All oysters come in very clean. Sometimes comes dirty from inside. Or if very, very dirty I wash it in the back. I shuck oysters is good, no dirty in there.

Eric Velasco: Right, I guess if they stay so tight, presumably on the outside, it would get on the inside unless you introduce it?

Guadalupe Castillo: Exactly. So I know right now, all oysters are great.

Eric Velasco: You got an interesting technique for getting the knife through the oyster. Describe it to us, please.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, because sometimes it is hard. Sometimes I can't shuck only my hands. It is too hard. In it is broken so I can't open. So I can't use the concrete. A little bit, a little crack, okay it is ready to open.

Eric Velasco: So basically you put the knife against it and you are banging the knife against, the end of the knife against the board to get it in there.

Guadalupe Castillo: Basically.

Eric Velasco: That is interesting! How did you learn that? How did you figure that one out?

Guadalupe Castillo: I said, "Wow, I can do that!" Okay! I can do it. The chef told me, catch me before, "Hey, don't do it like that because the oyster is broken." The first time yeah when open, oh my goodness, maybe hard. Maybe one cut...

Eric Velasco: Narrow.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, exactly. Right now maybe I need too strong or a little bit... So I use it if the knife don't go inside, it is a little bit and only to open. Only crack it is easy. For shuck.

Eric Velasco: Get a little bit and then open it from there?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir.

Eric Velasco: Interesting. So how did you convince him that was right way to do it? You just make them a few and say “Hey, this will work...”

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, yes. Frank come here one day, I showed him. He coming one new night, he showed me all the sides all the oysters. Also people, I don’t know where, Chicago... I don’t know... he opened that way. And I ... He said, “I don’t think so.” He told me, “Yeah, okay with gloves, my gloves, my knives.” Okay, you got it. You show me. He trying show me... He can, “oh, no, no...you good, you right.” Yes, so...

Eric Velasco: [Laughter] So he is trying to open it the more traditional way.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah. The told me, “No, that way.” I saw the one people in Chicago and I am not sure where he showed me all the ways. Okay, you show me where, exactly. He can. He said, “Look. No, you good, you good.” So it is like that.

Eric Velasco: What do you wear to protect your hand?

Guadalupe Castillo: The gloves.

[00:46:06]

Eric Velasco: Is it a chain metal glove? Metal glove? Or is it like a...

Guadalupe Castillo: No it is ... a little thick. It is a normal glove. A little thicker. Sometime gown in my hand. A few times. Yes. A few times. Not right now. Right now it is... I mean.. I think too much practice. Every day, every day. So I know exactly how strong.

Eric Velasco: That patting technique, I would imagine, also, I imagine lessens your chance that you are going to hurt your hand, too. Because it is not just going in as far and you don't get that point when suddenly it slips on through...

Guadalupe Castillo: Exactly.

Eric Velasco: [Cough] Excuse me, please. So... Talk to me about the Guadalupe Special.

[00:46:51]

Uriel Castillo: Que le hables del especial de Guadalupe.

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean one day it start front seat said, "Hey Lupe! What you do you think? We want a special for the menu. *Digo* [I said] I don't know. I don't know what you are talking about because before starting, "you think okay?" I mean whatever

you say. You say okay, “okay.” I am shucking. “So it is okay that I put your name in there?” Okay, “Oh no! Maybe nobody order.” [He responds] “No, yes, yes. I try, I try” Okay, so what you think? Guadalupe Special? Or Super Special? Al Guadalupe? Or Big Special or Lupe’s Big Special. Lupe, what do you think? I mean maybe Guadalupe Special. Guadalupe Special it is easy. For it is Big Special, Big Lupe Special *como que* is too much. Too big. So maybe Guadalupe Special, maybe easy. I mean, I don’t know. Maybe people know it and yeah, yeah, you. I try it and okay. So I started with that. So he told me, “Put a little crab claws. Also put shrimp and dozen oysters. You organize your plate.” Okay. I do it. So I start before was a little different. So I don’t like it. So, I try next time be a little different. I show in front, I show parties. Ohh.. look like that, I like it! Okay!

Eric Velasco: Because you wanted to look good as well as taste good.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, yeah. Exactly.

