

Interviewee: Carmenza Ramirez

Interviewer: Amy West

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Transcriber: Amy West



Worcester Women's Oral History Project

Abstract: Carmenza Ramirez was born in Colombia and moved to the U.S. in order to reunite her family. She is well educated and was a university professor in Colombia. She is now a rehabilitation counselor for the state of Massachusetts serving Spanish-speaking clients. She talks about enduring years of separation due to visa restrictions on the heels of Sept. 11, 2001; reuniting her sons; and trying to build a professional life here in the U.S. She describes the loss of her professional identity, the reduction of her life to household tasks, the loss of connection with family, the challenge of building a new professional life, and the role of language learning and schools in accomplishing that task. Her narrative is an example of the emotional and psychological cost of immigration for professional women. She ultimately constructs a successful, independent, and professional life and a new relationship with her husband and children here in the U.S.

AW: All right, [clap] so what is your full name?

CR: Carmenza Ramirez

AW: When and where were you born?

CR: I born in Colombia. Medellin, Colombia. I want to be as specific because Colombia is big country, yes?

AW: And when?

CR: August seventh, '61.

AW: All right. Have you ever married?

CR: I got married in 1980 when I was just graduated from the high school.

AW: What is the name of your husband?

CR: My husband name is []. He is an engineer, but we are separated now.

AW: All right. Do you have children?

CR: I have two children, Victor and Diego.

AW: Where did you attend school?

CR: I attended school in Colombia. I love to study; it was a priority all my life. I have a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree from Colombia in social sciences. I was a specialist in social research back home. In Colombia, I worked as a professor for 15 years in sociology and social sciences at local universities. I have a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling with a concentration in mental health from Springfield College [Massachusetts]

AW: All right. Uh what were the names of the schools where you studied?

CR: I studied in Jesus de la Buena Esperanza that is the name of my high school. Jesus de la Buena Esperanza is Catholic school in Colombia. After I was study in University Autonoma Latinoamericano. La Autonoma is the university and I was study over there sociology and economy. After that I went to the Universidad of Antiochia for my master's degree.

AW: All right. Do you currently work in this country?

CR: I'm sorry what was the question?

AW: Do you currently work in this country?

CR: Yes, I am working in this country aaaall the time.

AW: What do you do for work?

CR: Now I am qualified vocational counselor with Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission for four years now.

AW: Did you work in your home country?

CR: I work in Colombia when I was younger in different activities over there and when I was my professional life I was teacher for 15 years in the university.

AW: Tell me about the country that you came from.

CR: My country is very special country, the people is friendly, is good. The people know about the something bad from my country when it speak about Colombia the people remember only the problem with the drugs, with Pablo Escobar, that made me bad because Colombia is not only Pablo Escobar for 20 almost 30 years ago now, yes? There's no drugs. My country had bananas. I can find bananas in Stop and Shop, Big Y, from Colombia. Wonderful coffee. Wonderful delicious coffee. And beautiful flowers.

AW: When did you leave Colombia?

CR: I leave from—I left from Colombia in 2006.

AW: How old were you at that time?

CR: Hmm 40 . . . 45? 45 years old.

AW: Uh, what were the reasons that you and your family left your country?

CR: I never had the American Dream. I never thought to come here to live. But in 2000 my husband lost his job as an engineer in Colombia, My older son, graduated from high school. My brother was living here in Massachusetts and he said, "Carmenza, maybe your husband and son can come here for vacation." I bought the tickets for both to come here and they got three-month tourist visas. When they came here, both got jobs within one or two weeks. My son was 17 years old almost going on 18 and was so happy in his first job in America and everything is different when you are younger, everything is adventure, yes? My husband was happy because he got a job. He called me three months later and said, "We aren't coming back. We are going to stay here." Over here both were so happy, but that was sad for my younger son and me. I was working in the university, I wasn't thinking about moving here in that moment, but my younger son was so sad. That was difficult time for us. In 2001 I tried to get a visa to come here, but that was a terrible time because of September 11.

AW: Mmmm.

