

TRANSCRIPT- ALMA LOPEZ and MARIO PUGA

Interviewees: ALMA LOPEZ and MARIO PUGA

Interviewer: KIERAN W. TAYLOR

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Length of the interview: 01:01:20

KIERAN W. TAYLOR: Yeah, well let's, let's go ahead and get started then. And Ms. Jarvis, fix a plate. We've got food here, if you're hungry. And our guests have graciously brought food from their food truck, which we'll talk about in just a minute, but I wanted to thank Alma López and Mario Puga for taking out time this afternoon to be with our class. This is as I mentioned, this is an oral history class and also a labor history class. So we're talking about various themes related to work and labor, and the students at the end of the semester, they're gonna be out doing their own interviews around, you know, projects related to particular occupations and just really broader themes that are related to work and labor. So what I'll do is I'm gonna ask you questions just about your work experiences both in Mexico and here in South Carolina and Mario, I know you've worked in other states in the US as well. So we'll talk a little bit about that. And then hopefully I can shut up in time to give the students a chance to ask some questions as well. But, maybe, and then— Alma I'll ask you to come up a little bit closer to the microphone. It'll, it shouldn't have, you know, it'll pick all of us up, but it's best if you're kind of close to the microphone. So just for the sake of the recording, could you say your names and where, and when you were born?

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ALMA LÓPEZ : My name is Alma López and I was born in Mexico City and grew up in Guerrero.

KT: And Mario?

AL: Mario

MARIO PUGA: Yeah, my name is Mario Puga. I was born in Mexico City in 1974. And I've been in the United States since '89.

KT: So you've been here I mean, the US has been home since '89. And about how long has the US been home for you Alma?

AL: When I arrived at United States, I was 16. It was in 1995.

KT: Okay. Tell me a little, well, first of all, just, and this is the same question that we ask anybody who comes to the class. Do you remember your first day of work?

AL: Yes.

KT: Tell me about it

AL: I mean my first day of work when I let's say where I got paid, because I always work, but when I got paid was in Mexico City.

KT: So you, how old were you?

AL: I was 15.

KT: And what did you do in Mexico City? What, what kind of work was it? What, what do you remember about that day?

AL: Mm, it was housekeeping, not for long. And then at restaurant, I was working at a restaurant.

KT: Do you remember a particular day? I mean, was that difficult to work for someone else to work outside of the home?

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AL: Not at all. No. No. I was used to work. I was excited because I gonna get paid.

KT: Do you remember how much you were paid for your first day of work?

AL: If we say it right now and dollars, it'll be five dollars a day.

KT: Five dollars a day? Yeah. Yeah. And Mario, how about you? What was your first, what do you remember that first day of work?

MP: Well like Alma said growing up in a foreign country, you tend to work at a very early age, so I was working, answering the phone for my father. My father and my uncle had a plumbing business going. So I was there answering the phone at the age of nine. So, and they just gave me allowance pretty much. But I was answering the phone. Yeah.

MP: In the businesses?

KT: Yeah.

MP: Yeah. Taking, you know, messages.

KT: So you as a nine-year-old, you were able to handle that?

MP: Well, I'll tell you one thing though. And this is where you guys, I don't know if you can relate, but growing up in a foreign country, like I said, and she can testify to that. You tend to grow up mature, actually mature at a very early age, because that's what the culture tends to push you into is just growing up. Get matured, get ready to get, I don't know how to explain it. You gotta be ready at all the time. So pretty much growing up in a foreign country. You matured at a very early age. So that's one of the things.

KT: Do you, when, when did you first work for somebody else? Like non-family.

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MP: At the age of ten. I was working with they were selling little, little knick knacks, foreign knick knacks. And that's when China started, well, yeah, it was mostly Taiwanese, Taiwanese washers and little gifts, electronics, radios, little radios. And that's where, there was a street stand and, two ladies actually hired me to do the, to do that.

KT: And was that just like selling out on the street,

MP: Selling out on the street on a, on a little stand

KT: Yeah. Now this wasn't one of the stands in the Zocalo in Mexico. Was it?

MP: No, no, no. It actually it's it is south of Mexico City is it is called San Ángel.  
Yeah.

KT: Called where?

MP: San Ángel

KT: San Ángel

MP: Yeah. Which is south of Mexico City,

KT: San Ángel

MP: Within the city, but he's just on the south side part.

KT: So, yeah, I think I know, not as far as like UNAM [Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico], but that's close

MP: Pretty much.