Eric Velasco: So once you had all the ingredients then it was only a matter of how you wanted it to be presented to the guests?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir. Yes sir.

Eric Velasco: How does it feel having the special named for you?

Guadalupe Castillo: I know, I mean...

[00:48:44]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Qué es lo que te hace sentir...?

Guadalupe Castillo: Sentí bonito.

Uriel Castillo: It is like... he never expect that...

Eric Velasco: In fact, you were reluctant for them to do it. You weren't really in favor them doing it. You just said okay...

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah because up to that one... everybody, waiters and waitresses, "Oh!!! Guadalupe Special!!!" I said, "Yes, you jealous?" [Laughter]

Eric Velasco: Where is the Chris Conner Special? [Laughter]

Guadalupe Castillo: Exactly, yes.

Eric Velasco: [Laughter]

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes sir. I am good. I like it.

Eric Velasco: So who came up with the ceviche?

[00:49:22]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Quién dijo que se hiciera el ceviche?

Guadalupe Castillo: Frank.

Eric Velasco: That was Frank's?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sometimes for one or few times have a super special. I put the lobster, muscles, or clams. So a little change for that one plate. Yes. Before we start with lobsters. Half lobster, half clam, and the other.. the other day or the next day I put muscles. The people like it but not much. They say, "Only one plate no max. No super big." Sorry, it is the special. No more the super special. Yes, so...

[00:50:07]

Eric Velasco: Because you weren't able to sell enough.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, yes.

Eric Velasco: Okay.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, that!

Eric Velasco: What do you put into your ceviche, now?

Guadalupe Castillo: I put it lime, lemon, and orange juice. Chili pepper, garlic, and.... black pepper....(pause)... and jalapeño and cilantro.

Eric Velasco: And what fish go in?

Guadalupe Castillo: Red snapper.

Eric Velasco: And this was Frank's recipe?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, for sometime... I mean... Yeah, it is his recipe. Yeah...

Eric Velasco: And part of the reason I was wondering is that he is very French oriented in this place and so it was always curious to know to me how he came to have more of a Caribbean- Latino-kind of dish on there. I half suspected that you were the genius behind it.

[00:51:05]

Uriel Castillo: Que él espero que tu fueras el de....

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean... because the menu... he is the only lemon, *limón*, cilantro. So he is no the chili pepper... I mean, garlic. So I put some before in the back tastes that I know, I know it needs something. So, I told the people mix it right now. I mix before. I taste..

Eric Velasco: You made it taste right..

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, it tastes right. So I mix right now all the people. All the Mexican people. I mean, you make a ceviche. You put that one, that one, that one, that one! So okay. So he tastes it, “Oh my gosh, this is good!” So he mix every day, every day. So before I told him ... jalapeño, cilantro, lemon juice. Tastes it a little simple.

Eric Velasco: How long has the ceviche been on the menu?

[00:51:58]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Cuánto tiempo tienes?

Guadalupe Castillo: Uhm... uhm... maybe one year? Maybe one year. Yeah, I start only one order, two ordering... so its not much, right now its busy.

[00:52:16]

Eric Velasco: So you are coming in bright and early in the morning, 6:30 to 8:00. Tell me about when other people are coming in the morning?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean, next door coming 4-5 people from next door. First stand to us.. no..

Eric Velasco: Early in the morning?

Guadalupe Castillo: Early. After 8. After 8.

Eric Velasco: So they are getting stuff ready back in the kitchen. The back over at Fonfon? So when do some of the people start coming in here? Or is that more in the afternoon?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, it is eleven, twelve. It depends on the people working the line that make the sauce and salsa or the middle line. They come at 11 or 12. For the garbage check they come at one and three o'clock. Depending what is the station working. Yeah...

Eric Velasco: And then... oh okay, so your shift ends somewhere, you said around 2:30?

Uriel Castillo: Two thirty or two o'clock.

Eric Velasco: So what do you do? So you are back at four thirty o'clock in the evening?

Uriel Castillo: He is back at 4:30.

Eric Velasco: What do you do in between?

Uriel Castillo: We just go home, you know and take a shower.

