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## Interview with Louis Lovelace and Fernando

Fernando Lastname

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**Interview with Fernando \_\_\_\_\_ (and Louis Lovelace)**

**Conducted at Fiesta Mexicana restaurant, on High Street, Mt. Vernon at 8 p.m. on October**

**Interviewer: Darleen Feldman**

**Translator during interview: Jen Stevens**

**Translated & transcribed by Mariel Diaz**

JS: Where are you from?

F\_\_\_\_: I am from the state of Michoacan.

DF: Can you describe your past a little for us? Where you were born, how you came here...

F: I was born in Mexico City, on the ninth of December 1963. I am part of a normal family, consisting of 11 members. Because of circumstances in our country, the family went to live in the province of Michoacan, in a small town called La Piedad. There I spent my childhood and part of my adolescence, studying, working, living with my peers, well, with everybody. I feel like I am a very social person.

DF: Why did you come to Mt. Vernon?

F: Good question, not even I know that (*laughs*). Because, it turns out at the time, certain circumstances led me here to Mt. Vernon, and here I am with you all.

JS: Only because of circumstances?

F: Yes, because of unplanned circumstances. You know, sometimes there are circumstances that you just don't expect. Sometimes plans change from one thing to another.

JS: Did you have family or friends here?

F: Yes, friends and family. The busboy here is my brother, she (*unintelligible*) is my sister-in-law, and the brothers of my sister-in-law, well, you know them already, no?

DF: When did you come to the United States, and where did you first go?

F: I came here for the first time about eight years ago, eight or nine years. And you know where I went...the Mexicans always look for California. It was in the city of Stockton, California, that I was first in a state of the United States. After that I spent four years in Mexico. Three years ago I came to the United States, to Tennessee. Then I came here to Mt. Vernon and have been here for 8 or 9 months.

DF: Did you come here with anyone else, or by yourself?

F: No, I came here by myself. I like solo adventures (*laughs*).

DF: Do you have anything else you wish to say about that?

F: No.

DF: Okay. Can you please describe the Hispanic community here in Mt. Vernon?

F: Well, because of my work, I have seen many different types of Latinos, and from many different places, such as Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, El Salvadorians. But those are the people who work here. As for the people that come here to eat, there are people from Nicaragua, Venezuela, Honduras, Brazil, Spain, Portugal, and from Argentina, from Chile. So yes, there is a Latin community here, very small community. A few weeks ago I met some Mexicans who were here working for the apple orchards, and also for an American company called Mexico-Americana, a company from Texas. We definitely have an individual community, but there is no real racism here, we are doing well, everything is fairly peaceful.

DF: A community of Mexicans? Or of all Hispanics?

F: Well, I understand that there are only 2 or 3 Mexican families here, but the other people who work here are from El Salvador. Oh, there are also some people from Colombia, but there is not really communication between the groups in order to form organizations or anything. This is mostly because of our different situations--because of work, our work, and its doubtful how we are able to meet with the others. I think that there is not really a problem with any of this.

DF: Therefore do you think that there are not really any social activities that exist here where people can get together?

F: Well, for us, through the restaurant, we have tried to get together a soccer team, for no other reason than to have a good time, hang out. You know, we do it on Thursdays and Sundays, I think we all enjoy ourselves, including you all [the Americans who play with them sometimes]. We like it when you come out to play. We like to be known as friends, as just people, individuals.

DF: Do you think that the people of Mt. Vernon are hard to get to know?

F: Its like any other part of the world; there are some really nice people, who don't really care where any one [of us] goes, you know, they'll greet you on the street no matter where you are, with a smile, and always want to talk, and then there are others who think we are from another planet. I feel like the situation is akin to that of the black people, like I see in the movies. But I don't pay much attention to those people, it doesn't really matter to me.

DF: But generally, do you feel like people of Mt. Vernon are accepting of the Hispanic community?

F: Although they perhaps are not 100% accepting, for whatever reason, because many Latin American countries have had some bad moments in the past. My country, as well, is going

through one of its worst periods in its history right now, and also because of its proximity to the United States. I think that right now there is at least one Mexican in every town of the United States. Mexicans are very easy to get to know, easy to get along with, no?

JS: I wanted to ask you about what you thought of the immigration situation--do you think more people will keep immigrating? Do you think that the majority of the people coming to the United States come in order to work? Or is it more that they have family here or want to study here?

F: While its one thing if we do not bother anyone, that we don't cause any problems, problems of police, drug addiction, prostitution, this type of problems, if you do not involve yourself in them, you will be fine. The American people have the right to say certain people, certain Latinos, are causing problems, and they have the right to enforce immigration. The problem that we [the Mexican people] have, is that as long as you are here working, this justifies you being here. If the work of a Mexican does not affect the work of an American--does not take it away, then I think its fine for them to work here. I believe that a large part of this country depends on the work, not only of the Mexicans, but on all the Latinos and immigrants from the rest of the world.

DF: Would you like to say anything else about immigration?