KT: Closer to UNAM. Okay. And you were just, you were hired. Were these family members or how did these?

MP: No. No, no.

KT: They just hired you because, I mean, how did they know you?

MP: My brother and my mom had a, a little clothing stand there.

KT: Yeah.

MP: And next to them, there were these ladies and they, I guess they saw me cuz I already helped out my brother and my mother just selling. So they saw me that I was able enough to sell. So they, they pretty much hired me. It's not, it wasn't a full time. It is just like over the weekends.

KT: Right.

MP: So it was just a little, they also wanted me because when they go and buy stuff from, you know, the suppliers because there they, they were not taxable items. They were selling on the side.

KT: Right.

MP: And where the area where they were selling those stuff was fully a full crime places. So if the ladies went there and buy, buy stuff, by the time they get out, they will be robbed and taking all the items that they bought. So what they hire me for just going over there, get the stuff and run down the street as far as I could so I can get into a taxi and go back to yeah. Pretty much.

KT: So in a way, I mean, you were kinda like security?

MP: It was actually a running, running, I don't know, how would I call myself, but I was running with the products so that they won't be able to catch me and steal them.

KT: I know that, so you were part of an, frankly like an underground economy.

MP: Underground. Exactly. Yeah. Because actually since those items were not, they were introduced to Mexico illegally and they were sold underground.

KT: Yeah.

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MP: Every time, you know, the police came and sort of like take away every, all the items that were, that were there because they weren't—

KT: I know that that's a big struggle in, in Mexico City, in Mexico City, the city would crack down against the ambulante.

MP: Exactly.

KT: And then the ambulante have to come together and advocate and say, no, you know, I know there're massive protests around

MP: The that's been going on for, since I was close. I feel, you know, that's in 1980s

KT: Now, did you get to keep the money you made? Or that become part of the family economy?

MP: It was half and half, so yeah.

KT: So you'd keep a little bit of cash.

MP: Yes, yes.

KT: But then there was an expectation from your parents that you would contribute to the family.

MP: It wasn't like an expectation, but for example yes, for example my mother was in need of something, so I pitched in. So it is, it was just like that.

KT: Do you remember any close calls where either some person who wanted to rob you was able to catch up with you or the police?

MP: Well, every time I went there and there were people running. So I had to run, run with the products and of course they, I was young, so I was able to go through little alleys and stuff like that.

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KT: Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah. Yeah. Wow.

MP: But, that was the first, first formal job I had, I guess. Mm-Hmm

KT: Tell me a little bit about the decision on the part, on both of your parts to, to come to the United States. Did you have older family members, Mario who'd come over for work? Or how, how did you make that decision? Or how was that decision made for you by parents or older family members?

AL: Yes, that decision was made by my mother

KT: Uhuh. Because by this time now you were living Guerrero you were outside of Mexico City, right?

AL: No the age of fifteen I went to Mexico City and that's where I start my formal job. And that's where I started living with my grandma. I didn't grow up with my parents. I grew up with my grandparents in Guerrero. So I came to Mexico City and then my mom decided to come to United States. And that's how I came here. It's not, it was not my decision. My mom brought me here.

KT: So you're still a teenager.

AL: I was about to be sixteen

KT: And for your mother, like, did you know, what did she know about the United States? Had she been here before to work?

AL: No. my aunts were living here and her husband, he was living here

KT: In South Carolina?

AL: In that time her husband was in Florida and my aunts were living here in South Carolina.

KT: Okay. So and I'd imagine, you'd heard about many, many people who'd come to the United States to work. Like what, what were your impressions as you set out for the United States? Like what did you have on your mind?

AL: I didn't want to come to United States.

KT: No?

AL: (laugh) It was, not, well, I grew up in a little, little village that we didn't have electricity, so it was only— United States was in my imagination because we didn't have, TV, we didn't have teachers, I just went, went to sixth grade. We didn't have books. We learned from books. I didn't have books, the only ones, the one that were teaching, but we cannot keep them, the teachers will take it. So I was like, I don't know anything about United States. Clueless. Yes. So I was, it was not something that I was planning to come.

KT: For your mother. Was it mostly an economic decision then? It was just survival or what?

AL: Well, I'll say economic, but also being together with her husband and her children.

KT: Yeah. Yeah. And then Mario, for you coming to the United States, what was behind that decision?