Guadalupe Castillo: Eat something. [Laughter]

Uriel Castillo: Exactly.

Eric Velasco: So both of you are working double shifts?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir.

Eric Velasco: That wears you out, doesn't it?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes.

Eric Velasco: Do you... uhm... do ever get a chance to eat here?

Guadalupe Castillo: Sometimes.

Uriel Castillo: Sometimes. Like it depends on how much work we got.

Eric Velasco: Right. What is your favorite thing to eat?

Uriel Castillo: Well over here I have been trying everything so I don't have like a favorite thing. Everything is good. [Laughter]

Guadalupe Castillo: Sometimes, sometimes I have time. I make lunch for everybody.

Eric Velasco: Like a family meal?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, like a family meal. So I have... sometimes I make it Mexican food. A lot of people eating. Sometimes I make pasta, so a lot of people eating. It is gone. I like it when it is gone. Sometimes come and prep a little Mexican food. And I call Pardis, "I have this." She come in very fast, "Oh yes! This is my favorite food."

Eric Velasco: The Mexican food you make. What kind of dishes do you make?

Guadalupe Castillo: Like... sometimes I make, *chile rellenos* [Stuffed poblano pepper] you know poblano pepper stuffed, something meat or cheese and make it in the eggs and put down the fry. It is so good food. So Pardis she don't like it. He only like beans, cheese, and chips and guacamole. They are his favorite food. So I make it.

Eric Velasco: So part of it is he is vegetarian, he doesn't eat meat.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes. He no eat meat. Some make it for her no meat. "Oh Lupe, I love Lupe." Ah, okay! My food! Yes, so I prep sometimes for family meal.

Eric Velasco: When do you eat? You know, you got all that time behind the oyster bar, prepping; sometimes you make the family meal. You get home...what time do you get home at night?

Guadalupe Castillo: Uh... eleven, ten thirty, eleven. I eat something easy. I am sleepy a little bit and ready for next... ready for next day.

Eric Velasco: So Sunday you rest and rest hard.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah. Yeah, he plays soccer. Two games, Sunday sometimes. So I watch him. So he play 7 o'clock in the morning and maybe up to 9:00 up to 10. So I go Sunday to watch him play.

Eric Velasco: You play in a league kind of thing or with some friends?

Uriel Castillo: Yes, it is Sunday leagues. Just like the leagues. So two. One of the leagues I play at 7 am. So... so that ...

Eric Velasco: After a Saturday night?

Uriel Castillo: [Laughs] Yes, after a Saturday night. He goes with me every time so...

Eric Velasco: What position do you play?

Uriel Castillo: I play center midfield.

Eric Velasco: How long have you been playing soccer?

Uriel Castillo: Uuff... Since I was like 4 years old, maybe.

Eric Velasco: Is that your favorite sport?

Uriel Castillo: Yeah, that is my favorite sport.

[00:56:32]

Eric Velasco: Now, where were you born?

[00:56:36]

Uriel Castillo: ¿En dónde naciste?

Guadalupe Castillo: Chichiquila, Puebla.

Eric Velasco: Okay, and uhm... and when did you move the United States?

Uriel Castillo: ¿Cuándo te moviste a los Estados Unidos?

Guadalupe Castillo: Uuhmm... de Chichiquila, Puebla. I move to Mexico City. I work in there for 15 years. I work it for 10 years in one... no restaurant... it is like Subway. It is a small...

Eric Velasco: Okay, Sandwich shop.

Guadalupe Castillo: Small sandwich shop, yeah.

Eric Velasco: Okay.

Guadalupe Castillo: I worked for about 10 years in there. So I worked in construction, too. Uhhh... I work in a few things there, too. So I am coming here 1999.

Eric Velasco: So you came in directly to Birmingham?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir.

Eric Velasco: And then started working here pretty soon afterward. How was.... [to Uriel] And were you born in the states, too Uriel?

Uriel Castillo: No, I was born in Mexico City.

Eric Velasco: You were born in Mexico City, too? When you look at Highlands as a place to work, how would you describe it to a friend or a relative about working here and how you are treated and the conditions in which you work...?

