



Naomi Amador
Graham Central Station & More - Waco, TX

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Subminimum Wage

0:00:00

Angelica Mazè: Check, check recording. OK, we're recording. All right. This is Angelica Mazè recording for my project on Waco restaurant servers for the Southern Foodways Alliance out of University of Mississippi, in cooperation with Baylor's Institute for Oral History. The date is May 24, 2024, and I am here with narrator Naomi. Hi Naomi.

Naomi Amador: Hello.

Angelica Mazè: Welcome.

Naomi Amador: Welcome. Thank you.

Angelica Mazè: Awesome, so glad you're here.

Naomi Amador: Me too.

Angelica Mazè: Let's start with, what is your full name?

Naomi Amador: Naomi Leigh Amador.

Angelica Mazè: Wonderful. And what is your date of birth, if you don't mind?

Naomi Amador: August 3, 1981.

Angelica Mazè: OK cool. You're a year younger than me.

Naomi Amador: Yeah! [laughs]

Angelica Mazè: I forgot. Well, welcome. I'm so glad you're here.

Naomi Amador: Thank you.

Angelica Mazè: Let's begin at the beginning. Where were you born, and how did you get to Waco?

0:01:03

Naomi Amador: I was born in a super small town in the panhandle of Texas called Pampa. It's a tiny little depot—used to be a depot stop for Santa Fe Railroad before they merged with BNFS, or however they do all that, BNSF—whatever. My father actually worked on the railroad there. My grandfather worked on the railroad, and my uncle worked on the railroad there. Grandpa and uncle retired. Dad did not. We moved to Illinois, helped to start a church. Things went south after, hmm, I think we were there for almost ten years, so we moved to Peoria, IL when I was about eleven. I think I just turned eleven. No, sorry, I just turned ten. Got there, total culture shock: actual metropolitan area. [laughs] I came from like five whole stop lights in the whole town. So yeah, it was pretty overwhelming. Actual seasons too. 'Cause we have snow, of course, in the panhandle, but they have snow in twenty below zero, forty below zero.

0:02:02

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, a real winter.

Naomi Amador: Yeah, so that was an adjustment. And then when we decided it was time to come back to Texas, our family is kind of spread out between north, west, south, so we thought if we just kind of go in the middle. My mom had a sister that lived here with her husband and her two boys, so we moved here. I would have graduated had I stayed, but we moved here my senior year, so I didn't know anybody.

I actually ended up getting a server position at El Chico when I was seventeen. They didn't read my application. They thought I was eighteen. They wanted me to start running food and drinks.

And I was like, "I can't run the drinks because I'm not TABC certified." And they were like, "What are you talking about?" I was like, "'Cause I'm seventeen. It's on my application." They were like, "Oh, crap! You look like you're like twenty." I was like, [laughing] "No, dude, I'm not even—I'm a senior. Like, no, I'm in high school." So, I couldn't run my own drinks.

0:02:54

Angelica Mazè: Right. You're winking there, I see. [laughs]

Naomi Amador: Correct. Yes, yes. So, "You can take orders and you can wait tables, but you won't run your own drinks. Wink, wink." And I was like, "OK," and of course—whatever. So, yeah, things got busy. All the things. But my time in Illinois, my first server position was my first job. But that was not even serving. I was a dishwasher at a 50s diner in some random, just off on the side of the road shopping center that was right across the parking lot from where my mom worked. And I was like, "Oh, I should go get a summer job there." So, I walked in there, and I applied, and the woman was not very friendly, but she was like, "Yeah, we need a dishwasher." I was like, "Very cool. How much is it?" And it was like, I think it might have just turned to \$7.00 an hour. When did we get the change? Do you know?

Angelica Mazè: I remember 1991 was the last time that the subminimum wage was changed, but I think it was probably close to \$7.00 if you're talking mid-to-late 80s or something.

0:03:54

Naomi Amador: No, it had already changed by that time, so we were at \$7.25 or \$7.15, whatever it had been changed to, just for the bare minimum of any kitchen staff that started. I found out even the cooks were making that at that time. I thought, "Holy cow!" Even at that age, it didn't make sense to me. I was like, "OK, that's just how they do things." So, it didn't take long

before one of the owners, I guess the owner's husband, had come in the kitchen and kind of laughed. He's like, "What the hell are you doing back here?" I was like, "I got hired last week." He's like, "They're having you wash dishes?" I said, "Yes, sir," and I kept washing dishes. And not five minutes later, the head cook, Anthony I believe was his name, came up. And he's like, "Well, I guess you got promoted." I was like, "What are you talking about?" [Angelica laughs] He's like, "Well, he just told me you're now one of our new servers." I was like, "I've never waited a table in my life." I was like, "I'm sixteen." [cross-talk] He was like, "OK." So yeah, they threw me out there. And I mean, straightforward diner food: trashy burgers that were delicious, and kind of like soda jerks, but not really. So, you can make a Green River that was like Sprite, but it had the syrups that you could pour in it. So, you'd actually make a Cherry Coke if you made a Cherry Coke; it wasn't just coming out of a fountain.

0:04:58

Angelica Mazè: That's kind of cool.

Naomi Amador: It was cool. One side was a gift shop. The other side was a restaurant. I loved it, because I've loved 50s ever since I was a kid: Motown, doo-wop, all that stuff. So, I was like, "Oh my gosh, I get to listen to this music all the time?! I don't have to listen to crappy country music?" [Angelica laughs] Or, not even country, because it's not real country; like, Texas Roadhouse country is what I'm talking about.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah. [laughs]

Naomi Amador: Awful. So, loved it. I loved that job. The woman there really didn't like me a whole lot, but she couldn't fire me because I never really screwed up, so she didn't have a choice. She was like, "Well, I guess you're doing okay." I'm like, "Well, thank you." Then, by the

time I had gotten here for my second serving job—fast forward, I moved here my senior year. I did not know anyone when I moved here, and I didn't want to go to Waco High or University [High School], and neither did my parents, so they decided to let me go ahead and homeschool. Because I went to a private school before we had moved, so we just contacted the woman that was the director-whatever of that curriculum for that school and said, “Can you just send us the books, and we'll have her do it, and we'll just send you in her tests?”

0:06:00

Angelica Mazè: Oh, wow!

Naomi Amador: It was kind of like a remote private school kind of thing. So random. That's what I did just so I could work as much as possible. My plan was to move out. My parents didn't know that, of course. [Angelica laughs] So, I worked all that I could, that I could while I was even doing school work. And then by the time I turned eighteen, [snaps] out.

Angelica Mazè: Out the door.

Naomi Amador: I stayed at El Chico, but then I ended up going to hang out at Graham Central Station, which is—God, that was so long ago. I went there just to see, because I had never been to a nightclub. I was eighteen. I'd never been to a bar. I'd never been in those types of things, so going in there, I didn't really know what to expect. But they have a karaoke room, a dance room, country room, and then the other one was like retro disco whatever. So, of course I saw the karaoke room coming in, talked to them for a little while, and they're like, "Well, we're hiring." And I was like, "Really?! OK." So I applied. Of course, my mom freaks out just like, "Oh my God, I can't believe my little girl working at a bar," blah, blah, blah. It was just awful. So, then I was like, "No, mom, I just sing, I'm not actually bartending."

0:07:00

She's like, "OK, that's great." I think I'd been there for a couple months, and I was like, "If you guys ever need help with the bar, I've never done it, but I'd love to learn." They were like, "Whatever." So, one Saturday night, manning my post at the karaoke DJ booth, or "KJ" as you call 'em.

Angelica Mazè: KJ? I've never heard of that.

Naomi Amador: It's a karaoke jockey.

Angelica Mazè: I love it.

Naomi Amador: Yes. So, I was a KJ. So, he came up, the assist manager, and was like, "You still want to learn how to bartend?" I was like, "Sure." He hands me a shaker cup and a bar key, and he's like, "Alright, you're on bar number two. Here's your bank bag." And I was like, "I don't know how to mix drinks. I don't know what anything costs." They're like, "Well, you'll figure it out." I was like, "I don't even know where bar number two is. Are you kidding me?" So, he points me over, like in the middle of the busiest part of the dance club. I was like, "So, you're giving me not only a bar, but a bar to myself, by myself. And I've never done it. Perfect." So, I had the longest line because I was totally making drinks heavy and wrong. [Angelica laughs] They were so cheap it didn't matter. So, I was the only bar in the whole building that had a line, and everyone was like, "Oh my gosh, Naomi's killing it!"

0:08:03 And I was like, "No, I'm really not! I'm dying over here!" Like, trying to call for help. Everyone's just kind of laughing and like, "There you go. Just sink or swim." And I was like, "Oh my God, I'm going to kill every single one of you." I walked that night with like \$450 in tips.

Angelica Mazè: That's a lot of money for an eighteen-year-old.

Naomi Amador: That's a lot of money, hell yes! The shift was like 10 o'clock 'til 2:00. Of course we closed, but then you stay and break down and stock and whatever. So, really 4:00 AM. But I thought, "I've never had this much money at one time in my life! This is freaking amazing!"

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, and it was cash, right?

Naomi Amador: Yes. Hooked. That's the nature of the beast of the service industry, especially bartending. It is so hard to walk away from the money. Because it's ridiculously difficult to switch from hourly plus tips, to have to wait 'til every two weeks to then budget your entire life. Hope nobody breaks a bone. Hope you don't run out of gas. Hope you don't run out of ramen noodles.

0:09:00 It's legit. It's an adjustment. So, it was a lot learning and not learning how to be frugal. I think it was a big thing too, because I was so young making so much money. I didn't really drink. I didn't really party. So, it wasn't like I was snorting the profit or sharing the wealth with, "Oh, I got all this kind bud. Everybody share and come," and I'm just throwing parties—it wasn't even like that. So, I think I first started drinking after I had, of course, been around the bar for a little while. But I really didn't like the taste of alcohol, but it just never dawned on me: Don't drink it. Because I was like, well, everyone seems to be having a good time. Blah, blah, blah. Well, the first thing I ever drank was Southern Comfort, hundred proof.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, wow.

Naomi Amador: Oh God. And the bartender that gave it to me, of course, she didn't realize I was underage, bless her heart. And I didn't even say anything; I didn't even ask for a drink. That

was the whole thing. I went to go see my friends at a different bar that they were working at after they quit Graham's. And they just assumed that I was twenty-one because everyone always thought I was older.