CR: Our appointment was September 15. Everybody was now, "The visa was not not not for everybody." Obviously. I understood perfectly. But I was so sad. And my interesting was only in my younger son. I want my sons together because we were very close family. I try to take care of my sons together whole life. We try but I pay one lawyer in Colombia for doing the all legal visa and everything, the lawyer in Colombia stole my money. My husband in that moment got one contract here in one factory in Northampton. He was living over there in Northampton. He found a lawyer for immigration, yes. I lost my money in Colombia, he put one lawyer here for doing all legal papers because I didn't want to do any illegal. Yeah no.

AW: Yep

CR: Agree nothing illegal I follow the rules all the time. Okay, we have to wait, we stay separate for six years.

AW: [phoo]

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CR: In 2006 the visa was approved. My younger son was sooo happy. I remember that day. He can't believe it. He was so happy when the visa arrive. That was my satisfaction for six years didn't see my older son. It was so sad. I missed him—my older son. [tearing up] I'm sorry. I don't want to remember this one, really I don't want to remember this one, only for you, because was so difficult time. Six years in Colombia I was happy with my life in the university. I was teaching. I saw my life forever teaching in the university. I was satisfied with that. But it was a terrible time for the family since we were separated. Terrible [choking up]. Me and my youngest son were in Colombia and could only talk on the phone with my oldest son and husband. I suffered during this time, missing my family and my youngest son missed his brother and father terribly. This was the hardest time our family ever had to experience. It was a nightmare for all of us.

When I saw my younger son happy, I saw what mattered in life. I wanted my sons together again. When we came here, I saw in the airport my husband and my older son waiting for us, I wanted to die. I saw it doesn't matter what happens with me, but both sons are together again. In 2006 the permanent visa was approved and in 2012 I got my citizenship.

When I came here I felt different sensations, everything was so different. I didn't study English in Colombia because I was not interested in English. I am very social person. I love to say "Hello, everybody." I love to help people, yes? In the university everybody know me. In Colombia, Medellin, my son was not happy with me alone all the time because everybody,

"Hello! Hi, Carmenza! Hello, Carmenza!" Yes? And my son would say, "Why everybody know you?" Yes. Because I was working in five different universities at the same time. I was working all the time in the university and when you go to the stores, normally you find the students working over there, yes? But here everything is so different. The language was my first frustration, and now it is still a frustration for me. In Colombia I was really smart and recognized as a very good student. Here, the frustration was terrible. Do you have another question?

AW: Oh, I have lots of questions! You've, you've uh, you've covered many already.

CR: Let me know. I try to do something easy for you.

AW: No, that's all right. So, who did you leave behind when you came to Colombia, all right, can I, sorry, to the US from Colombia?

CR: When I was ready to leave from Colombia, I brought my money, my own money that I had saved. I'm very organized financially. I organize always all my life, all my life my money, too. I brought my money. Never would I agree to go in any—help for benefits or something. Nothing. Nothing. I really personally I don't agree with that. Yes? But I brought my money. I came here in April 25th 2006. On August 25th, four months later, I bought my house with the money I brought from Colombia. Legally, everything. When the people say, "Carmenza you bought. . ." immediately the people thinking about something bad. I hate that idea. No. I'm very good worker all my life and organized my life. I bought my house in East Longmeadow, [address redacted], I bought that house. My husband was living here for six years in the time. Didn't have anything when I came here, arrive here, my son and my husband was living in one small apartment. For me was no good because our life in Colombia was no rich people but very very good in accommodation and everything. Like my younger son say, "Nena . . ."—I realize now that never I want to forget this—but my younger say, "Nena, we are living in Colombia like kings. Look at the people here." I never forgot this. I told him, "So you want to live like kings like Colombia, you have to work and study—study first—you have to work, okay, if you are going to have your castle." Okay? My son always listen to me. My younger son always pay attention and everything, but I remember when we arrive here and my older son and my husband living in one small apartment in Northampton made me like sad. What is the reason? Didn't . . . the family . . . doesn't have . . . privacy in everything but was no our life in Colombia. Do you understand? Not the same quality, yes? For me was bad. In Medellin was thinking, "Okay, I brought my money. I have to buy one house for all family and start again everybody like Colombia again." I bought my house in East Longmeadow. Then I saved money to go school