[00:58:08]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Qué cómo que le dirías a un amigo que como es venir aquí en un restaurant como aquí en Highlands? ¿Qué le dirías?

Guadalupe Castillo: ¿Como para qué? ¿Para trabajar?

Uriel Castillo: No, pues si te preguntan, “¿cómo es el trabajo allá?” ¿Qué le dirías?

Uriel Castillo: ¿Qué es lo que tu estuvieras haciendo si no trabajaras aquí?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean. It is a nice place. It is a nice place. Nice guys. Restaurant guys are good guys. It is a little expensive, but it is good food, too. It is good food. Yeah.

Eric Velasco: What would you do, you think, if you weren't working here?

[01:02:47]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Que si cuando empezaste a preparar cuando tenías el segundo trabajo?

Guadalupe Castillo: I do something. But I don't know exactly what. Yeah.

Eric Velasco: You will work.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir.

Eric Velasco: Did you... How long did you stay ... when you came here in Highlands you were working two jobs. How long did you stay at the second job?

Guadalupe Castillo: Well I start in Highlands to wash dishes before working in the Azalea and prep. So I come in sometimes a little early because my time is 3 o'clock. The Azalea coming from maybe 2 o'clock or 1:30 because a little prep there. So a little lost so I come in early.

Eric Velasco: So just a couple blocks down the street.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah. One day I am sleepy in the Azalea in the wood station, I stay right there. I eat something. I am sorry if **Patrick** catch me, he make a picture, and next day he show me, "Lupe, what is that?" Oh my goodness. He catch me there sleepy so I start at 3 o'clock and then Highlands. One day the chef, Ed Reese, chef he told me, "Hey Lupe, is not much wash dishes you help me something prep?" I go, "Yeah, I can do." He said, "You can use a knife?" I mean, I can do it. So okay, so he cut me... that time I use it a lot of a little bites. Pico de gallo.

Eric Velasco: Okay.

Guadalupe Castillo: Pico de gallo and the oyster bar. Is no more. Is maybe 18-16 years to go. So he said you make small dice. Onion, small dice. Jalapeño and tomato and chop a little cilantro. Okay, so he looked at me so he watch me every time. I am very fast with the knife. So he said, "Oh my God, what did you do before?" I mean... worked in a restaurant in Mexico, everyday I sliced jalapeño. Everyday onion, everyday tomato so I

am had for practice for chop... for slice...

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, he said “no, no, no... I told Frank you worked in the morning, too.” Uhm... I don’t know because I am scared. Because all day working in the same place. I am scared because you have one job at night in another place and one more job in the morning so maybe fired in one you have one job.

Eric Velasco: You have to have job security, that is something to fall back on.

Guadalupe Castillo: Exactly. So, I said maybe no. Say, “Why no?” I talked to Frank, “I am not sure.” Yeah, one day Frank told me, “Hey, ... I needed you working here all day so ...” So I said, “I don’t think so.” He said, “Why not?” So one lady working desserts, he speaks in Spanish. She told me, “Hey Lupe, he said he needs you working here. It is good. Nobody asking you. Only you. He said because he look at you because your job is good. So I mean, I am scared because you know maybe no working all day. So I am looking for other job so. “No, no, no he said he likes your job so he needs working all day. I mean what are you doing? “What do you do?” [She responds,] “Prep. Prep in the morning and wash dishes in the night.” So I start like that.

[1:02:36]

Eric Velasco: How long did you continue doing the dishwashing at night and prepping in the morning?

Guadalupe Castillo: Uhmm..

Eric Velasco: A year? Year and a half or so, I guess?

Guadalupe Castillo: I wash dishes for three years.

Eric Velasco: Right. Three years total but when did you start doing the prepping?

[01:02:47]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Que si cuando empezaste a preparar cuando tenías el segundo trabajo?

Guadalupe Castillo: Uhmm... maybe three months. Yeah, three months.

Eric Velasco: Okay.

Guadalupe Castillo: Three months wash dishes before I start for prep all day.

Eric Velasco: You knew.... Frank Stitt's reputation of a chef at the time.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir.

Eric Velasco: So, one of the greatest chefs in the South, in the country is saying, I need you....