0:10:00 So, I didn't think anything of it. I'm sitting and watching a band, and all of a sudden there's this bright red drink in front of me. And I'm like, "What the hell is this?" She's like, "Oh, it's Southern Comfort and Sprite with some grenadine." I was like, "I don't even know what that means, but it sounds delicious." And I drank it, and it was like vomit in a glass. I still, to this day, cannot pour a Southern Comfort anything without a slight, ugh, pause in my soul. It's awful. So, I had probably maybe two or three of those, doubles, of course. We're talking, like, chapter eleven. And for those of you all who don't know what chapter 11 eleven is, it's like the trashiest truck stop bar you could probably ever think of, but they pour so heavy, nobody cares.

Angelica Mazè: I've never heard that term.

Naomi Amador: Oh my goodness, it's fantastic. So, if you're paying for a double, you're really getting a triple, basically. [both laugh] It's fine. So, that's how they pour at this bar that I was at. And I mean, I never really drank. I think maybe when I had a babysitting job.

0:11:00 I was like fifteen or sixteen, and the guy, the dad had said, "Yeah, we have some Aftershock. If you want to take a shot, we don't mind. We're cool." You want a fifteen-year-old to drink aftershock, which is disgusting, and I'm also babysitting your three-month-old. That's probably not... That's really dumb.

Angelica Mazè: That's probably dad trying to be cool.

Naomi Amador: Yeah, that's weird. So, associating those with just drinking in general, it never really was attractive to me. Plus, my brother did every drug under the sun, and drank, and

all the things, so I learned at a very young age what not to do. So, it kind of steered me away from where everyone else in the service industry: “Let's go out and party after get off work, or let's go to the bar and grab a drink, or let's go shoot some pool.” And everyone just kept getting in that cycle. And I was just like, yeah, but you're just literally spending the money you just made. Like, that's the dumbest. And you're giving it to the same place, because once you become a regular somewhere, just because you start getting drinks, great. Well, but you're also giving them everything you just earned. So, that never made sense to me.

0:12:00 I think that's why a lot of people thought that I was so square, because I didn't just throw my money away. I'm like, no, because I don't really drink. I'm not really boring; I'll have fun doing anything, but I just wasn't into all the other things that everyone else was. It kind of saved my ass a few times, really, because so many people breaking up, getting together. That's another thing with the service industry: It's a horrible cesspool of just rumors, and he said she said, and backstabbing, and someone's dating someone, and I don't like them now because they're dating someone. And it's so cliquish. It's very high school. I've never been a fan of that aspect of service industry, which is why I think I kind of gravitated more towards speed bars. Because it's loud; even if you're partnered with someone you don't particularly care for, you don't really have to talk to them because you're kind of in your own areas.

Angelica Mazè: What is it? Will you say what a speed bar is?

Naomi Amador: A speed bar would be like if you're going into a place, and, "Hey, I'll just have a Jack and Coke and a beer." It's just kind of like TrueLove here, or like a mainstream kind of club.

0:12:59 I can't think of one that might be universal for this particular interview, but just like a hole-in-the-wall joint that you just literally go grab a beer and a shot, start a tab, shoot some pool.

Angelica Mazè: OK, so they're not mixologists.

Naomi Amador: Craft Cocktails, yeah, no, no. If you're fast and accurate, that's basically all your job requirements are, and memory like a steel trap. You have to have a mind like a steel trap.

Angelica Mazè: Love that.

Naomi Amador: And I did at one point, believe it or not. It's not here now, but it was. [both laugh] So, I don't know. I think that's why I gravitated to that, because it was more kind of just my area, my space. If I screw up, it's on me. If I don't clean or stock or whatever, the accountability. Just leave work at work. "No, I did my side. Check the other person's side," kind of a thing. But then you get into a lot of unfortunate drug use and things at work. Also, drinking on the job, on top of prescription drugs or whatever drugs you may have taken before you went to work. That's another scary thing. Just, it becomes a family even with a lot of people you don't like, much like real family. [both laugh]

0:14:03

Angelica Mazè: I was going to say. Sounds right.

Naomi Amador: You just don't get paid to hang out with your family, I guess. That's the only upside. It's weird, because you start looking out for people you wouldn't typically look out for. Not in a bad way, but just like, I wouldn't hang out with them outside of work. But then you

feel yourself feeling like you're kind of responsible for them too, because you're seeing them going down that path of drinking in the bar every night that they're working at, or drinking on the job every night that they're working, so it's like a "see something, say something." But I don't know; it's a very strange dynamic, the whole service industry to begin with. But that's when I started seeing more illicit drug use, was in the speed bar situation—college bar, speed bar kind of thing. Scruffy Murphy's, for instance. That sort of like—

Angelica Mazè: Would this still be Graham Central Station?

Naomi Amador: Oh, I'm so sorry.

Angelica Mazè: No, no, you're good. You're good, and I might have you backtrack, too, in just a second.

0:14:59

Naomi Amador: Yeah, so a lot of things that I had never really seen before: illicit drug use, yes; speed bars, again; dance club, yes. It's going to be there unfortunately. So, then moving on from El Chico after that, because I just wasn't making really good money. Roadhouse had just opened next door, so that competing steakhouse was kind of like—

Angelica Mazè: Texas Roundhouse?

Naomi Amador: Mm-hmm. Threw a wrench in our—because we were the only person on that side of I-35. There was no Magnolia Table. It was only Elite Cafe. So, [blows raspberry] "Yeah, okay." But we also had Trujillo's right there. So, people came to El Chico. It was a very real following, like you were with us or you were against us. It was so stupid.

Angelica Mazè: [laughs] That's hilarious.

Naomi Amador: You feel like you're in West Side Story. [snaps rhythmically]

Angelica Mazè: Like the Sharks and the Jets. [laughs]

Naomi Amador: Like, "Hey, we'll meet you outside with the beans [sp]." [Angelica laughs]
So, changing from that, I actually went over to Roadhouse not long after it closed—or opened, sorry, because I knew El Chico was on the way out. Ended up serving over there, meeting people that I'm still friends with to this day. [quietly] A lot of people I wish I didn't know to this day.
[Angelica laughs]

0:16:05 But a handful that I still like. But again, illicit drug use, which is crazy to think in the service industry of just—because that's a corporate-owned business, so you wouldn't think, I don't know. It's just so strange, because you think it's more wholesome, and it's more family oriented. I mean—

Angelica Mazè: Not a bar, not a nightclub. They have a bar, I know, but, yeah.

Naomi Amador: Yeah, but it was that service industry mentality once again, just like El Chico. People are going out after every shift, and going to the bar, and hanging out, and that solidarity, and we're that click, and we're so great. I mean, it does build rapport. It is kind of like a team building exercise, so to speak. Probably not the healthiest one, but it kind of is because whatever could possibly go wrong is going to go wrong. [Angelica laughs] How you're going to deal with it is like, "How drunk are you? OK, well, I'm not that drunk. You should drive."

"OK, cool."

"No, no, I'm more drunk than you are. You should drive."

"No, no, no." I'm like, okay, it's literally, again, like an adult daycare, as I described earlier.

0:17:01 It literally is that mentality. And from the get-go, just from how I grew up, I was always that maternal, whether I wanted to be or not, so I was always the one reeling people back in from doing really stupid things that they knew better. But again, drugs, alcohol, late nights, all the things. So, yeah, after getting to Roadhouse and seeing how cliquish they were, and I just don't like that. I don't like super clicky. And I guess maybe that's why I don't really like working for corporations versus mom-and-pop. Because even if you have the cliquish elements in your mom and pop, it's much quicker to be either squashed, or you know it's not going to get any better, get the heck out of here. Because if you take it to HR, supposedly it's supposed to run down the channels, and proper people are supposed to be aware of the situation, whether it's somebody's just being a jerk, not doing their job, sexual harassment, whatever the case may be.

0:18:04 But it seems like once you have to put it up that corporate ladder, it takes so much longer for the results to come down. So, when you work at a mom-and-pop restaurant, you're still going to have that same cliquish—owner is going to pick the favorite, there's going to be nepotism, there's going to be all of the elements. But it's so much more abrupt justice because, "Well, so and so did this and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." Well, they're fired. There are no channels.

Angelica Mazè: So, management has your back.

Naomi Amador: Sure. Yeah.

Angelica Mazè: Then there will be swift justice of some kind.

Naomi Amador: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: If they don't, that's something else. But you're not waiting for this huge machine to do this big bureaucratic process of punishment.

Naomi Amador: Yes. There is no red tape. It's just, "Mom said you're fired. K, bye!"

Angelica Mazè: [laughs] "Mom said you're fired."

Naomi Amador: Literally, because mom owns the place. "K, bye!" But yeah, it's crazy. So, I've seen both sides of it, but I do definitely prefer the mom-and-pop side, I think, personally.

0:18:55 It was a lot more difficult, to say the least, because they're not as structured as a corporation that has X, Y, Z, "Here's your spreadsheet. Check this off. This is what you do."

Whereas mom-and-pop's like, "We got a notebook paper in the back. It has everything you need to know on it. Don't touch it because you'll get it wet. There's your closing list."

"OK."

"Don't initial it, because we don't have it laminated, but just do it, and if you don't—"

Angelica Mazè: [laughs] And we don't have a printer.

Naomi Amador: Yeah, so you can't get written up. But if you don't do it, you're in trouble.

But they don't ever keep up the write ups, so you're on your tenth write up for the fifteen-millionth time. [Angelica laughs] It's fine. So, yeah, stuff like that. Again, it's one of those places where you get irritated, but again, it's family, whether you like them or not. Especially with the mom-and-pop places, you're more tolerant of people's—just ignorance. I mean, things that should be common sense, to me, even when I had my first waiting-tables job, is so foreign to some people that I've known in this industry for years. And I'm thinking, "How?" Even when I was sixteen. . . Anyhow. So, it's a very different dynamic.

0:20:00 And I do prefer the mom-and-pop to. . . Yeah, I do—to corporate for sure. I prefer the speed bar to the to the, "Everyone, let's just sit around and wear cool bow ties and awesome

suspenders, and we're going to twist our mustaches and talk about how awesome absinthe is for like five hours, while people are waiting on their drinks that already take an hour a piece to make." I don't get down like that.

Angelica Mazè: So, backtracking for these jobs. Is El Chico a chain?

Naomi Amador: It is a chain.

Angelica Mazè: OK. El Chico, and then Graham Central Station, which I think was locally owned.

Naomi Amador: It was kind of a chain. It was a Texas thing. It was throughout the state though. It was the brother competition, so anywhere Graham's was, they would build a Denim and Diamonds, which was basically the same kind of nightclub. So yeah, that's why.