F: You like to talk about immigration! For the Mexicans, immigration is a delicate subject. Its a strong subject, because as well...You see, my country has been affected politically by the power of the government, but in spite of all the efforts of Mexico, we are not starving to death. There are many jobs there as well, a lot of opportunities. But, for me, a large part of Mexico's problems is the U.S., politically. Because the United States is the most powerful country in the world, there are problems too strong within the United States, that have nothing to do with the other countries. The U.S. has a very strong influence in my country just as in the other countries. Its very important right now in Mexico because of the economic crisis that we are in, and the U.S. is lending us so much money. It seems like Mexico could be just another state within the United States, just like Puerto Rico or Hawaii. Even though none of us really want that, its still a possible outcome.

DF: Can you talk a little more about...You mentioned that there are people in Mt. Vernon who have certain prejudices, and how they interact with you.

F: Towards me...Well, let me repeat what I said before. There are all kinds of people, and some that look at you badly, and you just ignore it. I am not going to make myself a martyr--why don't people like me? Well, first they have to get to know me, and then the rest of the people. I simply have to be myself, and that's it. I am a Mexican, I'm never going to change that, so there it is.

DF: What about within the restaurant?

F: Within the restaurant there are people who maybe don't like us, but they like the food, so they come. Although sometimes I look at people with a big smile on my face, inside I am saying: I have so much to tell you. But, you know, that's part of the world, and you have to accept it as it

is, no? I am not going to be looking to hurt someone because they look at me the wrong way...I have my own life, and I will respect them if they respect me.

DF: Do you think that the Hispanic community is isolated?

F: Very much so.

DF: Can you explain that a little?

F: Its that there are different activities. There are Latinos who work in the companies around here, they have so little free time perhaps, and the time that they do have they dedicate to their spouses, their children. Its hard. But those of us here in the restaurant...it would be great if we could have Latin music here. What for? To have something different. Something different, from different Latin countries. For me, I like this idea. My brother and I have discussed this. So they know that we are happy people as well, that we have a desire to be happy and live a good life. Its an idea that we've only talked about, nothing has come of it yet...Imagine yourself dancing the lambada, or salsa right here, it would be great, right? Or maybe music that we listen to in Mexico, you could even do the macarena! Right?

JS: I think that everyone around the world likes to dance.

F: Yes, its a way of getting rid of the tension of the week.

JS: What is a normal day for you like?

F: Well, I get up normally around nine-fifteen, I get to work by ten in the morning, usually to open up, and I show up with an ear to ear smile, although inside I get scared that I'll make a mistake in front of people. I feel good, I feel comfortable working here in Fiesta Mexicana.

DF: And the days that you don't have to work? Well...today you are here with us, but...

F: The days I don't work I take it easy. I get up late, very late, and maybe go wash my car, out to eat, to play soccer.

JS: Do you live by yourself?

F: No, I live with other Latinos.

JS: Friends or family, or...

F: With friends, with the people I work with.

JS: Far from here?

F: No, very close, only 12 hours from here or so (*laughs*). No, very close.

JS: Can you walk to work?

F: Yes, its very nice.

JS: How did you find the house or the apartment where you live? Was there room for you when you got here?

F: Oh yes, they were all happy that another person could help pay the rent! But its very nice, you can live peacefully.

JS: How many people live there?

F: Actually, there are four of us.

DF: For you, when you go to the bank, the grocery store, you can't speak perfect English. How is that for you?

F: Hmmn,

DF: Oh, one minute, the tape is running out.

*(Side 1 of tape ends)*

DF: How old are you?

F: How old do you think I am?

JS: Hmmn, 23...25...15?? 35? Really? You look younger than that! I was going to say between 24 and 28.

F: As we say in Mexico, good life and few regrets. Ok, you asked about when I go to the bank, to the supermarket...alright. When I go to the bank, at first it was very hard for me, but little by little you learn. In Mexico, they teach English in school, but just the basics, like what is a chair, etc. But once you are here you have to accommodate. And you have to take something that maybe you learned a long time ago and use it again. When you need to learn it you will. It's like when you were in Spain (*to Darlene*) you had to learn to speak Spanish, to communicate. To say, may I have a Coca-Cola. So, its like everything in life.

JS: But was there anyone to show you around, to help you a little? You know, to show you were everything is?

F: Well, the first times I went, I went with another guy who spoke English, and he told me what to order, how to order it, what to eat. But the trick is to not shut yourself off from the world, you have to keep on learning, keep on looking, that you don't say "Oh, now what do I do?". There is really no alternative. Whoever knows how to write will teach you to write, and whoever can speak fairly well...I know that my English is really bad, but I try to get learn more each day.

DF: But how do you learn?

JS: Do you speak with the people you work with?

F: I try to speak English with the customers. Because of my job I don't have the time to maybe look things up in a dictionary very often, or maybe watch videos. For me, the best way is to talk with other people.

JS: And just listening as well. If all you do is listen, you will still learn.

F: Yes, yes.

F: I have a friend who was in Colorado a long time ago, his name was Daniel, and he had always been blind, but he speaks English perfectly. Just from being there, really. He can't see, but he can speak perfectly. When one comes to the United States that's how you feel, blind. But little by little you start feeling more comfortable.