MP: On my part growing up in Mexico City actually ran away from my house for a year. When I came back, they gave me the option. My parents gave me the option: you wanna keep on studying or you wanna go with your brothers, which at the time were living at, in Rhode Island. So from my understanding of the United States at that age was that Michael Jackson, Madonna, you know, all, all of the culture, pop culture, which I really enjoyed. And I wanted to be where the action was. Not so much of economy



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because at that time you don't think about, you know, economy, but, I just wanna be, be there. So yeah, I moved here in December of '89 and I crossed the border. We actually crossed the border illegally. We flew from LA to New York. And from there we took a train to Providence, Rhode Island. The major decision for me was I guess a different, different life, a new perspective, something that I wasn't accustomed to, to Mexican culture. So I wanted to learn more on some of the culture. And like I said the pop culture here in the United States. You also hear that economically of course the United States was you know, always been the major drive for you know, anyone who wants to immigrate here, the opportunities and everything. I didn't focus much on that, but I just wanted to be where the action was.

KT: And you were how old?

MP: I was sixteen at the time.

KT: You were sixteen. What kind of work did you do in Rhode Island?

MP: When I came here, it was December there was a blizzard going on at that particular moment. And of course, all the factories, which are jewelry factories over there in Providence, Rhode Island were all shut down. And the people that worked were not working at all. So my brothers told me why don't you go back to school and do high school? So I said, "well, why not?" So I went back to school and I finished high school there in, during the summer times I used to work in jewelry factories.

KT: What kind, I'm sorry,

MP: Jewelry factories. So I saved some of the money and then I spent it during the rest of the year and my brothers did not charge me for any, you know, at the time they did not because I was in school. They did not charge me for rent or anything like that, or

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the food. I, you know, I did some meals for my brothers and the people that were living in the apartments with them because being a Hispanic, you rent an apartment with two, three or four persons so that they all can pitch and paying all the bills and stuff and still save some money to send back home. So that's how pretty much.

KT: These are your, these are older brothers?

MP: Yeah. I'm the youngest of them all

KT: And then why South Carolina for you Mario? What, what brought you to South Carolina?

MP: In '94, I went back to Mexico. I met Alma there in Mexico City. And when she came, I came. The opportunities in Mexico were not very good and so it would've taken me what I do here in four years. It would've taken me ten years in Mexico, so I decided to come back and Alma move here to South Carolina, Johns Island. And I said, well, you know what, let's go and meet her there. So I, I moved here to Johns Island.

KT: For Alma?

MP: Yeah.

KT: And what, what did you do when you came to South Carolina? What kind of work?

MP: Johns Island was a rural area, still is rural, but it is progressing to be a part of the city too. And the only jobs that are there, it's working in the fields picking up tomatoes. So yeah, we did a little bit of picking of tomatoes, which it was, I don't know how people can manage to do that, it's a pretty tough job. You get up at four, five in the morning, you go back to sleep at eleven and, and it is bending all the time. And I guess

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some of you guys go into training and if you bend for three or four hours, your back hurts and these people actually bend for twelve hours. So, yeah, it was tough. So,

KT: So it was in the 1950s and 1960s where you first started getting concentrations of Mexican Americans coming to John's Island to work in the tomato and vegetable fields and the tomato shed. And so that was a, a there's a, a longer tradition by the time you got to John's Island. Mexicans had been working those fields for, you know, maybe as many as 20 years or so.

MP: Yeah. What they usually do is, like you mentioned back in the 1950s up to almost 1997, that's when the tomato price kind of crashed. Not many tomato growers are there now, but what they usually do is mostly Mexicans, Central Americans, Haitians would come from Florida and will follow the harvest from South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Ohio, they would follow the harvesting of the tomato. So at the time is May, June, July when the tomato fields are producing. So that's the time all the migrants would come here. And establish themselves here and then move on to the north states once the harvest is done. Mm-hmm

KT: Now did either of you work migratory agriculture, or were you always permanent here in south?

MP: No we were working the fields in packing and just backbreaking. And we got a, actually both of us got a job over at a nursery, a plant nursery. So, we worked there for two years.

KT: And what, what did you do at the nursery?

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MP: Just planting little plants from very little to big trees or, you know, there were many plants, so there were short plants, trees, fruit plants. And everything in between,

KT: I'm assuming that work was much better than working out in the fields, picking tomatoes?

AL: It was much better and pay was better.

KT: The pay is better. Yeah. How were you? Well, first of all, how did you get on, you know, as a newcomer to South Carolina, how did you get on as—do you remember who hired you to, to pick tomatoes?

MP: Well, you actually have to go to the labor camps and ask for, for yeah.