Angelica Mazè: OK, so at both of those places, were they paying you that subminimum wage? Were you making full minimum wage, like \$7.00 and change? What is it, \$7.15, \$7.20? I can't believe I've forgotten.

0:21:01

Naomi Amador: I think it was \$7.15. I was \$2.13 for serving at El Chico. Texas Roadhouse, Graham Central Station, and El Chico was all \$2.13 an hour. The kitchen staff was \$7.15 at that time. Or \$0.25? Did I say \$0.15? \$0.15. Now I'm questioning myself.

Angelica Mazè: I am feeling really dumb because I have forgotten.

Naomi Amador: No, no, you're good. But that was theirs as well unless you had been there for, say, two years, then you're a whole \$8.00. It was bad. So, stuff like that. It's very frustrating as well, because I see these people in the kitchen, and in my opinion, yes, bartending is hard, but

I've also worked in kitchens. That is so much more difficult for so many other reasons. It's all moving parts, and it's all answering to people, whether it's your superiors and your fellow workers in the kitchen, or it's your fellow bartenders in the trenches and you're constantly answering to customers.

0:22:00 It's harder on the bartending side because they're the face. They're constantly dealing with every crotchety, cranky, cantankerous, other C-words that I can't say on this interview—people that kitchen staff don't have to. But they have to deal with that one expo, or that one manager that thinks he's an expo, and that's your matching my having to put up with the customers on my side, constantly going, constantly going, multitasking, multitasking. Different than the dynamic of what you're doing when you're in a kitchen operating; still that same amount of speed and urgency, but multiple steps and are difficult in their own right. So, I see that camaraderie between front of the house and back of the house, but there's also such a great divide. That, "I'm not going to do that because that's not my job." I was never that person because I thought, "Well, you're the first person that's going to go, one, because you have a crappy attitude; but two, if you are a one-trick pony, then really you're just a replaceable part."

0:23:02 Whereas if I'm a person that knows how to do three things, and a manager can say, "I taught you how to do that like a month ago, you remember?"

"Yeah, I do."

"Cool, can you jump back there and do that?"

"No problem."

Angelica Mazè: Job security.

Naomi Amador: Correct. Doesn't always work in that fashion, but...

Angelica Mazè: When things go well, job security. [laughs]

Naomi Amador: Yes. So, it's a catch-22, as any job, for sure. But just the \$2.13 an hour—I think my biggest frustration when I started really paying attention and not just head in the clouds, still a child in many ways, was realizing: I'm getting paid \$2.13 an hour to be here 'til 4:00 in the morning. My tips have stopped two-and-a-half hours ago, so I'm literally manual labor, scrubbing floors, pressure washing floors, replacing bottles and bottles and bottles, sometimes cases and cases and cases of things, depending on what it was, for \$2.13 an hour.

0:24:00 I don't know if there's a quick fix for that, but I do know it's just very discouraging when you look at your paycheck. Because also most places, unfortunately, corporate or mom-and-pop, don't really report all of the tips. So, of course when you're walking at night with sometimes \$200, \$300 in your pocket from a single shift, yeah, that was a great, abnormally wonderful shift, but you're still making that \$2.13 an hour on your paycheck. So, if you're the person that walked with \$75 having worked all day, not just a night shift, you're still making \$2.13 an hour. But you've got to figure it out because you're living off the generosity of others. People don't know what tips are an acronym for to begin with, so when you know that it's "tips to insure prompt service," it's a great concept.

0:24:55 But when I have my own dad breaking out the freaking calculator to calculate a tip, and I want to punch my own father in the face. Do you know how I survived? Not just myself as a kid, but raising a kid on my own, I was stringing together full time jobs between two or three jobs at a time that all let me make my own schedule, nighttime-daytime. I'm working

when he's sleeping, which is great. Don't lose time with him daytime, when he's with his dad, or night time. You know, trying to make that all work together.

Angelica Mazè: It's a lot.

Naomi Amador: It's a lot, but it's such good money. It's really hard to walk away, because then when you hit management, you break down the hours versus what you're actually making in your salary, and I've just out-made almost double what you made last week on your paycheck, in my tips. And you're the manager. So again, what should the legality limitations be on—if you're averaging this many hours a week, why are you able to legally only make this much money, if you break it down per hour, even salary-wise?

0:26:04 That's mind boggling on the opposite spectrum of the entire sliding scale of this the whole entire thing. Which is why I never wanted management, because I saw how hard they worked, and I was like, "You've got to be kidding me."

Angelica Mazè: And they don't get tipped out. They don't get tips.

Naomi Amador: Correct. Well, some do. [laughs]

Angelica Mazè: Aha! Interesting.

Naomi Amador: Not supposed to, but yeah, I mean some owners really will include themselves in your tip share. I've worked for those owners, and I've promptly quit working for those owners, because I'm not going to have people messing with what already has been taken away from me. Not just from tips, but just hourly, I'm getting taxed on \$2.13 an hour on top of, yeah, making \$2.13 an hour [laughs] no matter what kind of week I had. So, yeah it was discouraging when I knew I didn't make shit for tips for the whole week, and I'm like, ugh. I

know I'm waiting on that paycheck but really that's just going to, when I could afford to put gas in my tank at that time for that amount of money, now might be a quarter of a tank of gas. Then, it was a full tank; now, doesn't stretch quite so far. Same minimum wage.

0:27:06

Angelica Mazè: Yes, neither have risen in quite a long time, and of course the cost of living continues to rise. So, you were still in your twenties—I'm guessing, it sounds like—when you were working at El Chico, Roadhouse, and Graham Central Station?

Naomi Amador: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: And I know you mentioned your kids, so we'll talk about them in a second. Actually, I think the first question I want to ask is, let's go way back to your diner job first. You wanted a summer job, what was the money for? What were you saving that money for?

Naomi Amador: At that time, I really didn't have much in mind, of course, other than a car, eventually. I was trying to work towards that. I had a car that my mom and dad would let me use if I needed it for job purposes, so really, I would drive with my brother to school. So, I didn't have to have a vehicle at that point other than for work.

0:28:03 So, they were kind of testing the waters themselves [laughs] to see, "Can we really trust her to drive this car?" But also, I wanted to have my own vehicle that I bought my own, but I knew I wasn't going to be able to afford anything extravagant. I just wanted something to get me from point A to point B, wasn't mom and dad's, whatever. So, that was my main motivation, for sure.

Angelica Mazè: And then when you moved here, you said El Chico's, for sure, your goal was to get through high school and move out as soon as you graduated?

Naomi Amador: Get the heck out, yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Angelica Mazè: And you did?

Naomi Amador: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: You did. So, when you turned eighteen, you moved out?

Naomi Amador: Yeah.

Angelica Mazè: And you were paying for your rent. And you were working full time at the time?

Naomi Amador: Yes. Well, as close to full time as I could, yeah, at El Chico, and Graham's, trying to string that together too.

Angelica Mazè: So then, walk me through those next couple years, up until—I don't know exactly what chronology makes sense in terms of when your first child came along, or. . . But you worked. You were working through your twenties. You were supporting yourself. You were living in an apartment in Waco.

Naomi Amador: Yes.

0:29:00

Angelica Mazè: Did you have roommates?

Naomi Amador: I did. I was actually just crashing at a friend's house that I worked with at El Chico, that lived right off of the river in these really—they're not there anymore, now the

McLane Stadium sits there—but it used to have some really cool apartments called The Island Condominiums. It's these awesome, crappy townhomes, apartments, because it was two levels. Some of the end ones had five bedrooms. Most of them were two, but the unique thing about it was you'd have to go down this walkway across a bridge, basically, to get to the island that had the pool sitting on it. So, it was sitting in the river on a cement slab, but that's what made it different than any other place. So, everyone in Baylor area wanted those apartments. Whatever. So, I had gone over there and hung out with my friend that I worked with at El Chico at the time, and her and her roommate got into it one morning. She's like, "Oh my God, she's so crazy, and she's just going to have to move out." And I was like, "Really? So, you need a roommate?" And she's like, "Actually. . . ." And I was like, "Yes!"

0:30:00 So, that's when I moved in with her. That's when that whole dynamic of all of that crap, that she was the one that partied with the after parties, and all that. And that didn't even dawn on me when I was like, "That's a great idea." I was just getting out of my house.

Angelica Mazè: You were eighteen?

Naomi Amador: Yeah. I was like, "Fantastic." I ended up actually moving out, because when I came home from a trip to go visit my best friend who was in the military at the time, I went to the Marine Corps ball and I went with him to North Carolina. When I came home—my dad met me at the house to take me to lunch, and there was weed in the coffee grinder. [Angelica laughs] There was a bong that had been literally—I cannot make this up—had been knocked over on the floor, and someone just put newspaper over it.

Angelica Mazè: Amazing.

Naomi Amador: And then DVDs missing. I had vinyl missing. My original White Album that had the four pictures that came inside of it that an ex-boyfriend's mother gave to me: Gone. I was so heartbroken.

0:31:00 But yeah, that's the dynamic. I had another night that I came home from bartending at Graham's, and I'm walking up the stairs, and there's a girl walking down the stairs with my clothes on. And I'm like what [laughs] in the hell is happening?

Angelica Mazè: Oh my gosh.

Naomi Amador: House is full. People getting drunk, people getting high. I don't know any of these people. Don't even see my roommate. It's like 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning. I am so tired. I walk upstairs past the woman with my clothes—or, woman? She's probably like eighteen—has my clothes, "Oh my God, where do you shop?" I was like, "Obviously you shop in my closet. Can I have my shit back?" So, I go upstairs and all of my stuff is all over the room. I go back downstairs, heat myself something up to eat. Go back up the stairs, go bang on my roommate's door. Our doors face each other with the bathroom in between or whatever, so I go bang on her door, and she's in there making out with some dude. Oh my God. Then I heard a knock at the door, and I was like, "And that's for you." And I go in my room and shut it. And of course, the next thing I know, cops are knocking on my door. So, I opened the door, and they're looking at me and I said, "Yep." [laughs]

0:32:00 So excited. This is 4:30, almost five o'clock by this time, so they're asking whose house it is. I said, "Well, I do live here." I said, "It's actually my roommate's whole thing happening right now. I just got off work. I still have my Graham Central Station shirt on. I literally smell like a bar mat. If you don't believe me, you can totally call my manager right

now." He's like, "That's okay." But everyone's jumping off our balcony—and second story, they're jumping off the balcony to make it out the back door. So yeah, it was a whole thing. So, from that time, to moving out of that very quickly, because I realized I wasn't the roommate that was crazy. It was my roommate that was crazy. Had to move back with mom and dad. That was fun. Wait for my apartment to get ready. That was fun. So, yeah, still eighteen or nineteen by this time. Then when I had gotten out of El Chico and waiting tables altogether, I was just at Graham's for two years, probably solid. So, I was about to be twenty-one, I believe.