here. I told my husband, "Okay, you pay rent here you are going to pay the mortgage over there but I am going to pay the down payment and I have to keep money because I have to study." Yes? I needed English and studied ESL [English as a Second Language] at Springfield Technical Community College. I start there. I was there for two years, 2006 and 2008, and I paid myself. Never the state pay for me anything at all over there. Everybody was study free, but I was maybe the only one paying for the class. Was a lot of money in that moment for me because [\$]1,200 for one semester in that moment—no job—was difficult but doesn't matter. I study and my son was study too. My son, my younger, studied, he start studying in STCC [Springfield Technical Community College] with me, yes? He try to put English, yes, but my son was more advantaged, had more advantage in English than me, because he just graduated in the high school. He was in extra class in the afternoon when I was working all the time, I pay for him English class, yes? In private English class, extra class, in the afternoon after school or the the after school in for English. When he came here he doesn't have the problems like me. Okay, he is start over there in Springfield Technical Community College for two years and one year after one semester after when I was in my second semester over there, the director, the director in Springfield Technical Community College offered me a job as tutor, grammar tutor because I was very good in grammar in English. I don't know why. I study so much but I didn't understand -- I didn't understand anything but I understood grammar only the rules because for me was easy to follow the rules. My life is following the rules because following the rules was good like, like, like, like math. Yes? Follow the rules only follow the rules. Yes. I was tutor for Spanish population over there. That made me happy to start teaching again. In another level, but I was happy doing something like my life in Colombia, I felt that is really good for me. That was a start only save money for paying another semester, pay money for, yes? But was so my life a little details a little back. Yes? I was there for two years. After two years only study study grammar, grammar, grammar, grammar, I didn't have any conversation, I didn't understand anything when the people talk. When I finish ESL program supposed was four semesters over there at that time and finished I say, "No, I need more English." I don't feel like good, yes? I want something better, I want something good. I also studied at Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield, Connecticut. Was near my house, yes? I went there. I went there, I study over there for one year. That was my best memories in the college. My best memory in the college here. That college made me happy. They invited me to that college when—that college is like my university in Colombia. In Springfield Technical was different. My second college in Asnuntuck made me pleasure, good, the people were kind and friendly, the teachers, everything. I wanted to stay there forever. Made me safe. Happy when I got class over there, made me happy. I would stay over there for long time. But I was only one year. Because when I got a good, my advisor very good, of very good over there my advisor say, "Carmenza you have a good level in education maybe you can go move forward in another place. Maybe you can go in one college

for something more formal." Yaw. Okay. I was looking after that I went to West[ern] New England University. I went over there. The director over there had interview with me. Very nice. But he put me in comprehension for English. I did one test. He say, "Carmenza go for comprehension here." Okay, I spend a lot of money because in Springfield Technical Community College and Asnuntuck was good because Asnuntuck I studied over there one year but Asnuntuck gave me another semester free because I was so good a student in the first semester, Asnuntuck offered me one special program free for stay in class with the people who was going to study criminal justice. I can stay there only for listening and participating in class but not formal student. But Asnuntuck permit me to stay that semester in that criminal justice program. Was the best for me, my teachers and everything. I keep my mind happy when I remember that time. When I went in and we Wes[tern] [New] England University, and start comprehension was very bad experience. I was no happy. My English was . . . eh eh . . . stuck. Nothing changed. Nothing was doing well. Mmmm . . . like I lost the time, I lost my money. When you feel you lost your money your frustration is growing up, your money is down, nothing is the same level you want. Okay. I went to the director again. I was talking with him when finish the semester I had very bad experience. He told me, "Carmenza, maybe you can try something different." Oh my God I feel like like ball. [chh] [pfff] [psst] [pch] Oh. Bim bom bim bom. Oh no, I want only English. I need my life back. For turn my life again, yes? That my frustration was terrible in that moment I was working in the synagogue in weekends in the synagogue in Longmeadow.

AW: What were you doing there?

CR: Over there help in put the decoration, over there put the tables, every Saturday everybody is going over there for lunch, decoration the tables, some put the tables, my friend they in Springfield, in Springfield Technical . . .

AW: Mmmhmm.