AL: And that time we, because there was just, it was not many Hispanic, so we know each other and we passed

MP: Information

AL: Information.

KT: Yeah.

AL: So that person knows where, and especially because they have place where you can live there, so many people were there to work because they have place

KT: Because you're living with your mother at the time?

AL: No, with my aunt

KT: With your aunt, but Mario you didn't I mean, just showing up.

MP: Yeah. And so I end up in the labor camp.

KT: So in part, because it, they provided shelter.

MP: Yeah

KT: I'm, I'm guessing because you had been here for a little bit long, you know, you're not part of the migrant stream. That you have, because most Hispanics are passing through John's island, whereas you have a little bit of an advantage because you're starting to sink some roots here and you kind of get to know people and immerse yourself in the community. And I know pretty quickly, like for both of you, you became kind of leaders in the community for that reason. Or did that happen much later?

MP: Much later, and she started the leadership more than I was. In high school, I was, you know, helping out with coaches, volleyball coaches, and I was a peer, but doing voluntary job for the community actually started with my wife. And she can explain a little better than me because she's the one that started it all.

AL: First it was hard because I had to learn the language. I was not able to speak English and I had to depending on him, because he went to high school. So he learned English first and my family, my aunt, and all of them, they were living here for many years and they never went to take English class. And so he said, you gotta go to English class. So I went to the high school of St Johns and then I went to Our Lady of Mercy. So I was taking English class after I work. And I see it's very necessary to learn English because doors can open with knowing the language. I had to have someone with me if I go to the store, if I go to the clinic and all of that. So I just trying to be independent and start driving and all of that. So after I learned a little bit, I saw more necessary things for the Hispanic, so that's when I started become a leader in different things.

KT: Yep. And a lot of that was through Our Lady of Mercy.

AL: Let's say that's where I learn a lot.

KT: Yeah.

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AL: How they care for the people. But after I was working there I feel like the doors were open for me to do many things.

KT: Yeah.

AL: Yeah.

KT: So from like, from the nursery, what sort of jobs did you hold after the nursery?

AL: After the nursery? Landscaping that's the longest job that I have, landscaping in Kiawah Island. Then Our Lady of Mercy, I was doing all the stuff, taking care of the children while the parents are in class and the front desk answering the phone —with my poor English, it was very hard (laugh),and anything what they asked me to do.

KT: Yeah. And Mario, I know you've done different kinds of jobs over the years as well.

MP: Yeah. Well, first of all, because of my father being a plumber and an electrician, I kind of learned their skills a little bit. Then here in the United States first picking up tomatoes, then the nursery, then I moved to tree climber. Then I moved to hardwood floor installer. From there. I learned many skills from construction skills and, and recently I was in nursing school and that's what I like to proceed doing in the future. But yeah, I've, I'm a Jack of all trades, I would say. Yeah.

KT: Yes. Yep. And Alma did you have your own business before Mario? Or did you do that together because you were, did a cleaning service for a while?

AL: I have, yes. I I've been cleaning houses since 2004, but I opened my business in 2015.

KT: Okay. Yeah. Yep. And, and I'm just, I mean, obviously like John's Island is very different than it was when you moved here in the eighties and nineties. And can you talk a little bit about the changes that you've seen in John's Island and what does that mean for economic opportunities?

MP: Well, I can tell you one thing though. I just remember one thing though. I was getting Alma from her aunt's house and I was driving this raggedy car (laugh). And when I was about to take Bohicket Road, which is one of the main arteries to go to Kiawah, there were hardly any, any cars passing by. They're hardly, I mean, two or three cars will pass per minute. And I can tell you absolutely that, because at the time when I had that little car and I kissing Alma and I realized I was in the middle of—I, I didn't stop to getting onto Bohicket Road. So I was kissing her and then I realized I was in the middle of the road (laugh) but no car was coming. So I'm like, oh boy. I'm yes, because otherwise, I, I would've crashed (laugh) and, and in good thing, and not a whole lot of cars are, were passing by, at that time.

I'm talking about 1995. Nowadays traffic, the traffic it's, probably thirty thousand cars passed by per day. So it's, and I can from two or three cars to a hundred cars per minute. That's a big difference. Kiawah, it's a community for retirees and has grown, lot since then in Johns Island right now is considered the place to be because more than thirty thousand houses are planning to be built over there. So it has grown a lot. And again, another, thing that we saw, and that's why we started this business is that in 1994, there were seven or eight families, Mexican families living in the island. Right now, I can tell you, about a thousand Mexican or Mexican descendants, live in Johns Island alone.