Angelica Mazè: So young.

0:33:00

Naomi Amador: Oh my God. So much fun though, because of course, again, being the service industry, and Waco being such a small town, especially back then. The service industry is such a much smaller concentrated community, so it's like its own little network of the best and the worst and the way worst [both laugh] of humanity for sure. But yeah, it was crazy. Just seeing the dynamic of how all of that works, especially being as innocent and naive as I was. Being brought up so naive, so shell shocked when I got thrown into reality. It was crazy. It really, really was. Looking back in hindsight, I would lose my mind if I knew either one of my kids did half the things that I was put in the spot of, like being the mom, to be like, "No, you shouldn't be putting that up your nose." Or, "No, you shouldn't be taking those keys and doing this." And I'm like, "I'm eighteen. Why am I telling you what to do when you're of age? This makes no sense!" So yeah, it's just always been that way.

0:34:00 But I've also been the responsibly irresponsible person, if that makes sense. Like, "Yeah, let's go back roadin' and smoke cigarettes because we're sixteen and we're so cool." Yeah,

I was a rebel. Not the best choice in the world because it wasn't our fucking car. But it was her brother's car, and he said it was okay. Not really, he didn't know. But everyone was asleep, and that's the worst that I did when I was a kid.

Angelica Mazè: That's not bad. That's really pretty, uh, compared to what you were being exposed to.

Naomi Amador: I was like Olivia Newton John in *Grease*, okay? I was a badass, just so you know.

Angelica Mazè: [laughs] I love it. Incredible. [Naomi laughs] Just, the whole visual that you're giving me there, which I'm loving. I'm restraining myself from singing, is what I'm doing. It's not my interview. [both laugh] Amazing. OK, so walk me through the rest of these twenties. Where else did you go? You were supporting yourself still? You had your own apartment, moved in with your folks, moved back out, found a place to stay.

0:35:03

Naomi Amador: Yeah. I ended up moving in with a girl that I worked with at Graham Central Station who was a beer-tub girl. She was adorable.

Angelica Mazè: A beer-tub girl?

Naomi Amador: It's just a girl that has a beer trough in front of her. That's really just a water trough filled with ice and beer bottles. They were dressed in bikinis, which you could wear a shirt over it if you felt too—and chaps. Had to have chaps.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, chaps. Wow.

Naomi Amador: So yeah, there was a lot going on. That was its own community of wow.

Angelica Mazè: OK. [laughs]

Naomi Amador: Lots of cocaine. Holy Moses, lots of cocaine. Lots of on-the-job drinking, mainly the cocaine. And really good at math. So, one of the girls—and I will not say her name because [laughs] she'll somehow find out, she's that girl—had been stealing so long from Graham's by doing math in her head while she was ringing things up. Wink, wink.

0:36:03 She was doing the math in her head and keeping inventory of each type of beer that she had given away, so by the end of the night, she was making her drawer look like she rang decent. But really, she had pocketed, I think like half.

Angelica Mazè: Wow!

Naomi Amador: And they just caught it, so they started counting her beers just to see how smart is this girl? Because they kept checking the drawers for, like, is she writing it on paper? Does she have her cell phone? Because back then it was just a flip phone. It wasn't like we have now. You literally had to pull up the calculator by hand. Like, you can't touch it, it's super obvious. But no, she was keeping it all in her head.

Angelica Mazè: Wow.

Naomi Amador: And we don't know how long she had been doing it up until the time that she had gotten caught. Thousands of dollars in a week. And she'd been there—she was there from opening day, and we had already been open for four years at that point. We had no idea.

Angelica Mazè: Wow, that's impressive.

Naomi Amador: Yeah. I'm like, man, if you are that smart, [both laugh] you kinda earned it, man.

Angelica Mazè: You could do a lot with those math skills.

0:37:01

Naomi Amador: I mean, if you used your powers for good and not for evil. Like, literally going in to tell people, "No, this is how you catch somebody stealing in your bar." Like, you would make millions being that person—

Angelica Mazè: Yeah.

Naomi Amador: —kind of exposing what to look for. So yeah, it was crazy. But all those girls were nuts. Well, I didn't realize that—again, because I had such a sheltered experience—I didn't know what it looked like when people were on cocaine. I had no idea. I had no idea, really, what it was like to be around anyone other than, of course, you can tell a drunk person from a mile away. But other than that, I had no clue. So, I was apparently roommates with one of the biggest coke heads [laughs] at the time.

Angelica Mazè: Surprise!

Naomi Amador: So, that was very uncomfortable. And her father is actually involved in law enforcement, previously of a university. So yeah, it was a lot. He called on me a lot to babysit, and check in, and "How's my daughter?" And "Thank God I have someone that's kind of like a plant."

Angelica Mazè: He sort of knew?

0:37:59

Naomi Amador: Yeah, so that way he knew I was going to keep him in the loop of how she's doing, who she's hanging out with, if she really is doing okay, is she eating. I was once

again the mom. Always. So, I had to get out of there, so I moved out of there very quickly. Ended up—let me see. By this time I was still at Graham's. I ended up staying at Graham's until I was about twenty—let me see. . . twenty-one. But I didn't realize before that that I had already been pregnant for four months. So, as soon as I found out I was pregnant four months, we decided [snaps], because if there's a bar fight, if something crazy happens, even though I'm behind the bar and there's a barrier and all the things, it's just too many variables.

Angelica Mazè: Was that a possibility? Did things get rowdy?

Naomi Amador: Oh gosh, yes. We had lots of bar fights. When you mix rednecks in one room with hip hoppers in another room, and then old people that just want to sing their karaoke, and then the other people that just want to listen to their disco.

0:39:02 So yeah, it's a lot. You have to go through the country room as a woman to get to the women's room. The men's room was kind of a neutral zone, which I never understood that, because a lot of bar fights happened in the neutral zone. It was like this room off to the side that used to be the big part of the main dance room, but they sectioned it off to make it into a pool hall kind of thing. But it was just a nook in front of the men's room that if anything happened, that's not a normal route for our floor people to take, because nobody was ever in there. Anyhow, bar fights, 100 percent. There was a lot of people that were coming to terms with their sexuality that ended up getting harassed there, unfortunately, because it just wasn't as normal as it is now for people to actually talk about, or see it and not freak out, or notice it and not point and gawk, or whatever. So, it was really weird because. . .

0:40:00 I don't know. Again, the dynamic of the service industry: You see such different, all-walks-of-life people when you—what I love to do—people watch, my favorite thing as a

bartender. So, watching people interact that are from opposite sides of the track as customers, all dancing together at the same time, it's so cheesy, but it's like, holy crap, there's a chance for people to actually put their differences aside. Music is one of those things that has always been the common denominator from all walks of life, obviously. So it was just kind of weird to see one extreme to another, where you have this horrible bar fight over here where someone gets bashed in the face with a beer bottle and it makes their eyeballs bleed because it burst those blood vessels in their forehead. That happened at a Vanilla Ice concert at Graham Central Station. [laughs]

Angelica Mazè: Wow, you just blew my mind.

Naomi Amador: I thought, "Are we really fighting each other to get closer to Vanilla Ice?" And this wasn't even with the actual—this was the DJ he had when he was going through his heavy metal stage.

0:41:04 So, whatever that means. I don't know, but it was something.

Angelica Mazè: Wow.

Naomi Amador: Yeah. So, my boyfriend at the time, who was a DJ at Graham's, was put in charge of Vanilla Ice. I guess, like a handler; I don't know. We had no idea what we were doing. We were just trying to keep him where we knew where he was. When it was time to go on, don't get too drunk, don't get too high. Get him on stage. Whatever he does after that is up to him. But this is what we're paying him for, and this is what they're paying for. So, we end up having to drive him and his DJ back to the hotel, which was, I think, the Red Roof Inn on [Interstate Highway] 35. If that thing is even still there. Classy.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah. I think it's been rebranded, but it's still there. It's basically still there.

Naomi Amador: It's beautiful. So, drive to check on them because I guess their driver had already dropped them off. We make it up the stairs. Vanilla Ice is incoherent, babbling something, jumping on the bed, making no sense, like a little kid, ear-to-ear grin, eyes lit up like an anime.

0:42:00 It was the weirdest thing. I don't know what he was on, but I really would love some. [Angelica laughs] And then the DJ had some random girl up on the vanity in the bathroom. They were about to do whatever they're going to do, whether Vanilla Ice is there or not. I'm like, "What is happ—I've gotta go. I have to go." And I got the heck out there. [laughs] I was like, "This is—"

Angelica Mazè: Oh my gosh.

Naomi Amador: —the service industry." it's crazy.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah. So, this was all to say that you were twenty, and this was—this was the environment that you realized you were pregnant.

Naomi Amador: Correct. And I was like, I'm out. I can't do it. So, by the time I left, I was—Where did I go after that? I was working at. . . You'll have to bear with me, it was so long ago. I left Graham's and. . . Yes, Linens & Things. That's what it was. God help me.

Angelica Mazè: Got yourself a retail job.

Naomi Amador: Retail job, yes, so the other aspect of the service industry. [laughs] Not most people associate the two, but it really is when it comes to customer service, in so many ways.

0:43:03 So yeah, I did that and decided just to nine-to-five as close as I could get, it would be the best thing for me anyways. Still was on my feet all the time, whatever. So, got through all that, did my job, all the things. Eventually realized this is not cutting it as far as minimum wage. At \$7.15, here I am doing manual labor. I am unloading trucks. I am putting out freight. I am putting merchandise on the floor. We're talking pieces of furniture. It's manual labor. It is two hundred to two hundred and fifty pounds depending on what it is, furniture and shelving and all the things, so it's not like you're just putting out bath towels and sheets like most people think. Especially at Christmastime, you have crap that you never normally sell that you want to make the most money off of that are big and wooden. And here is a game table. Here's this. Here's that. All these moving parts. So, I hated it, and again I got frustrated because I'm not making a fraction of what I could make if I was back bartending again, but I didn't want to go back to bartending with having a baby.