CR: . . . was my friend after when I left from Springfield, she offer me, "Carmenza, maybe you can make up your money, you study all week you . . .," I'm very dedicated person and I studied Monday to Friday. On weekends, Saturday and Sunday, I worked in a synagogue organizing tables and decorations. I used the money for study. Okay? Okay, that was good deal. Okay. When the director in that time told me, "Carmenza, try something different, maybe you can go to Springfield College." Okay. Oh my God! Almost four years try to improve my English. Only study grammar work for pay the semester, work for pay the semester. Okay I went to Springfield College. [clears throat] Always I listen the advice. Okay I went over there. I had the interview

with the director. The director say, "Carmenza, you can start in one master's degree." "Oh! My English is no like master's degree, I have already master's degree in Colombia, two master's degree in teaching and social research what is the reason another master's degree?" "Carmenza, you can study, yes, another master's degree and in the same time you learn English." But I say, "I don't feel safe I don't feel good, but okay, si, that is the only way I have to learn English, okay, that's fine," but in that moment I didn't I didn't want big loan. I was so frustrated, I was so bad. Okay. Finally. Okay. I want to think about that. I went to California. I went to California because my friend offered me to go to California with working when one person who was living here in Longmeadow, but she had mental illness problem. Her family was ready to move to California. The lady in that moment I worked with then for two hours a week only for shopping with her. I went to Holyoke Mall two hours for shopping. Two hours for shopping which she paid to me. She was so happy with me. For me was good because I can hear English, but the problem was she loved Spanish. "Oh, I love your Spanish. I want you to speak Spanish with me." She living alone but her sister take care for her because she have illness problems. Ready to move to California. Okay. In that moment I was so bad. I didn't want to start that was in fall 2010, yes? Yaw, no. I'm not ready for to go to the school yet, accept one loan again, for, for, for something more in financial aid, a loan, no, no, no happy. I accept the move to California, leave my family here again. In that moment my sons both are working, working and studying. Diego was working on Home Depot, study at UMass [University of Massachusetts] computer engineer and Victor was study in Hartford University. Both never have time for me. Both forgotten Nena. Never! Both have girlfriend, work, school. Forgot Nena. Nena was only for clean the house. Try to study English. Frustration. Cut the grass. Organize. Doing duties I never have in Colombia. Dig the snow. Oh my God! I was so crazy and depressed. [You know], I came here for my family, but my family forgot me. My husband is a very good worker, but he forgot me. He was no interested in what happen because he was busy. Yes? Was not his fault, but he was busy all the time. So you are answer the question all the time, he, "I'm busy, I'm busy, I'm busy, I'm busy." He was working Monday to Sunday and we didn't have much time together. In that moment I decide, okay, I look my life, I look in the mirror, and said, "I'm going to be older, I don't have a skill for communication with people here." I tried to learn English, it's impossible, and my only option is get one loan now. I prefer go to California and relax for a little while. I accept the offer to work with the lady. Her sister told me, "Carmenza, can you go there? We can pay for you good money if you can go over there." I accept it. okay. I'm not doing anything here really interesting for my family. I feel for first time, okay, my family doesn't need me for anything. Yes? I am in the other room. Dark. Move to California, stay in California, that was from 2010 until 2011 I moved to California. I was in California, only communication by phone with my son[s] for say hello, sometimes my sons never call me only call them when I was so sad, so depressed. Nobody remind me. No nothing. Was Christmas nobody say me, "Hello Nena, Happy Christmas, Merry