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So in all the Hispanic workers, most of the time they go and work over on Kiawah, Seabrook or within the John Island area.

And we saw that necessity. One day during the pandemic, we went to the store actually the gas station. And we saw all these Mexicans trying to get something to, to breakfast in the morning, but they were disgusted about the food that was there. And we thought about, you know, what we should open up a food truck business with breakfast or start a little, just a little stand and see how we sell. And if they like the product when it'll take off from there.

KT: Yeah.

MP: And that's how it started, actually. We didn't have any work because anyone, I mean, all the places were, you know, closed. Or they don't want anybody in their houses. Like, she does housekeeping, they don't want anybody in their houses because of the fear at the time of contracting the coronavirus.

KT: Sure.

MP: So, but there were still a lot of landscaping business open and many of the constructions was still going. And we said, well, let's have a little stand in (00:33:08) so, and the first day, we made like twenty meals and we sold two hundred dollars. And then the next day we say, well, let's increase it a little bit. And the next day was two hundred fifty, then two hundred eighty, then four hundred and then five hundred. So it, it, it increased. And we saw the necessity of having a food stand there. And we decided to go ahead and open up this food truck. Yeah.

KT: So the business is a year old or

AL: No,



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MP: little more than a year old.

AL: Well, let's say the business, how we start, like he said, the stand it's a year and a half. We start after the pandemic.

KT: Right.

AL: We were not working for two months. We opened in May last May. So this past May was one year. So a year and a half

KT: For the truck

AL: No, for the food stand. And for the truck, we just have like three months.

KT: Gotcha.

AL: Yes. But like he said, one of the things is before we start, we thought a lot about selling food. A lot of people in our culture will be saying like, you, if you go to another country, you might want your chicken nuggets, your regular food that you eat, where you grow up. So for us coming here, we want our food. We, I mean, we still like the food from here, but we also want our food. So people go into the gas station and ask, sometimes I don't wake up enough early to make my breakfast. So I stop at the gas station and we just see, what is it, there is not much. So we, we want something else. So we always start in that. We always have that in mind. Right. But it, and selling something for breakfast, but we never did. But then when that happened, when, when I didn't have my job, when he didn't have his job and the pandemic, and we were like, what are we gonna do here? You know?

KT: Right.

AL: So that's when we start with the stand,

KT: Had you ever sold food before?

AL: Yeah.

KT: You had, yeah.

MP: Yeah.

KT: So you had, what, where did you sell food? Like at construction sites or

AL: No, people that we know.

MP: First time we sold food was just before we went back to Mexico in 1999.

KT: And so for a long time, you've made food, but, not like a business,

MP: Not like a business. Right. You just make tamales on Saturdays, tamales or on Sundays we sold the menudo, which is a dish. But it was like sporadically, we sold that.

KT: Right. Right, right. Right.

MP: And then in '97 also we started selling barbecue, Mexican barbecue. It's goat meat, cooking a pit. And we also did it. It was in 1997, but it was just spontaneously. It's not, not really a business or something that we wanted to consider doing a business.

KT: Yeah. Who's the cook who has the expertise?

AL: (Laugh)

MP: She does. She, she's the one with the touch.

KT: These are, so these are your recipes and you're, you're kind of, yeah. Yeah. Is that, are these things you learned from your grandmother?

AL: A little bit I would say a little bit, because back in the place where I grew up, it was mostly me with the farm, with the chickens, with the horses, (laugh). So getting meal, making cheese, all of that. That was my job when I was little with my grandparents.

KT: So you've been doing this for

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AL: So it's not much in the, in the kitchen.

KT: Yeah.

AL: I did not learn a lot from, from where I grew up, but I guess I like it that I make my food. I mean, (laugh)

KT: Yep.

AL: Yeah. You know, sometimes you like you look and you do it.

KT: Sure, Yeah. I'm curious about empanadas though. Why empanadas? Why are they, or what else do you have on the menu? Do you usually mostly, are you doing tacos?

MP: Or I'll show you what with it at first, in Mexico if you go to Mexico City and you hit the streets, the street vendors you would have in the mornings: tamales, cuz that's breakfast in Mexico, tamales in a sandwich and recently bake bread and you have a tamale inside there. So that's one of the breakfast. Then you have like orange juice or a milkshake or like egg with beans and that's the breakfast with the tortilla. But you also have, there are street vendors where they had three different, well, not really three they're like they're like twenty dishes. Yeah twenty dishes, different dishes. It goes from chicken to cow liver to what you just ate, chicken beef, pork,

AL: No cows and chicken liver. Okay. That (laugh)

MP: And so you have twenty different dishes.