0:44:06 So, it was a really, really hard thing, but I stayed with retail as long as I possibly could, well after I had my son. I stayed there, and I tried my best to not get back into the service industry, but again, I just could not make sense of killing myself every single day with manual labor to then just make \$7.15 an hour. I just couldn't do it. So, I went back; didn't want to. Did it, and at that time I went to, let me see. . . So, I was there, had Ash. That was 2003 when I had him. When my ex-husband and I, after we had my son, I think we were married almost two years when I went ahead and left, and at that time I was back in bartending, so I was working at Treff's.

0:45:05

Angelica Mazè: Treff's? I don't know Treff's. T-r-e-f?

Naomi Amador: T-r-e-f-f-s. It's actually still a bar in San Marcos. He had more than one location. He did Waco first, then he did Austin, and then he did San Marcos, and San Marcos is the only one that's still open. But it's down on Austin Avenue where Halftime is now, that's never open. That's where Treff's used to be. So, that was a pool hall downstairs, darts, speed bar. Upstairs was a bar, little step down into like a stage area for music, and they had music all the time, which was great. Piano bar on Thursdays, so the piano man would come every Thursday, line to the door every Thursday even though it was the same show every Thursday. [both laugh] Nobody cared. Tuesdays were \$2.00 you-call-its, so that was really great for tips.

0:46:00 And the great thing about that bar was they were smart to always round the quarter up instead of dealing in pennies, nickels, and dimes. It actually increased us tip-wise, because if you throw a quarter in the jar, nobody cares. If you give a dollar and a quarter nobody cares. But if you have the choice between a quarter and dimes, nickels, and pennies, [snaps] you're going to put those dimes, nickels, and pennies. You're going to keep that quarter. So, it helps and people don't realize how much that helps. But it's also less time in the office. It's less time at the end of the night counting a cash drawer. It's less time at the end of the night dealing with just the menial things when your brain is already on autopilot. You just want to get the hell out of there and turn off at 4:00 AM.

Angelica Mazè: And you're not being tipped out, right? So, if you've got to spend an hour doing side work, or if you're bartending, accounting, and cleaning, then you want to do that for as little as possible.

Naomi Amador: Yeah. If you're cleaning your section, if you are rolling silverware, if you are stocking a bar. And that's why I just got to the point where I would literally give \$10 to my

fellow worker doing side work, "Hey, man, wanna roll my silverware? Because I want to get out of here." Because at the end of the day, that \$10 is going to be not taxed. [laughs]

0:47:00 But my check is going to for \$2.13, and if I'm still sitting here an hour later rolling silverware, I would rather just go, because I'm actually losing money, if I'm really getting down to it. So, it was hard. And I also would turn around some nights where I'd be like, "OK, I'll take your \$10, because I got time." I don't have to be home. My son's with his dad. I got all the time in the world. I'll roll every one of these pieces of silverware all night long. But then I worked at a place—oh, jumping ahead, sorry. So by that time, getting back into Treff's, and I also worked at the same time at a place also called Ace's, which was another speed bar off LaSalle, not there anymore. But again, because I couldn't make—in the service industry, especially in a bar or a restaurant, you get the hours you get unless you are an assistant manager, or you are a certified trainer, or you are a lead, or whatever the case may be. However, the hierarchy works in that particular setting, you're always going to be that bottom of the totem pole.

0:48:01 And until that time, you get what you get, so if you're not picking up shifts to scrounge enough time to make those bills, to make that rent, to make whatever is coming up—because again, you don't have a check to budget with, so you gotta hustle when you know, "Oh crap. I did not make enough money last week. I need to pick up at least three shifts this week to hope to goodness I can make rent." It's really crazy, especially having kids.

Angelica Mazè: I was going to say, yeah.

Naomi Amador: So, bartending and waiting tables, yeah, you get the hours you can scrounge up by far, unless you get in good with the manager that happens to make the schedule, or whatever, however that dynamic works at each individual place. Where my thing was,

working at Ace's, I worked for a girl that I used to work for at Texas Roadhouse. Her and her husband decided to open up their own bar and took over—I can't think what the bar's name was before Ace's, but they bought the bar and decided that was going to be what they were going to do.

0:49:01 So, they both quit their jobs and pushed themselves full time into owning this bar. Terrible with money; drank more than we sold. They ended up trying to fire me, as a matter of fact. They went on vacation and trusted this dude to run it. I can't even tell you what his name was—sweet dude. Of the handful of us that were there, I was the newest person that had just gotten hired. They went ahead and left for Vegas, came back, and everything was upside down. So, they're going through the paperwork and the nightly reports, and nothing's jiving, and "What the hell happened while we were gone?" So they started going through the surveillance footage, and they start calling people in. Well, I was one of the people they called in, and she all but told me that I was completely untrustworthy, that she should never have hired me because, "You were always that girl going out and getting drunk and getting high the whole time we were working together, and I should have known that you were going to be this crazy person, even though I thought you changed because you had a kid, and now you're just a bad mom, too. And I should probably call the cops, and you stole from us," and blah blah blah.

0:50:10 And as she's just going on this rant, I'm thinking, "Woman, we never even hung out. I was the person that you didn't like because I wouldn't be cliquish with you guys, so I don't know who you think. . . " I guess, because she did drink a lot, maybe she was mistaking me for someone else. I have no idea, but the bottom line was, you are putting my integrity in question, number one. Two, I know y'all. Why would I be dumb enough to steal from y'all? And three, there are surveillance cameras everywhere. Everybody knows this! So, as she is reading me the

riot act, and disarming me, and just dressing me down, her husband pulls out—because it wasn't digital, it was not electronic—a roll of all the drinks, and he finds it. I was trained wrong.

Everything was going under miscellaneous instead of specific liquor.

0:51:00 So, if you're supposed to be doing tequila: bottom-shelf, mid-shelf, top-shelf. Same for gin, same for vodka. But she's just having me putting in dollar amounts and hitting miscellaneous, so there's nothing being categorized. There's nothing being shifted into the right columns. So, when he finally got to the very, very end, and it was all literally at the very, very bottom under miscellaneous, which nothing ever is unless it's like a bag of chips or something. So, when he realized it, and she's still just going and going, and he's trying to get her attention so she would finally stop, and then she realized, "Oh my God." I was like, "OK, so this is who trained me. They trained me wrong. This is who you need to be talking to, not me. I didn't steal a single damn dime from you. Every ticket that I have is accounted for. You can watch every time I pour something, I ring it up, or I write it down and then I ring it up." But they knew where to stand to take a shot, so I was the only person on camera caught taking shots while they were doing shift shots. They knew where to stand.

0:51:59 I didn't, because I just thought this was, "Y'all are handing this to me. You're in charge. This is okay." Apparently not okay.

Angelica Mazè: The owners are handing these shots to you?

Naomi Amador: The person that they put in charge.

Angelica Mazè: The manager who had—

Naomi Amador: During their trip, yeah. So, on top of everything else, then they're like, "And then you're stealing liquor from us, too, because..." And I said, "No, actually I paid for my

shots. I don't think anybody else did. Did you look that ticket up? Because I can tell you where they were standing, because now I can see, sitting back here with their surveillance cameras on, they're standing right there."

Angelica Mazè: Good Lord.

Naomi Amador: Crazy.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah.

Naomi Amador: So, fast forward through that, ended up quitting Ace's, obviously. She goes a step further to then go to Pat Treff, who owns Treff's, to then say, "Naomi was stealing from us. We caught her. And we have regulars that say they love coming to Treff's when Naomi's working because they don't pay for anything."

Angelica Mazè: What?

Naomi Amador: Are you kidding? I just disproved what you just said to me, but then you're going to take it a step further as a business owner to a business owner acting like you're doing him a favor by giving him heads up of a thief.

0:53:01 Which, yes, as an owner I would greatly appreciate if someone were to have given me a heads up if somebody were to do that, stealing from me or whatever. But just to do that because you're mad at me for telling you what I think of you after you told me all these terrible, horrible things.

Angelica Mazè: That you're a bad mother.

Naomi Amador: Yeah. And I'm like, no, I'm kind of a good mom actually. I don't go out and get crap-faced all the time, and I don't go out, and you know. It was just so strange. I ended

up getting my hours cut down, and cut down, and cut down to basically squeeze me out at Treff's, because he took her word over mine. Obviously he doesn't know me; he doesn't work with me. He's just the owner. He doesn't. He's not in the trenches behind the bar, which is also another disconnect in the service industry. So, I basically just cut my losses on that end and thought, you know, I'm getting to that point where I'm hitting that wall again and being burnt out. I'm a single mom. I'm exhausted. I'm tired of working these late, late nights. So, I ended up taking a nine-to-five-ish job at OfficeMax.

0:54:00 A friend of mine's father, that I've known the family for years, got me a job as the operations manager over there, because at that point I had already had management experience, training experience, scheduling, books, payroll, all that stuff. So, he knew that would be easy if it was just structured, and then I learn the procedures and go from there. So, very easy transition. It was so nice to be home. I didn't have to worry about being out late and having to not be able to sleep in because I have to get up and take the kid to school. Or whatever, sometimes not go to sleep because it just made more sense. So, that was a huge adjustment for both of us. But that was a really weird dynamic, again, working for a corporation. There was a lot of weird stuff going on, too, that I still don't really fully know what was going on, but I believe the GM was found out to have been involved in some type of embezzling, and blah blah blah, and it was a huge mess. And the person that got me the job ended up quitting, so I was like, "Hmm, if he's jumping ship. . . "

0:55:00 He's like, "I kind of would probably want to [snipping noise], if I were you." And I was like, "OK." So, I got the heck out of there, and had to panic, and had to scrounge for a job. And I believe at that time. . . I missed a couple of jobs, I'm sorry.

Angelica Mazè: That's okay.

Naomi Amador: Sure did. But anyhow, moved on to bartending again after I had done that, just because, again, trying to make ends meet. I think I was making \$9.00 an hour as the operations manager working full time.

Angelica Mazè: Wow! Really?

Naomi Amador: Yeah, it was crazy.

Angelica Mazè: OfficeMax, wow. Operations manager?

Naomi Amador: Yeah, it's crazy. So yeah, they were just a weird company anyways, but then they ended up doing the splitting and the merging and all the things. Now it's just Office Depot or whatever. So, left that. I can't remember the job that I went to right after that though. I'll have to circle back around to that.

Angelica Mazè: Well, while you're thinking about that, let me pause you and ask. Two things I'm thinking about while you're describing all of these jobs, and having to go back to flopping between bartending where you can make the money, and then retail where you have more time with your kid and a better schedule.