Christmas, whatever. Nothing! Oh my God, everybody was happy here, but Carmenza was so sad. Only clothes and one house tried to help somebody with mental illness. That made me, "Okay I am very good for her, she is so happy with me, she had really very, very, very good quality of life now because her life was so bad before me. Her family recognize my good job with her, her family loved me, she is happy happy now. Her life changed. Oh my God! Three hundred sixty [degrees] which okay maybe I'm very good in this one. I want to help people in mental illness now. Okay, I'm going to turn back to Massachusetts. I accept the loan going to study in Springfield College. I send a letter to the director again, the director Accordino (sp??) in Springfield College and say okay, I accept. I was looking around and maybe yes, okay, I don't have more options than that. I don't want to stay in my life only with one person helping. Eh -- that is -- she is ready for one PCA [personal care attendant] or she is ready for something different than me. I have very high level in education and I can help lives in another way. Okay, I turn back in July 2011. I start in Springfield College in September. Yes? In 2013, my younger son got married, yes? My younger son was working in Navy too. He is very active. He is very smart. He—everything is doing well. Okay he got job and graduation and computer engineer. Okay, the life was so happy for then I was study. I start in 2013. I start here my [practicum] and my internship. How I came here? I came here because when I was in Springfield College, the training director went there for a counselor in Spanish. Need veery good degree, very good resume, need somebody for practice in Boston, Worcester, or Framingham. When he called me he offered, "You want to work in your practice at your internship here in Mass Rehab?" He ask me the question, "Do you want as the practice Boston, Framingham, or Worcester?" I didn't know where the places he was talking about. Only I knew Worcester because in Springfield I look one sign Worcester, and I, in Springfield I look one sign Worcester, I saw is not too far away from East Longmeadow, yeah, I was living in East Longmeadow. Yeah, okay, maybe it's better, Worcester. That was my only idea. What Worcester? It's, yes? In that moment okay I say, "Carmenza, you can go there and do the interview. Okay, he gave me the hours. Ready for come here to Oh! when I the East Longmeadow here oh my God! Why I say? This is far away! Yes? But I didn't realize in that time but I say, "Okay, see like for me Worcester, I want to go there doesn't matter. I find my life, see my life put me over there, I go over there. When I came here, yeah, I was study my master's degree. Only I follow the rules. Only reading, reading, reading, and grammar for doing my homework. But never talking, never speak with somebody. Never practice English. Never. I didn't have opportunity to practice with somebody. My life was always alone here. I am really social person. Here, alone, alone, alone, alone for long time. My sons and everybody were busy and when were together, we only spoke Spanish. After my sons, everybody left. Okay? When I was stay here yes start in my first time the other counselor was before me was in Spanish and I have the relation with her all the time. But not with the people around because I didn't. I say only "Hello," "Bye, bye," and "thank you," never speak

anything after many years here but I didn't have opportunity. When I know about the library, I went over there immediately because somebody told me here, "Carmenza, you can go to practice in the library, you can go to practice for speak in Worcester State University." Okay, I went to the library, put me in the wait list. Never call me. I went to Worcester State University. I pay one semester over there, \$700 for nothing. For nothing. Because I went there, look, for speaking. The speaking in summer class, summer class. Okay. Summer class for speaking. One day the homework was to do a three-minute speech. I prepare my topic and practiced many times. I have really serious problem for pronunciation, I prepare all my class like my class in the university in Spanish, I prepare, I listen many times in the dictionary with my phone, what is the pronunciation of this word, I did the speech. The speech is three minutes. Okay. When I'm finished the teacher gave me a B. She said, "I told you three minutes and you took five." That insulted me because I paid \$700 only to speak three minutes. I got one B for me was no important the B. For me was no important the degree. For me was important my life back. The teacher insult me. "Carmenza you have one B because your spoke timing it was three minutes." Oh my God, was bad. \$700 spent in Macy's. That was my worse in that time try to learn English. After I turn back with the library, the library one year later gave me one tutor. Very nice tutor, I start with him. But in that time I got my contract here. The tutor was Wednesday, Wednesdays three to five-o'clock. Yes. Three to five-o'clock was in that time. But I start my contract here, yes, and the new director, told me, "No, Carmenza you don't have time for that in that moment." Yeah, because she was new too. I got the contract new director here. Or maybe I'm not clear. Or maybe she didn't understand me what I wanted to do. I told the library, I got problem with the schedule, because I ask the question, the director, the director told me . . . Now, I am confused, now, what I have to do? But I don't want to miss the tutor. Ah, Carmenza next time, next time, forget me. Nothing. I went again. I need tutor. Now you gave me, you help me so much with the tutor, I'm so happy because I call Boston and I ask the question in Boston can I take one tutor and use my office for that one and a half hour because I need practice in English, I need conversation, I need to feel comfortable with myself when I talk with my co-workers or relations with Worcester around. And Boston immediately, "Yes, Carmenza, you can use your time and the tutor can go there, 'cause that place, that's good, you can use the office for that. I'm so grateful. So happy. Yes? Now I am vacation from my tutor, but my tutor is four months far away.