AL: That you just choose, you just choose.

MP: So they put a tortilla, rice beans, and then the meat that you wanted. So that's your breakfast. A breakfast morning taco is this big with a lot of carbs in (laugh). So that's the Mexican breakfast and that's what we started doing. So every day we had four different dishes and we change every day. But now that we have the food truck, because

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we wanna expand our business into the Caucasian so that they'll come and eat. We only making certain dishes and, but not the all the dishes

AL: That we sometimes we have different dishes, like one or two not usually there. But what we have in the food truck is, and chicken empanadas, beef empanadas, ham and cheese empanadas, tacos. We have, chicken tacos, beef, pork, chicharron, which pork

MP: Skin,

KT: Pork skin, pork fried pork, pork. Yeah. They're pork rinds.

MP: Pork rinds but in a green sauce

AL: We also have crepes. We also have milkshake, juice, but juice make on a scratch.

MP: In a blender

AL: And a blender. What else, we have quesadilla. And then when you order quesadilla, you order whatever you want, chicken meat, beef. So torta, we also have what else? Tostada, the crepes have a lot of fruit inside. So yeah, that's basically,

KT: I have so many, so many more questions to ask you, but I also want to make sure that the students get a chance to ask questions too. But I do want you to tell me the story of the truck, because you went a long way to get a truck, right?

AL: We went,

MP: Well,

AL: (Laugh)

MP: Actually, we set up our budget. So we were thinking about financing and we looked at the food trailers that they built in Florida and in Georgia and for the custom

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food trailers that we wanted, it was like \$36,000 to \$42,000 range, which at the, at that particular time, we didn't have that much money. So we thought about financing it. And, and then we saw one that was advertised in Facebook and it was \$15,000. And it was with some of the stuff that we needed and we thought, well, you know, that's not right. I don't think it's the right price, but let's call them anyways. So we did. And so these are manufactured in Mexico and because of the free trade agreement, they don't pay much of a taxes and you can bring them here, but they only bring them to Texas and you have to go and pick the trailer up over in Texas. So, and you know, that was within our budget and we thought, well, yeah, let's do it. And actually when we order the food trailer, custom food trailer, they told well, we have one already with this, this and this. And instead of a sixteen foot trailer, it was an eighteen foot trailer. And this, they told that they can sell it for the same price. Okay. So we did

AL: So yeah. Yeah. We just order some more stuff like the oven and things that we order to put it together. But I don't think the, to order everything was not that much of the time and all of that, the time was we brought down here in November, remember was Thanksgiving. We thought we were gonna be opened by December or

MP: January,

AL: This January. No, it took so much time to the business to open the permission stuff.

MP: A food trailer. It's,

AL: We all this time, all this months since November and we open in July all this time.

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MP: So for a food trailer, business to be running accordingly, you have to have a commissary, which is a restaurant or someone that could back you up or prepare the food there at the restaurant then sell it at the food trailer. And that's one of the things you have to have all the business licenses and state local, and you have to pay taxes for here in Charleston area taxes there are called

KT: Hospitality,

MP: Hospitality taxes. Exactly. So into, in order to get everything together, it took about seven months to open up the business.

AL: And he's the one who did all of this. I'm the one who's in the kitchen most of the time putting it together and he's with the paperwork and everything. Yeah.

MP: So, yeah, it's a little bit complicated.

KT: Oh, I'm sure.

MP: But yeah, it's worth it.

KT: It's it's been satisfying though, to have the business (laugh)?

AL: Let me, let me answer that because I don't know about Mario (laugh) Mario was, is ready to close that down. He's tired. (Laugh)

MP: It was overwhelming. It was overwhelming because to

AL: took all of this time, yes. And he wants to close it.

MP: And for me all of the process and not sleeping well and over stressing myself for this business. And it took a toll on me. And it is not really the business part. It is actually that everything involved there because in order to sell, you have to wake up at four o'clock in the morning, get everything prepared at six thirty, you have to start selling, at nine you close down. But if you extend it to breakfast and lunch, then it'll take

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you from four o'clock in the morning to eleven o'clock at night. So you only sleep in five hours a day. And that's yeah, that's no problem in the three first months, but after six months, a year,

AL: Yeah, we have

MP: Been doing, it really takes a, a toll on your mental health.