0:56:02 Did you have health insurance from when your son was born? Did you have any health insurance from any of these jobs through when your child was born, or those first several years while you were changing around? Did you—

Naomi Amador: The only job that I remember even bringing up insurance, as far as the early part of my service industry career, was El Chico. I don't even remember how much money it was, but it would have taken all of my check, basically, to be able to have even the lowest rung of the insurance ladder, so to speak. And that was really for people that qualified for, I believe, it

was thirty-five hours or more, even if you picked up shifts, but you had to average that to keep it. And of course management, it was an automatic built-in to their—but I don't think they got any help paying for it. I believe it was fully their cost, whatever tier that they chose.

0:57:01 So, it was at a cheaper rate than if they did it on their own, of course, because you're going through a corporation. But you're still...

Angelica Mazè: But the company wasn't pitching in that much.

Naomi Amador: No. No, no, no.

Angelica Mazè: And I think it's pretty standard, anything over thirty-five, I think companies still are sort of legally required to have something in place. But under that, which is why a lot of places will have you work thirty-four-and-a-half [hours].

Naomi Amador: Don't you go over that thirty-four-and-a-half! Mm-hmm.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, okay. I was wondering about if you had any kind of healthcare support while you were giving birth and raising your child.

Naomi Amador: No, because any bartending job I've ever had does not offer anything, even for management, even for owners. If it's a mom and pop, there's never been, because there's not a price breakdown for if you only have five employees or if you only have ten employees. You have to hit that minimum, and we never were big enough anywhere I worked, it seemed like, to hit that minimum.

0:57:59 But I just remember all the corporate server stuff was just crap for insurance that really didn't help much, and it was just—it was so hard. I ended up having to unfortunately go through the state of Texas when I did have my son, because I didn't have the income to cover

claiming myself on an insurance policy, and even my husband at the time, because he worked for his dad. It was a family-owned business, once again. It's such a culmination of so many things, but I know there isn't one answer that's just going to be the, [magic sound] "This is the fix-all! And this is what it was, and y'all are so dumb you didn't see it in the beginning of time!" I know it's not, but there has to be some type of middle ground, meeting in the middle—something, a term that's escaping me right now—but, I don't know. Having to go through the state of Texas to help me with my son, I'm glad that I did. He ended up having to be in the NICU for ten days because he ingested fluid on the way out. They were afraid he was going to develop a bacterial infection.

0:59:04

Angelica Mazè: Oh, wow!

Naomi Amador: So, NICU...

Angelica Mazè: Yeah. Well I mean, just birth alone is exorbitantly expensive.

Naomi Amador: Oh, correct.

Angelica Mazè: And then yeah, NICU is.

Naomi Amador: And it was a very rough delivery, which sucked, but I ended up having to be in the hospital for seven days after, because my fever wouldn't come under control and they were afraid to send me home. Then, I was discharged, but then I was driving back and forth every single day, five or six times a day to feed the kid because he's still stuck in the hospital. So, I don't have a room anymore; I gotta go home and then I have to come back! So yeah, it was hard because when you're in NICU, it's only two in at a time. So, if I wanted to be with the baby; gotta

trade out with whoever else, because I'm here with the baby. So, that was rough. And then coming out of even maternity leave, it's still a limited—yeah, it's six weeks minimum, allegedly. But they can still get away with just giving you a month off paid, but they don't tell you that, so you're out two weeks paid, but "Oh, you said six weeks. Well, we only pay for four. You just didn't see that in the fine print."

1:00:03 So, that's another thing that I had to face at a different job, the second time. But it was humiliating to have to go through the state of Texas. I hated it. I've never had to go through government assistance before in my entire life, but had I not, I would still be paying for my child being born in NICU and me being in for days.

Angelica Mazè: And you being ill.

Naomi Amador: Crazy. So yeah, it was hard. But I mean, when I realized in the grand scheme of things, I'm probably never going to see social security, [both laugh] so it's kind of okay that I cashed in early to help me through the early years.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, there you go. Atta girl.

Naomi Amador: So hey, whatever, it worked. But no, I've never, until I got to—well, yeah, OfficeMax did offer insurance, but again, you had to take care of it on your own. Actually, I think they might have paid for a quarter.

Angelica Mazè: OK. It didn't feel financially viable?

Naomi Amador: No, especially for as little as I was making. There's no way I could have made it if I would have implemented that. I just basically banked on the fact that I really never

got sick, and as long as my son was covered through the state for that limited time, until I could find something else, great, let's do that.

1:01:09

Angelica Mazè: And did you have child care help while you were working nights and all these crazy bartending shifts?

Naomi Amador: Yes, thank goodness. My parents were so great. I was able to work my schedule to where, when my son was with his father on designated days, I could work open to close.

Angelica Mazè: OK. How long of a shift is that? Just out of curiosity, just generally.

Naomi Amador: Oh, goodness. If I had to work, say, two jobs in one day because I decided to work a morning shift somewhere and then close somewhere, or evening-mid kind of thing, however it worked out, I would string three jobs together to make a full time deal, but only schedule when my kid was sleeping or not home. So, one day I could work the lunch shift, which would be, technically you get there at 9:30 or 10:00 depending on what restaurant you're working at, work until at least 5:00 for the shift change. Or, if you got cut after lunch, so you're looking at maybe working a three-hour shift.

1:02:03 Then you can go home, shower, change, pick up kid, drop off kid, whatever. Then you've got to be back at work at 7:00. Same job, different job, doesn't matter. Or dinner shift. Got to be there at least by 4:00 to be ready for dinner by 5:00, work until least 10:00, 11:00 sometimes, for just the regular. But if you're bartending at a speed bar, you're not getting home till 4:00 AM, so that would have to be the nights that my son was with my parents. But then I'd

have to get up to have breakfast with my son. So I'd have to haul ass over to Hewitt, from my house, way downtown. [laughs]

Angelica Mazè: Oh my gosh.

Naomi Amador: I didn't get much sleep, which sucks, but if I didn't have that—because there's so many people that I know that their parents have nothing really to do with their kids, so they don't have that backup for the backup. So, then you get into, well, do I qualify for a sliding scale at the YMCA? Or do I qualify for a sliding scale at whatever? But it's never really a good sliding scale, because it's still, "Oh, you make too much money." How do I make too much money when I literally either eat, or I pay my electric bill? [laughs]

1:03:04 You know what I mean? So, I don't know. It's crazy. It is. And having two kids, I've told them both, "You will work at least one service-industry job, and you will work at least one Black Friday."

Angelica Mazè: [laughs] Yeah, these are formative experiences.

Naomi Amador: You may hate me for it, but you will appreciate people a lot more, and you will have a lot more respect for the people that you piss on every single day. When I think about *Fight Club*, "Do not fuck with the people that wait on you," they're not kidding! The people that literally do everything, that you never notice because it's just "the help," literally make the world go around and run absolutely everything. And you trust those people to make your food [both laugh] and your drinks. And that's a-whole-nother subject for a totally different—let's hope a podcast, I guess. [laughs]

Angelica Mazè: There we go. Good, we'll keep that in mind because I want to listen that podcast. I at least want to be a fly on the wall for that podcast that you definitely should do.

1:04:03 So, just for a time thing, we've probably got like—maybe, I don't know—twenty minutes left. So, I would like to be able to bring us more or less up to speed, but I know you have a million jobs, probably, still to cover, plus the birth of your daughter, Lila [sp]. So, if there's a way to kind of hit some of the highlights. I mean, I'm not in a rush, but I don't really want to keep you for more than twenty minutes. So, let's work down that timeline. Any of the places, the birth of your daughter obviously is an important milestone. But then, if there were any experiences at any of the service jobs that you worked that stand out to you for things that you remember, challenges that you faced, or things that were wonderful.

Naomi Amador: I think a lot of it, too—it was really strange. Backtracking to El Chico—horrible customer experience. Not of mine, thank goodness, but I finished it.

1:05:01 There was a gentleman that decided to open his pants and have him just sitting there while one of the girls had come back around to take his order. And of course she immediately runs off crying, and I'm thinking, "What just happened?" I saw her walk around the corner with a tea pitcher in her hand, and now she's just running out the back door crying. I come around the corner, and I see it, and I'm thinking, "Are you kidding me right now?" So, I walk right back over [laughs] to the server station, and I grab the sugariest pitcher of tea I can find, and I go over and I gladly dump it in his lap, [Angelica laughs] and I tell him he needs to go. And he looked at me like, "I can't believe you just did that!" And I thought, "I can't believe that your junk's hanging out right now, but here we are!"

Angelica Mazè: [laughs] It's not funny, but oh my God.

Naomi Amador: [laughs] So, as he's trying to get out of his booth with—his pants are like right here, and he's got all this cold liquid, and he's cussing at me, and he's just pissed off. And I'm just inching back, because as he's trying to get out, he's slipping and falling all over the place.

1:06:00 And of course my manager's coming down the aisle just mad, thinking that I threw something at him or something crazy happened. I explained to him what happened, and he sees him pulling his pants up and putting them back together. That's when he realized what was happening, and he gladly helped him out the front door. But I thought—

Angelica Mazè: And you were so young.

Naomi Amador: Yes! And this girl was even younger than I was. So I thought, "I can't believe that that just happened!" Cut to my next job at Texas Roadhouse. I have an older couple that's sitting in my section, like, the first week that I'm there. And I get this weird vibe from them, but I don't think much of it. And then they're supposed to be paying out their tab, and everybody's starting to leave. It's closing time. I'm sweeping my section. They might have a set of teeth between the two of them, and they asked me to go back to their hotel with them. And I thought. . .

Angelica Mazè: Wow! What?!

Naomi Amador: What?! I don't even drink, so that blackout's not even possible for that to happen. What?! So, I have to get my managers involved again and tell them, "I'm not going back over to my section. I've swept up as much as I'm going to sweep. I've wiped down as much as I'm going to wipe down. I'm going to get the hell out of here."

1:07:04 So, they took care of it. But I thought, "What?" But it's things like that, that just—I've seen women get lifted off the ground by their throat by a man a foot taller than her, and

that was the father of her children. And I am sitting there looking at this happening across from me at the bar, and I'm making eye contact with the constable, because they used law enforcement for our security at Graham's. And he sees it, and he looks at me. And he looked at me like, "Don't." And I was like, "Mmm, but I'm gonna!" So, I jump over the bar. I take off running, I mean, shoulder down, and I run into that dude as hard as I can. Mind you, I'm like one hundred and fifteen pounds soaking wet. [Angelica laughs] I'm not a big person at this point in my life, but I hit him as low and as hard as I possibly could right in the gut, and he dropped her. And I kind of helped scoop her up, and the constable right behind me takes him and gets him and takes him out the front door.