DF: I only have one more question. Can you practice Mexican culture in your everyday life here? Can you listen to Mexican music, dance a little salsa...

JS: There is a feeling that when one moves to another country you have to leave every part of your culture there.

F: Well, Mexicans have a lot of influence on the United States, culturally. You see all the Mexican restaurants here, plus there is imitation Mexican food in the grocery stores, Taco Bell, Chichi's, Chili's. So, it's a large influence. Regarding Mexican music, if you go to any big record store you will not only find Mexican music but music from all of Latin America as well. The United States has influence from all over: from China, Japan, from Russia as well. This is simply a free-market economy.

JS: Is the majority of your family still living in Mexico?

F: Yes.

JS: Is it difficult to maintain communication with them?

F: No, not at all. I write, or call them on the telephone. No, it's not difficult at all.

DF: Are you religious?

F: Catholic.

DF: Can you practice it here?

F: Because of my work, I have never been to catholic church here yet on Sunday, I am always working! But in Mexico, I go every Sunday with my whole family.

DF: I don't have anything else. Is there anything you'd like to say?

F: Well, I'd like to say thank you very much for the interview. I hope that this has been of use to you. Thank you for the opportunity to express myself a little.

JS: Many thanks to you.

DF: Yes...

JS: I don't have anything to do with this project, but it interests me greatly. Also, its the first time I've been able to come to Fiesta Mexicana.

F: You know, people usually know that there are some Mexicans here, but they never know that there is a Mexican restaurant! They see us in the streets, but they never think that Fiesta Mexicana is right here!

JS: Is having a restaurant here very hard? Because my father has restaurants in Colorado, and its very hard work, very hard.

F: Its just like any other work. For those who work in construction, its a different world, and they shut themselves off in their world. In the restaurant business, well, you shut yourself off in the world of the restaurant, and the everyday problems of that restaurant.

JS: That's what I am trying to understand...if someone is working in a different country, and they still have their family and friends in another country, and you work so many hours...it must be very hard!

F: Many times here you have to not see a good television program, or for example not go to the movies, or see your favorite artist put on a show.

JS: But also, I suppose there is not much to do here in Mt. Vernon, I think.

F: No, no, but for example there was an exhibit of old cars here, and a number of us went. Some didn't go, I guess they weren't interested, but there are some things to do here.

Louis Lovelace (*manager*): I try, as a manager, to make sure there are some activities to do for all the employees, because I know that there is really nothing else. That's why we organize soccer, so that everyone can get involved and do something. Especially on Sundays, when other people come around. I like them to be able to see how to interact with other people, to see how they live, so there is something different rather than being at work and speaking Spanish all the time.

JS: You speak English really well. Have you been living here a long time?

LL: Well I am from Puerto Rico, and we are American citizens and take English in school. But I have been here for twenty years, I came here in college.



JS: Twenty years? Longer than me!

LL: Where are you from?

JS: Colorado.

LL: And you speak Spanish. Where did you learn, school?

JS: Yes, partly from Colorado, from studying it in school, and there are many people who speak Spanish in Colorado. Also, last year I studied in Argentina, for thirteen months.

LL: It's hard to hear an American speak...

JS: Yes, I am very frustrated right now because I am losing some of my Spanish.

LL: But that is the key. You have to go, and mingle, and practice everyday.

F: Here in the restaurant, for example me--I am going to talk about me. I sometimes speak to Americans in Spanish, and it ends up that a lot of Americans speak Spanish. And they are very happy to speak Spanish. Eight days later, here they are again, speaking Spanish. It's good, I ask them "how did you learn Spanish?". And they say "No, I was in Costa Rica". And from there you go on practicing Spanish.

JS: Yes, I think that many people are nervous, and for me, I don't know...When someone is speaking in a different language, although maybe you can understand everything, its very difficult to communicate in a second language. You have to think at the same time. In English I can talk and talk without thinking.

LL: I remember when I first came to the United States. It depends on the person. The majority of people don't like it if you laugh at them, so it's going to be harder for that person to learn a second language. Because most people will make fun of my accent even now.

DF: Really? You are really good.

LL: Oh yes, with friends...Because I still have a strong accent.

JS: You have a strong accent, but its not necessarily a strong Latin accent. I mean, I would almost say that you were from Texas, or...

LL: Oh really?

JS: Yes, you're accent is really not very strong.

LL: Maybe you are used to Spanish in your mind, but to someone who has never heard Spanish, I have a strong accent.

JS: It's tough to lose the accent.

LL: I don't want to lose it! When I was in college I could have taken a course on phonetics to lose the accent, but what for? I am proud of being from Puerto Rico, you know, I have an extensive vocabulary, so I can have a conversation with anybody. Once in a while I forget certain verbs and things like that, and I don't use the proper form. But I have a pretty extensive, you know, I can come up with a lot of words, that even Americans don't use. But I am glad you guys came...

*(Side 2 of tape ends)*