AW: Yup, yup, yup. That's what -- that's what they do. You've told me so very very very much.

CR: I try to paint you picture.

AW: It's good, it's good, it's wonderful. So, in what ways do you share your knowledge, skills, and experiences with others. I know that you do that as part of your work here as a as a counselor. Are there other ways that you that you do that?

CR: I think so. You got in your life whatever you want. Only dream and work—follow the rules. And you got whatever. When I graduated from Springfield College, it was terrible for me. I was not happy in graduation. I was the only one I was crying because I separated from my husband. He went to live in Pennsylvania because he got a very good job there. He told me, "Whatever happens, I'm going there." For me was impossible to move to Pennsylvania in that moment because I was just starting here. I was thinking, "I don't want to turn back again for my family, now is not my family, now is only my husband." Because my sons already have different lives. So I decide no, I prefer stay in Mass Rehab. Just to start here, just graduate, just was offer one position here like counselor, because the other counselor was ready for retire. I was ready for cover her in that moment. Yeah, no, that is my opportunity for me, my professional life back. He say, "Okay. Carmenza, bye bye." He left to Pennsylvania. I was commute every single day East Longmeadow to here, in this office. Was difficult time. Feel alone, is dark like winter, when you morning is really, I feel morning is like winter, but I say nothing. I'm going to do whatever I want now. Because I was thinking in my family just now. In this moment when I graduate, I was thinking I was sad because I say, "I got one big loan." Was worried for that. Okay? Because in Colombia, I study in Colombia, but I never need loan, because always I was working and paying, working and paying. For my son, I paid the two first semesters in UMass. Yes? But I never was thinking in loan in that moment when graduate, I say "Okay, I have one big loan." My son got married in the same time. Left from me far away. And my husband left to Pennsylvania. "Okay, Carmenza, I have to think about me now. I have to take care only me. I have to stay Mass Rehab." But in that moment, my husband didn't want to pay the mortgage in East Longmeadow because he moved to Pennsylvania. So he say, "No, I'm not interested in paying the mortgage anymore." The house was ready to foreclosing. Ready foreclosing. Ready. The bank took the house and everything in that moment. Ahhhh! I was so sad! All my life was gone. Okay? I was moving, moving, and commute every day East Longmeadow and here. And here offer me one contract. Okay? In that moment when offer me the contract stay here like qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor, okay, I have money. I talk with the bank what the bank is going to do. The bank say whatever you want at this moment, the house is foreclosing, you can decide whatever you want. I call my son Victor, he was living in Connecticut. I call my son, "Do you want to move in that house, do you want to pay the mortgage? Yes, start that house is not going to be lost now. You can stay there, you are paying mortgage in Connecticut, you can pay mortgage in your own house, yes stay over there, I can move to Worcester, because it's difficult for me sometimes two hours in the highway when it's winter or difficult weather. Move every

day. I can move over there you can stay over there in that house.” My son, I was so happy, my son Victor say "Okay Nena, I'm going to move over there." We talk with the bank, refinancial again, the bank accept my son is living over there in-East Longmeadow. Yes? Okay. That was really-good, made me happy in that moment. I move here. I went to rent apartment in Harley Drive. Harley Drive in that Sutton apartment. I would rent over there. Near the office, very good yes? Very good close to office my life change I feel like okay I'm going to turn my life back. It was in my mind all the time, I go to turn my life back. I need only English. I am working now in professional life again. This makes me happy. I save money again, I bought my house one year ago, one, one-and-a-half exactly now. In Rutland. I bought my house. I'm so happy with my house. I don't call my house "house," I call my house, "castle." For my son[s]. Remember when we came here, we live in Colombia like king? Okay, I got my castle now. Yes? I'm so happy. I live alone, only with two fish.

AW: [laughs]

CR: Yes, and my fish their name is Precious and Sapphire like my two a little, Victor and Diego, yes? I put like Victor and Diego, but I didn't want to call my fish Victor and Diego. I put Precious and Sapphire because they're precious, precious for the more important in your life, the more important stones in your life are your sons. And here for my sons, my sons forgot me. Yeah, I want everyone, okay, we sacrifice the lives for son[s]. Yes? It doesn't make you happy [it make me happy]. But in one moment you have to take break, think about you, what is good for you. What is good? What is bad? What you can change and never never regret. Never. Go up. I try with my client every day, "You have to do whatever you want, respect the other lives. Okay? Follow the rules, you are going to be happy with yourself, happy with everybody around. I live alone. Sometimes I say, "Oh my God, never I think to live alone." Yes?