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir.

Eric Velasco: I need you to come help me.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir.

Eric Velasco: How does that make you feel?

[01:03:25]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Que si como te sentiste cuando el señor te dijo que vinieras a trabajar cuando era uno de los mejores chefs en su momento? ¿Que sí que sentiste cuando alguien así...?

Guadalupe Castillo: Pues, se siente bonito.

Uriel Castillo: He felt special. He was just a little bit scared but it was special that someone saw something in him.

[1:03:46]

Eric Velasco: And that is that when you were talking to the pastry person about that moment. It seemed to be her saying, “well look this guy is for real, he is great, you are needed, you need to do this.”

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir.

Eric Velasco: Did that give you a... help your sense of security? That fear you had?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, yeah, yeah... it is a little my stomach..

[01:04:15]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Que si te ayudo cuando te hablo la de los postres y cuando te dijo del señor?

Eric Velasco: You felt better about that thing that you were worried about?

Guadalupe Castillo: Yes, sir.

Eric Velasco: How long do you see yourself to continue work here?

Uriel Castillo: I don't know. I mean you never know. You know how life is? So, I am just working here, learning things everyday. Trying my best at work every single day so.

Eric Velasco: Are you interested in staying in restaurants?

Uriel Castillo: For the moment, yeah. But you know, I like to learn new things. Like my dad shows me a lot of things every single day.

Eric Velasco: Right.

Uriel Castillo: And he still does. So I don't know. You never know. I just feel good right now. I am just learning a lot. I don't know. You never know how life works so.

Eric Velasco: Have you had any thoughts about what you would want to do over the course of your life?

Uriel Castillo: I don't know. I am not sure. I mean, I just want to keep working and you know right now, if something happens, something new happens maybe a new opportunity to do something else, I will.

Eric Velasco: Ten years ago you didn't see yourself doing this, did you?

Uriel Castillo: No.

Eric Velasco: So who know what ten years from now will be like?

Uriel Castillo: Yeah. That is true. I mean, if something new comes, maybe I try it, you know? Because one of the things he taught me was that if you want to do something else, just do it. Like try something else don't stay at the same place, you know. If you want to try something else, just do it for yourself. So....

Eric Velasco: But it seems like the learning you want to do. The way you want to pay attention to learn skills wherever you go that is going to be how you learn that thing by paying attention and finding the best.

Uriel Castillo: Yes, I think.

Eric Velasco: You have been here twenty years now. How long do you see yourself staying?

[01:06:27]

Uriel Castillo: ¿Que si cuánto tiempo más?

Guadalupe Castillo: I don't know. We are almost leaving back to Mexico. Yeah, I come in for something, I found it so I do something there.

Eric Velasco: What do you think you might there? Just..

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean, make a small restaurant. Not like that, that is much bigger. No. Maybe a few tables?

Eric Velasco: Seafood?

Guadalupe Castillo: No not seafood because I live in the middle of the city. And the middle of the country is, I don't know, too long the, I mean the ocean is very, very long.

Eric Velasco: Very, very far away.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, far away.

Eric Velasco: Hard to get there.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah.

Eric Velasco: What do you see yourself doing then?

Uriel Castillo: ¿Que es lo que piensas hacer?

Guadalupe Castillo: I mean...

Uriel Castillo: I think he is just going to retire now. He is tired of working.

Guadalupe Castillo: Something small.

Uriel Castillo: He already made something small there. And back in Mexico so he is going to go back there and rest. See some family, you know. And...

Eric Velasco: You have earned it. All these double shifts. You have earned it.

Guadalupe Castillo: Yeah, a lot of ...

Eric Velasco: Do you think... when you get vacation, what do you do? Do you go back Mexico? Do you sit and relax?

Guadalupe Castillo: No sometimes relax, I have a few little days in beach, so I am staying home.

Uriel Castillo: Not a lot of vacation so... We don't really.

Eric Velasco: Well, I appreciate you taking the time, both taking the time with us today. It has been a great talk and I have enjoyed to get to know both of you a lot better.

Guadalupe Castillo: Thank you so much.

Eric Velasco: We are going to pause for thirty seconds.....