AL: We have been doing this, like I said last year, a year and a half. And right now we wake up at four, but we used to wake up three going to bed around twelve because I, we have the food truck, but I also have my business cleaning business. So after selling food, go to business cleaning, when you come back, go to preparing, prepare everything, clean everything. And so that's the reason you're very, very tired.

MP: Yeah. It's a challenging, I mean, it is worth it though because just by having like on Sunday, we were selling food and three kids came by probably eight year, year old kids. And the satisfaction of hearing when "aye men your food is so good".

AL: (Laugh)

MP: And like, oh, thank you. I mean, kids will tell you the truth so it was pretty satisfying. And I told them, you know, they like it. So, but,

AL: But it is very tiring.

MP: It's very tiring.

AL: In my opinion, we have been selling food, like we said before, but not like a business from all of these jobs that I have before. And, but this one, the food, this one takes most time. More tiring it's really,

MP: It was really

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AL: Hard, really hard. Because not to just prepare the food, you go and sell the food, but come back and clean everything after that. And it's time to prepare everything again. So, and my regular job, I go do my job, come back and I can rest, but not this one, this one doesn't have time to rest. So in my opinion, yes of all my jobs, this one is the hardest.

MP: And again, we have help now. So it's taken a little bit of the burden from us. Again, if it's if the make, if we make enough money, yeah, off course. It'll, we'll hire more people, but for now

AL: Continue, if not, he'll close out.

MP: Yeah, it is gonna come to the point of deciding what's more important in your health or your business. So

KT: What questions do y'all have anyone wanna jump in?

Speaker 1: So I'm curious about the breakfast. So I live in Florida, not originally, but I live there and I get I'm a sucker for good Mexican, and I've never had like Mexican breakfast and the Tamale sandwich. I'm just really curious about that.

AL: Oh, that you're not gonna find that everywhere. Mostly Mexico City. Yeah.

Speaker 1: Living in Mexico.

MP: Yeah. In many of the big cities in Mexico, they are food vendors, street food vendors that they do that. And actually,

AL: But mostly, I mean, I have been asking not many sell it. They call it the guajalota.

MP: The female turkey,

AL: Female Turkey,



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MP: Female Turkey. (laughs)

MP: Yes. It tastes pretty good, I mean, it's one of those foods that boy, we don't make it ourselves. But yeah, if you ever go to Mexico, just find a food vendor on the streets, they're everywhere. And yeah, just ask for a tamale within a sandwich.

AL: We didn't mention, but that's a good point. When you say the Mexican breakfast, I have not seen nobody selling breakfast with a food truck. I don't. Well, you don't see food Mexican breakfast. It's mostly.

KT: Tacos and burritos

AL: Yeah. You see people during the day or in the afternoon, but not in the morning. So let's say we did, I feel like we did a good decision doing Mexican breakfast cause something that you don't find

Speaker 1: That's that seems like it's definitely like a, a rarity. Yeah. Like I've never,

MP: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Would've never thought about it

MP: Yeah

Speaker 2: So coming to America, like, I'm sure you've seen places like Taco Bell, Chipotle, Moe's. Do you feel like, like the food that you grew up eating has had like a bad American twist added to it?

MP: It just that, you know, you have your cultures and your taste of cultures. If you go to Mexico, it totally tastes different. This, what we make is getting as close as you getting Mexico food. But you know, still better over there is just that the ingredients. And for example the kind of chickens that they grow in Mexico are totally different that they

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grow here in the United States. They cannot bring specifically chicken because of the—I guess they get sickness apiarian flu or something. So the chicken meat that you get over there in Mexico is yellowish. And here's more whiteish, creamish. I'm not really sure, but it tastes totally different. And that makes a difference in flavor.

AL: Yeah, when—I'm sorry—your question was if, you asked me if I go to Chipotle I don't think I ever gone to Chipotle or Taco Bell. My kids like the quesadillas, but no, it's not the same. It's not the same at all. For me, in my opinion. Let's say I made these jalapenos, I made the tortillas. The tortillas I didn't buy in the store, made it the meat, we put everything there. I mean is cooked. So the empanadas is the same. So everything, when we cook is made from scratch, that's why we say, and we were very tired. Cause everything is from a scratch. We make everything. So it's, it is very tired. It is very good. (Laugh) well, It's what I think (laugh)

Speaker 3: What's your favorite thing to make and what's your favorite thing to eat?