AW: Mmmm

CR: I'm here almost 11 years now. 11 years. Bit I miss my family. I miss my friends. Every single day my friends from the university, from Colombia, call me. Every single day, tell me, "Hello, Carmenza," "Good night, Carmenza." Make me always, always, always message. You can take a look all the time. All the time. [smartphone in hand] Message for today. Message. Today. Look. Today. Always my friends make me happy and I say, "Okay I am not alone." If I do feel alone, I call my aunt, I call my mother, I call my sister, I call anybody, but I miss everybody 11 years later. It's not easy to change your life, but you have to look for something nice every day, for something better and better. You need satisfies in your life. You need something put you up every day. Sometimes I'm so sad here in very difficult very difficult life.

It made me sad. It made me happy the same time because I say, okay, I have opportunity to help. Now I have the opportunity to change someone's life like I wanted somebody to help me when I came here to this country. For first time in my life I felt frustration for the language, feel alone. Alone. Came here and nobody around and stay in house only for cleaning, cut the grass and picking up and cooking. Yeah, that is not my life. In Colombia, I got somebody to do that. In Colombia I got opportunity to have one maid who do that because I was thinking, "I am lucky, I am smart, I can work, I have opportunity to gave job on another person for make the another family happy." Yes? I have opportunity to pay for that. I paid for that. Yes? Because I was busy. I was working all the time in the university, it made me good. Yes? Now it's in another way. Different way. But I'm so happy when I'm here, five-o'clock, I'm leaving, if somebody told me, "Carmenza, I'm happy to meet with you. You changed my life." When somebody tells you, "you changed my life," it makes me happy because it remind me I changed my life for something that was not in my mind. Yes? My barrier is still the language, but I try every single day to improve my English. I've got a difficult financial situation, but that's not important, you don't need to "gimme, gimme, gimme," no. Work, work, work and stay organized. Work and save. And organize your life. You don't need something like that. You can go in any way you want. Like I teach my sons. My sons are working in the office. He has his own business, too. Yes? I'm so happy, I'm so proud of my sons because it reminds me what I did. I came here for happy lives. When I look my sons happy. I got two grandsons now. Oh my God! I want wonderful life for my sons. But I don't want my sons and my grandsons forget everything about the Colombia, because Colombia is wonderful people. The other part of the family is there, the other part family ask the question, "How are you doing? How are your sons? How are the family?" All the time worried about the everybody is happy, everybody is fine. Yes? I try to go to Colombia when I can, but in this last four years working here, I didn't. Because when I go to Colombia turn back, I got so much depressed.

AW: Mmmmm.

CR: [deep breath] Because go there, I turn back is remind me all difficult situations. Now, I want to forget difficult situation. Only go up. Not down. Go to Colombia I need feel more comfortable here, the only is English because my life I feel pretty satisfied with I am doing now, yes? My job made me so happy. I start here in ABC -- in the first time the practice [practicum] after the intern[ship] I was offered the [AB] position because we have different categories and now I am C position two months ago. Yes? The people here take ten years yes? [Siri interrupts] or more, sorry, ten years or more forgot the C position. I got here already. Yes?

AW: Yep.

CR: That made me proud because see you try try try you get whatever you want. But in the good way. Follow the rules, here only follow the rules, and respect, respect the system because the system and the state is my partner to work together. Respect my clients. Now after this short time here, I got that position. When my co-workers know, "Oh Carmenza, you got the C position now. Wow! So quickly! I only take one time. I prepare a lot for the interview, forgot that position because we had to put like new person put the whole process. I follow the whole process again, the state, I put the best force for me for that. I try I practice the pronunciation for the interview with my tutor. Yes? I did interviews with my tutor. I write everything likely be and he corrected me. Yes? So happy. Was perfect, perfect when I went to interview. I was surprised how much I can learn when I had somebody be guide me to help in that. Yeah it was interesting that position had to be mine.