1:07:59 But I know them, and I'm like, "Y'all have been here before, and you're going to bring your mess into my house? This is where I work!" And it's just adding to the element of, all they know is they're seeing a man putting his hands on a woman in a bar in a dance club. It's already high-strung, high over-stimulation, just music, and lights, and smoke, and all—it was just—it was crazy. But it's insane to see so many fights. It really is. I've seen people get carried out by their, like, literally a man being tall enough to put his forearm around someone's throat, and literally just pick him up and walk him out the front door, because they're being that out of control to when they had to literally physically lay on them to keep them from moving until the cops get there. It's crazy. And now that I'm thinking about it, as an eighteen-year-old, what the hell was I thinking? But at that time, I had all these bouncers that were looking out for me, and all these cops, so it never even dawned on me how bad things could have really gotten. And for \$2.13 an hour!

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, I know! [laughs]

1:09:00

Naomi Amador: But it was such good money and I was having such a good time. All these people were spending, spending, spending, and snorting it, and doing all these dumb things. And I'm thinking, "Y'all are idiots." It's just crazy. So, being in that now for—holy crap!—twenty-five-plus years off and on, I think moving on to the, kind of in the same wheelhouse, but the spirit industry. You and I were working together even at the distillery that we did, the experiences that we got to have behind the bar, meeting crazy people from all over the world, being able to see, not just bartending it and serving it in the service industry in the same place, but actually being a part of making it, I think that's why I was so happy to be there. Because when I first got there, it was so family, it was so different, it was so close knit. It was so very much toward the service industry geared. Everyone gets an industry discount. If you work here, if you work there.

1:10:00 Again, the camaraderie between that industry, because again it's such a small—even in the United States as a whole, the spirit industry is so small. The brewing industry is so small. The wine industry, cordials, all of it if you break it down. So, once you have that network of people that respect the industry, that respect service industry, that respect everything in every aspect of it, because at the end of the day, y'all are pouring our product for us, and selling it and promoting it for us, and all these things. So, it's that one hand washes the other where I got to meet Val Kilmer in Austin working at an Alamo Drafthouse event with Balcones. That blew my freaking mind.

Angelica Mazè: I didn't know that.

Naomi Amador: It ended up being in his documentary that he came out with on Prime. I think it was Amazon Prime. But before he started acting seriously, he would always carry around those big old cameras on his shoulder and behind the scenes. So, he strung all of his VHS and all

of his digital into one, and had his son narrate, because he has a tracheotomy now, so he can't speak.

1:11:03 But his son sounds just like—I thought it was him. It was so strange; it gave me chill bumps. But he was on stage talking at that event for Alamo Drafthouse with Balcones, our symbols in the back, or Balcones brand labels in the back, while he's talking about him being from the Austin area and growing up there, so it was kind of like coming home for him. His son was there. We made the old, abandoned ghost town out there that they've actually done, like, *The Walking Dead*. They filmed a bunch of stuff out there.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah. Yeah, I've read about it. I've never seen it.

Naomi Amador: Totally worth a visit. Need to go out there. I can't think what it's called, but it has the main little water thing in the middle of the yard, or the middle of the main court—What is that? Like, the. . .

Angelica Mazè: Like the town square?

Naomi Amador: Yeah, like the town square. There you go. So, it has the barbershop. It has the general store. It has the post office. It has the bar. It has all these things. So, we got to make the saloon into a saloon. They brought in a roulette table. They brought in a craps table. They put all of our product behind the bar. Everything was made exactly the way it would have been, like doors open.

1:12:01 Then we had Birch, who was doing the ax throwing-something-something, and then you'd get a cowboy sash that was really a Balcones handkerchief that was red. It was just really cool how every little detail worked together. Then you bring in service industry, because you hire them to come and bartend the event for you, so then they get to be a part of it, and they

get to meet people they would not have normally gotten to meet. So, I don't know how everything works together. Those were some of the best times, before it got corporate, again. I don't mean to be down on the corporate, but it's just, you're so limited, especially in the service industry. If I would want to own a restaurant that has kind of the concept that Corey was going for with Milo: I'm literally just going to fix what I want for that day, rather than keeping a set menu. That is interesting to me. I'm going to trust you and say, "You make me your favorite thing, because if that's what you would eat, that's what I want to try." I don't want this crap on your menu. So, I think it's a more personal experience, whether it's a crappy hole-in-the-wall bar, or like when Seven Seas used to be open on Dutton.

1:13:03 It was that hole in the wall joint that nobody really went to, but now it's Sergio's, and since it's been re-named and branded, people are like, "Yeah, it's just not the same." Because it was a crappier location. It was more personal. It was more family. There was just something about it. So, I think when you go to a place that is more corporate, and they still have the ability to nail it with that personalization and that attentive. . . I don't know. There's just something different about it. But if you can find a place that has both, that's pretty freaking special.

Angelica Mazè: That's the sweet spot.

Naomi Amador: Yeah, for sure.

Angelica Mazè: So, it was Balcones distilling where you and I were working, which is mainly for this, which is where you had that amazing event in the ghost town, and you felt like that was—that was a good gig while it lasted. You felt like you were cared for there, and sort of had a good community with your coworkers and management.

Naomi Amador: Yes, for sure. It was so close knit. Even when you were there, it started to grow where the change was going to start having all the growing pains.

1:14:03 I wish that you could have been there sooner. I really do. It's all the old bartenders. It's all the old servers. It's all these people that we didn't know what the hell we were doing. We just knew what we were making was amazing, and other people thought it was amazing, so we're going to figure this out together. OK! Literally, we typed out these "How to do" things, and it was the funniest things. It was like, you're the most unprofessional person ever. It looks like a little kid took a crayon and was like, "OK, step one: Turn the water on. Step 2..." And I was like, "Guys, this is so ridiculous." But now you go in there and it's so corporate. Everyone has to wear a vest and a safety hat and goggles.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, is that right?

Naomi Amador: Yeah, and you can't go beyond a certain line. Front of the house does not go in the back of the house unless you're going to the merch area. You have to have the vest on, and the goggles, and the hard hat, and all the things. So, it's very OSHA. It's not what it was. So now it's a much more corporate feel when you go in there because it's not like, "Heyyyy!" It's not like Cheers anymore.

1:15:00 So, it's like, "Oh, do you want to tab? [laughs] That's my first question. Good to see you. Cool. Give me your card." So, I don't know. I think the dynamic of how everything was back then, it was so much of a family that there was not—there were titles, but it wasn't like that's your box, that's where you stay. Whereas when you got there, it was like, "This is literally the only place that you can go, and it better be done even though the person before you didn't do it. You better do it." [Angelica laughs] So, then it started getting into all that, and then it kind of

just, I don't know, it lost a lot of luster, and we started losing the people that had been there for so very long. So it was like, it goes from family, to "Who are you again?" Because unless you're there for a couple months, I'm just going through the motions, and saying hi to my normal people in the mornings, and going about my business. Once it got to be that way, that's when it kind of lost a lot of luster for me. But my God, the product was—it's still amazing. It's really cool to say that I was a part of that and know that our picture is hanging in the little reception area, which I didn't know until someone told me that the other day. I was like, what?

Angelica Mazè: I don't think I knew that either. That's cool.

1:16:07

Naomi Amador: "I'm on the wall?" [Angelica laughs] "Get out of here!" I forgot about that.

Angelica Mazè: We'll go sometime, we'll take a picture together of the picture of us in front of our picture.

Naomi Amador: [laughs] Just a picture of our picture of our picture.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, just a sort of a meta thing. Amazing. It's a date. [both laugh] and you worked in packaging too, so you weren't just working front of house. You did front of house stuff, I know, but you also were back running the bottling line and doing all kinds of production stuff back in the, yeah, packaging/production.

Naomi Amador: Yeah, we got to do pulling the samples, going out to the warehouses, which a lot of people dreaded, but honestly I love the physical aspect of that job just because I was so happy to get out of just bartending. I was so happy to get out of just being customer service and answering the phones and all these things. I could kind of disconnect, put my

headphones in, get back there and bottle five pallets of whatever it was, or sit there and write till my hands were numb and my eyes couldn't even focus anymore.

1:17:00 "What number are we on?" Numbering individual bottles from one to five hundred and not messing up or you have to be labeled again. Fantastic! I've only done this three times on one bottle, like this label is sticking out an inch from the bottle. But yeah, I mean, the production side was amazing. I wish I would have gotten more time to be able to learn the still side of it. I really wanted to learn how to do that a whole lot, but my brain, just the math. [blows raspberry] Oh my gosh, like, the computers, and the monitors, and the levels, and the gauges, and all the percentages, and you can't put too much of this or too much of that. No, I just want the whiskey. I'm good. Just give me the end product, and I'll tell you if it's good. [laughs]

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, and they did not pay. I mean, I personally never thought that y'all were paid enough—

Naomi Amador: Oh, no.

Angelica Mazè: —in production. But they were paying you more than minimum wage, so you weren't maybe as much in between a rock and a hard place with the, "I've got a nine-to-five schedule, but I'm..."

1:17:56

Naomi Amador: But on \$13 an hour. Unless you're a single person, and you have no children, and you have no aspirations, hat else are you going to do? They did offer insurance. They did pay for half. I believe it was half. It wasn't the greatest coverage in the world, but I will say, after I left there and had to go to a food-service job again, because I left there to go help Guess Family get that and Koko Ramen from a food truck to a brick and mortar. Keith Berringer

was the nicest man, president of company at the time, that allowed me to continue to pay out of pocket for insurance to make sure that I was covered until I was able to find a job that I could find coverage for myself.

Angelica Mazè: That's amazing.

Naomi Amador: And it was such a huge blessing, because I didn't realize that I was going to go in for my yearly and realize that I had cancer I had to have removed from my ovaries. So, had I not had that, service industry wasn't going to cover it. They probably wouldn't have done it as surgery anyhow, because I didn't have insurance or a way to pay for it. So, they give you a "discount" for paying cash if you're doing out of pocket at most OBGs or general practitioners. But still, it's not en...

1:19:07

Angelica Mazè: The cash is still going to be a massive—

Naomi Amador: It's going to be hundreds to just do—

Angelica Mazè: Thousands, I think.

Naomi Amador: Yeah.