AL: Everything. I think I gained maybe twenty more pounds after (laugh) after I'm selling food. But my favorite thing are the ones I put in the oven beef, barbacoa, turkey, cochinita, which is here too. And the pork rinds Yeah. That's I think my main,

MP: What I like is she does, she does shrimp and crab and a special Chipotle salsa, which is amazing. So, and we go down on the creeks on John Island, we catch the crabs from there and we have to kill him ourselves and everything. But that, that's a very good dish, I think, from all of the dishes that she does. That's the best one.

AL: I don't, we don't sell seafood because we don't have, we just didn't want to get the permission for that. I mean, we could

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KT: To do what permission for

MP: Selling seafood.

KT: For seafood. Yeah, yeah. Well, I was wondering about that because, I mean, that's, I mean, obviously you have seafood in Mexico, but have you made some adjustments to John's Island to like the local produce that's available or the seafood, or like crab, crab wouldn't be a common item right in Mexico.

MP: No,

AL: No,

MP: No, no. And actually we were thinking about doing the shrimp and grits.

KT: Ah,

MP: Cause she, she did that and she put a little bit of spicy in it and it was pretty good.

AL: We're thinking

KT: To, but it's hominy, right? It's hominy like in a posole.

MP: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So,

AL: Yeah, because we just recently opened the food trailer. We wanna start with this and we say, okay, if we wanna put it something more,

MP: Something else

AL: We will. Yeah.

KT: Other questions.

AL: Do you like the food? What do you like the best?

Speaker 3: That was the first time I've ever had an empanada

AL: Really, what can you have babe? I

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Speaker 3: Had the beef one. That was really good. I've always like seen pictures of them or like in Spanish class, like they're in all of the books or like the videos that we watch, but I never actually

MP: Yeah. Like

Speaker 3: A mole.

AL: Yes.

MP: And in fact this, this Friday we have— because we are pretty much involved still in the community. We are helping out a couple that are actually are living with us and their daughter's gonna have a facial surgery and they have the means to pay the operation. So we help them, help them, helping them out. And we are gonna make mole.

AL: We're gonna make mole to sell. Yeah. Yeah. Thirteen, twelve dollars. The plate has the mole with chicken, beef, I mean beans, rice, tortilla, and the drink. Awesome.

Speaker 4: What is your food truck located?

AL: John Island.

KT: But are you mobile or where do you set up the truck? AL:

AL: We are mobile?

KT: Close to Kiawah?

AL: We did first, when we recently opened, we were close to Kiawah. But you know Kerr--, what is the name? Kerrison?

MP: Parkway Kerrison

AL: Kerrison, they pass by very fast. So many, many the clients keep saying it's not easy to stop where you are.

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KT: Right.

AL: So you, they said we can also have an accident because they go so fast. So we moved here at close to KJ's where the chiropractor

MP: Is Main Road, Bohicket, Main Road and Maybank.

KT: OK, where all come together.

AL: (00:58:36)

KT: And I'm just thinking that there's like, there's so much competition now with food trucks and,

AL: But not breakfast,

KT: But not with the breakfast. That's that's your niche. Yeah. Yeah now

AL: Yes. I'm sorry. No, no,

Speaker 4: You are okay. I'm curious. Do y'all guys have like a Facebook page or some type of social media we could follow? So we know like where to go or

AL: Like that? Yes. Yes

MP: We can. It's it's called Huey Calli

AL:

When you, we call,

Mario Puga:

We gotta put, we go.

Alma López :

Not just with Cali.

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MP: It is called. Huey (writing in a board)

AL: El palito no.

MP: I forget how to write it. It's in Nahuatl what means big house and that's where the place she grew

AL: And there was some Facebook.

KT: Yeah. We'll, we'll make sure everybody has that link. So we're, we're right up against our, our class deadline, our, our course teams. But thank you both so much for, for doing this again. I don't know if did, I can't remember if I mentioned this, but Ms. López conducted interviews with both Alma and with Mario which I'll send you the links to those, but in those interviews, they talk much more about the process of immigration and they talk about their, their international love story that took Mario you know, all the way from Mexico to the us to track down Alma which he, he did pretty in incredibly that you were able to find her and, and reconnect. And so all the, you know, those stories are in those, those interviews.

MP: Yeah. And actually Charleston Historical Society made a small video

KT: A video, right? Yes. The historic Charleston foundation found

AL: Tangled Roots.

MP: Tangle roots. So you can find her story there.

AL: (Laugh) Thank you.

KT: Thank you both so much.

AL: Well, thank you. Both of you for inviting us.

KT: It was great. I'm going to eat.

AL: Go ahead. Go ahead. It's yours.