AW: [laughs]

CR: Always when I want something I put it in my mind. I dream, I follow that dream. Yes, that is my best advice for everybody. Never regret. Try. If you don't get it the first time, try the second time, or the next. Organize your life. Put what is the target in front of you and follow that.

AW: Is there anything else you would like to add about yourself, your family, or your culture?

CR: My culture. I love my culture. Yes. I love when everybody say something nice about Colombia. I love that! I love—every single year before I try to go to Colombia—I went to Colombia in August because August is the more—not the more—It the more important time for me for is the parade of flowers parade over there. The flowers parade is very special for very different ornaments and everything, the people is happy, everybody is outside and different fairs, yes, and old cars, horses, flowers, and different church of flowers for the sharing flowers and everything. I love that. I love because you can see any different culture over there. The people around the world go to Medellin in that moment in the first week in August. By the way, it's my birthday too. Yes. I love that. I love that. Christmas is beautiful for the lights in all the streets everything is is decorate with lights and everything but the more important in my culture is the people. I miss that because you never have problem like here you are afraid to tell somebody something because you have problem with your car or something outside or you are afraid

without . . . In Colombia in specific in Medellin si you have problem you can say whether or whoever is around, "Hey, can you help me?" Everybody, you don't need to except, you don't need to say, "Help me." No. Everybody say, "Can I help you? Can I help? What can I do for you?" Yes? Friendly because the people is like that. The last time when I went there four years ago before start here, the difference is like oh my God! For me was big difference! Oh! Everything changed now! [gasp] A lot—a lot of population, a lot of motorcycles, a lot accidents, TBIs, a lot—oh my God that was the sad part when I went the last time. But the only thing when I turn back is I miss everybody. I miss everybody. I miss my job. But I'm happy in this. But still I miss my job. Do you understand?

AW: Yeah.

CR: You got one life. You change your life. Yes? Different jobs. I love mine now but I miss last too. In the university all the time. In the university, study, with all the students, something new every day. Here is very similar in different way: something new every day, but something sad and something good when I can help you. Yes? When I can help somebody, made me, "Oh my God! That is so good!" Yeah? Okay. Everything is back.

AW: [laughs]

CR: Thank you.

AW: You're welcome. Thank you very much for your time and your interview. I'm I'm going to . . . that is . . .

CR: Now my son[s] and my husband are living in East Longmeadow. My husband, remember went to Pennsylvania. Now he got another job in Connecticut. He turn back. Yes, here. But he is living in East Longmeadow with my sons.

AW: [laughs]

CR: OK? The life was ...

AW: circle

CR: ... circle. Living together in East Longmeadow. My -- that mo -- my now is Rutland house but in East Longmeadow living Victor the house in the basement is one apartment complete apartment very nice apartment in the basement my husband is living over there, yes?, and we are good friends now, better than when we live together. Do you understand?

AW:Yup.

CR: We have better relation now, can you believe that? When we lived together he always told me, "I'm busy, I don't have time, I'm busy." I call him, he say "I'm busy, can you call me back?" Now, when I call him, he have plenty time for me. For first time in his life. We are friends. He invited me, "Do you want to do this?" or I invited him, "Do you want to do that?" And we have very good relation now. When we live together, we doesn't have time together because he never have time. Now is living over there, yes, both my house yes? And he have time when I invited him to go to visit my son[s], I give yes very good I want to be model for my sons. Very good relation all the time doesn't what the difference between you and I, we have to do model for very good [interrelationship] in the world. Doesn't matter we can't live together but we can change my sons, my plan, my sons now in different activities like family. Doesn't matter everybody is living in different ways now. Yes? But for first time we doesn't have arguments. For first time we are agreeing something. Yes? For first time sometimes we can do something together like go for a -- we came far away for something -- like very good friends. Now we are friends and talking, have good communication for something about my sons or my grandsons. Mmm?

AW: Yep.

CR: He is happy enjoying my grandsons living in East Longmeadow, I am happy in my house living with my Precious and my Sapphire.

AW: [laughter] Yep.

CR: Yes?

AW: A happy ending.

CR: Yes. Yes. That is my life now.