Angelica Mazè: I had a—anyway, yes. [laughs]

Naomi Amador: Yeah. So, especially when you're looking into more elaborate testing for feminine problems or potential issues, because then I had to go every three months for the first four visits, to then six months as long as it didn't show the cancer was coming back. Then I could eventually go back to an annual. But I still had to keep that very strict to make sure we got it all, kind of a thing, which I'm glad that they did. But I also had my daughter who ended up having to

be an external inversion, because she decided to put her head up here when it should be down here right before I'm giving birth. And that's from the outside. So, they stick their hands as far into your guts as they can to physically turn the baby.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, yes. OK, I've heard of this.

Naomi Amador: He told me, "Do not Google it!" I said, "I won't!" And I didn't, and I almost died. It was great.

1:20:00 And then get her in there. And then I almost died after my epidural because my blood pressure plummeted so hard, and they could not get ephedrine to get my levels back up again. I literally came out of my body. It was the most surreal experience I've ever had, and all over an epidural. And she still tried to turn sideways after all this, and I was in labor for twenty-something hours, and then they ended up having to do an emergency C-section. Didn't realize that she was stuck, because she was trying to turn again, so when he went to cut her out, he nicked her right above the eye with the scalpel.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, Naomi. Good grief.

Naomi Amador: So, again, I mean, from all the extra cost of just the medication to get me back level again, to bring me back from what went wrong, to then caring for her post-operation, my operation, the whole thing, again, had to go through the state of Texas because I did not have insurance being a service industry worker. There's no way, there's no way. So, again, humiliating as a person that's always worked so hard.

1:20:59 I shouldn't feel bad for asking for help, but at the same time, now that river's run dry to where I make too much money now as a single mom that barely makes \$6.00 an hour plus

tips. But I'm still having problems making it at that point, and I'm just a general manager, I'm not salary.

Angelica Mazè: This is your current position?

Naomi Amador: Yeah, correct.

Angelica Mazè: And you're a general manager of, it's like a pizza place and a brewery. Well, it's a brewery first, I guess, and they have pizza.

Naomi Amador: And we make pizza, yeah. But I mean, \$6.00 an hour. There's some places in town that are offering \$5.00 an hour to bartend plus tips.

Angelica Mazè: So, \$6.00 an hour, and then you get tips?

Naomi Amador: Mm-hmm.

Angelica Mazè: Wow! And how old are your children now?

Naomi Amador: My son turns twenty-one in August. My daughter just turned thirteen, so I still have a little time left with her. But I mean, I'm a grandmother now, and that's weird. [both laugh] I'm still too young in my brain to be a grandmother even though I'm only forty-two. But yeah, that was a huge adjustment.

1:22:00 But I still have all these variables. Still being the service industry, thankfully where I am now, the position that I am, which is a very rare thing in the service industry, they actually do offer insurance for my position and for the kitchen manager position. But that's all. But they do cover half.

Angelica Mazè: Hallelujah.

Naomi Amador: You can pick your tier, so however much you want to spend, but they cover half. That's the main reason I took this job.

Angelica Mazè: That certainly sounds like that's the best offer that you've gotten, which was better than Balcones. I can't remember.

Naomi Amador: Yeah.

Angelica Mazè: Wow. Well, that's something.

Naomi Amador: That was a blessing, yeah. And that made it a no-brainer for that too, because I thought, "Yeah, I could go to one day for a dollar less an hour and so much less of a headache."

Angelica Mazè: One day at the bar?

Naomi Amador: Yeah, but it's also no insurance, management or otherwise. Doghouse is the only other place that I bartended that actually was \$7.00 an hour, and that was ten years ago.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, wow. I'm surprised.

1:22:59

Naomi Amador: But they also have a zero turnover rate because they pay their bartenders so much. Their bartenders are happy to be there, and they'll be damned if they're going to give it to someone else, because then they'd have to go back to \$2.13 an hour.

Angelica Mazè: I've never heard of anybody paying that much.

Naomi Amador: Yeah. I was very shocked that they, as weird of a bunch of people as they are, they really do care about their employees. And they now own Crying Shame. They also own Salty Dog. And Blue Dog? Is that the other one that's by Salty Dog, that's like the fancy cocktail?

Angelica Mazè: I don't remember.

Naomi Amador: I think it's Blue Dog. I think so.

Angelica Mazè: Works for me.

Naomi Amador: Yeah, I don't know what they get paid over there, but I know at Dog House that's what it was. It was a blessing at that time because, yeah, single mom, and I could work the day shift, so I was literally there from like nine to five. I didn't have to deal with the nighttime riffraff, no door people, just a female bartender by themselves, which is just completely so unsafe, especially on Waco Drive.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah. Gosh, I cannot imagine. Well, I can imagine, unfortunately.

1:24:00

Naomi Amador: Yeah, exactly. [laughs] You know.

Angelica Mazè: I know. And I know more now that I've heard all of your stories about people being hauled out by the neck.

Naomi Amador: It was a lot of fun. [both laugh]

Angelica Mazè: I mean, you've got good stories. There's no denying. [both laugh] If nothing else, we could spend a lot of long winter evenings recounting your adventures in the food service industry. Well, I don't want to keep you for too much longer here. I think we're

getting to our-hour-and-a-half mark. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you want to share, or anything that I haven't asked you that you feel like you want to have known?

Naomi Amador: Goodness, I know it's a very delicate infrastructure for all of this, taking into account how the impact, if they were to make that decision to increase minimum wage and all the things that that entails. But there has to be something more, because when you're being taxed so many times for the same thing—and I don't think that, obviously, cash should be undocumented or anything.

1:25:06 I'm not condoning hiding income or anything else of that nature. But at the end of the day, when I earn that money, and I have a family to support, I'm not stealing from the company. I'm not stealing from the customer. I'm not taking their credit card and going crazy on a shopping spree. I'm not filling in an extra zero on their tip line. I'm not doing anything but working for what I've earned, and to be taxed and taxed and taxed, and then possibly audited because you think I'm making too much money. I'm working as best I can. It's just frustrating, it really is, to see people break out tip calculators. Or people that put the money on the table to begin, and then they keep taking money away.

Angelica Mazè: Oh no! I've heard of that, but I've never seen.

Naomi Amador: Yeah, it's a thing. So, it's humiliating—

Angelica Mazè: Gross.

Naomi Amador: —just the amount of groveling that you have to do in—

1:26:00 not in all cases, but I would say the customer interactions that I've even had today. It's a mixed bag: older, younger, family, single, couples, retired, military, all walks of life; but

you are always the help. You will rarely find someone that's actually understanding when there is a technical malfunction or something beyond your control—Wi-Fi goes out, whatever the case may be. You have to remember, we are doing the crappiest job, apart from something with the sewer or disgusting conditions. But as far as dealing with the most rude, inconsiderate, could not care less about humanity or what they are contributing to it, it's a very, very grueling and demanding job, and it's a very hard job to always be on. It's a very hard job to always put other people first, because nobody puts you first, especially in the service industry.

1:27:02 That's from owners most times, to managers most times, to fell employees most times, to people that are even under you. When you find that place that you feel like you're amongst your own, that's the sweet spot. Because I've worked so many places that I literally would go down with the ship burning just because I wanted to see that place succeed so badly, even though the owners have no clue what they're doing. When you get into the service industry, if you want to own a business just for the fun of it, don't open a bar. Don't open a restaurant. If you do, find people to get advice from that have actually done it, and find the people that know what the hell they're doing. And when they do, and when you have, let them do their job. Micromanaging is not going to make you any more money. It is only going to make your employees burn out faster and harder. And if you have to do the job yourself for the first couple years, remember that when you step out of those shoes and give it to someone else.

1:28:01 Nobody is going to care as much about your business as you do, because it's your business. But if you keep putting your employees last, and they're the afterthought, or throw a bar together: "Well, that fits there. That fits there. That fits there. They'll figure it out." That's not taking care of your staff. That's just putting shit where you think it fits, and it'll work, they'll just figure it out. Care about something more than the bottom line. Your people are what's keeping

this thing running. If you shit on your people, and you're already giving them shit for pay, they only last for so long. The quote that you gave me years ago is, "I feel like a mushroom because you're keeping me in the dark and feeding me shit."

Angelica Mazè: [laughs] Yeah!

Naomi Amador: This is what happens in the service industry. Nobody knows what the left hand is doing. The right hand doesn't know the left hand is doing. Nobody knows who's coming in. Nobody knows if the manager is even going to be there. Has anybody even heard from the owner today? What's going on with this? Why don't we have more of this? Who didn't order that? Who's in charge?

Angelica Mazè: Yeah. Who's running this show?

1:29:00

Naomi Amador: And they want to dump everything on the employees and make them do more for less and more for less and more for less. It shows after a while. You have to show appreciation. So, even if you're a small business owner, you don't have to adhere to the \$2.13 bare minimum. You don't have to adhere to the \$7.15 bare minimum. You can be those people that cross-train to make people more valuable, that break down those barriers between front of the house and back of the house so you can't say, "That's not my job." But you also can't tell me to clean a toilet if you've never touched shit in your life and expect me to do it. I'm never going to ask someone to do something I've never done before, but I guarantee you, I don't close anymore, because I've done that for twenty-five freaking years, so y'all got it. I'll supervise. I'll get along.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, there's nothing wrong with delegating if people have been trained.

Naomi Amador: It kills me. It does. Because I'm that person that, if it can't get done right, I don't want to have to do it again, so I'd rather just do it myself.

Angelica Mazè: Fair enough.

Naomi Amador: But, I have to realize you have to give it away before you burn yourself out.

1:30:00

Angelica Mazè: Yeah. Gotta take care of Naomi. Well, amazing. Thank you so much for sharing all of your incredible stories.

Naomi Amador: Thank you.

Angelica Mazè: It sounds like you're at a pretty somewhat stable position now, and I'm thrilled that they're giving you good health insurance.

Naomi Amador: Me too.

Angelica Mazè: Good-ish, given where the whole country is with health insurance, et cetera, et cetera.

Naomi Amador: Yes, for sure.

Angelica Mazè: And I'm just so grateful you found time because I know you have a really, really busy schedule with—

Naomi Amador: No problem.

Angelica Mazè: —mainly you're at work, but also your family and everything. So I just really, really appreciate it. Thank you so much.

Naomi Amador: Yes. Thank you for taking the time to do this, and thank you to everyone that's doing this study, because however it pans out, I mean, I hope it makes a difference.

Angelica Mazè: I hope so too. Nothing bad will come of it. [knocks wood] I'm knocking wood, but surely, surely "Another prayer to Saint Shirley," as my mother says. [Naomi laughs] Well, Naomi, thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

Naomi Amador: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: End recording.

1:31:00

[End]