

Coming to the Plains

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Mexico City, Mexico

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Editor note: Text originally in English is denoted with italics.

[1:01]

WARREN: Could you tell me your full name and where you are from?

NOLASCO: My name is Ana María Cuevas Domínguez. My maiden name, and Ana Nolasco from my husband's surname. And I was born in Mexico City, in the Capital.

WARREN: Could you tell me about your life there, in DF?

NOLASCO: Sure. Well, my life was nice. It was simple. I grew up only with my mother. My mother was my father and my mother at the same time. I have two sisters and my mom raised us. She put us in school. I am a public accountant. I was able to finish my degree. And my mother was a businesswoman. She had a shoe store for kids and we helped her, and as you can see, all my life, it was just working. We helped her and she was able to raise us because she was alone. We lived in my granny's house for all my life. For all my life we lived there until we could get independent and my mom got independent, but basically it happened when we got married.

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I was the third one who got married and I lived there. I lived there almost all my life until I was twenty-seven years old. When I got married, there was a woman who believed in me, and she sold me a place where I always worked with my mother. However, there were people who wanted to buy that place, people who had money, the possibility to pay more for it, but the woman said no to them. She would sell it to me. So, my husband was here at that time. Well, my boyfriend at that time. My boyfriend, my fiancée...And I told him about it. We had plans to get married and would buy that place and I would work there and for many years I would work there until we would migrate to this country.

[3:17]

WARREN: How old were you when you came here?

NOLASCO: Thirty-two years, thirty-two.

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WARREN: And how was your experience? First, why did you leave Mexico?

[4:07]

NOLASCO: At that time, there was a great financial crisis. There was a bad crisis in the country, where my husband was a merchant, too. He made clothes. He had two very dangerous attacks where he almost died. So, he decided. We lost everything from that business, and mine still stayed open because we had stores separately, so he was sad. And he said, “You know what? My brothers have called me. They are in Nebraska. I feel like I should go there.” Then, it was hard, very difficult. At that moment I was doing very, very well. I was making good money, good money. I wouldn’t have the need to come. Then, for my husband's wellbeing I said, “it’s fine”. Then he said, “I’ll go, try it and check it out.” He came here and I stayed there. So, my kids were in school. They were little, and it was a hard decision, seriously, suddenly to change everything because it’s everything. You leave your family, your customs... You leave everything, your house, everything. We had a lot of things and dreams there. Then, my husband came here and told me.

[5:42]

He came here when he was young, well, he came here very young. Then he told me that and told me, “You know what?” And I thought about it because of his life, and I said, “No, no. It is getting very dangerous here.” And there was a very difficult financial situation in the country, very difficult. That made us decide to come here. When we came here, the school year finished for the kids. At that time, I wouldn't know what to do, what to say, because my mom didn’t agree. Moms always worry, right? My daughter was very little, and the truth is that what I did was... I have never told this, but what I did was ask God and that was it. And I did something very weird.

[6:28]

There, we had two apartments, and one of them didn’t get sold, and then I asked God, “If this apartment gets sold, it means you want me to follow my husband.” It didn't get sold for a long time. The following week, someone came to see me and asked if I would sell them the apartment, and I felt low pressure and I said, “I have to go; I have to go.” And I sold that apartment. It was very hard to sell it. It got sold. And I said, “I had to follow my husband”. So, that was how I came here. Then, it was a nice experience.

WARREN: And talking about coming. How was your experience coming here?

NOLASCO: We came by airplane. We came with visas, normal, good, we had them issued. My husband before coming here had them issued for us. My kids thought we would go to Disneyland

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and come... right? It was nice. The first thing that surprised me was the cleanliness. There was clean air. It was summer when I got here. It was July eighteenth of 1998, and I saw everything beautiful. It seemed to me beautiful, beautiful. I loved this place, I loved it. That was what I experienced.

WARREN: You came directly to Grand Island, right?

[7:50]

NOLASCO: Yes, I arrived in Omaha.

WARREN: You were telling me a little about your first impression, the cleanliness, that it is so clean, but think about your expectations before coming here. The reality, was it different from what you expected or imagined?

NOLASCO: I think so because I was really tense with a lot of anxiety because of the crisis that was happening in my country. Because it's terrible, I saw that a lot of people even resorted to committing suicide, because there was a lot of terrible things, like... If you owed, for example, a thousand pesos, it would turn into five thousand because of interest, it was a terrible thing. So then, when I came here, I saw a lot of peace. I was always looking behind me to see if anyone was behind me and my brother-in-law would say, "No, calm down, it's very quiet here, very calm," because I came from a city where there was a lot of violence. There still is.

[8:54]

So then, the first thing I started to notice was the language. One is faced with the language. Secondly, you begin to feel loneliness. Loneliness, absence of family. We were very attached to our family. There were get-togethers and the whole family would gather. I think that's what I started to face, the loneliness, the language, different customs. I started to meet many, many nationalities, many different kinds of food, different traditions, many things. So then that's what I started to notice, but especially, you start to feel the absence of family, it's the one of the things you feel.

[9:44]

WARREN: Thinking about that, can you compare how your family life in Mexico was to what family life is like here?

NOLASCO: Yes, they are very different. In general, there, even on a workday, on the weekends, families gather often. Here it is more difficult, especially because of work. We always have worked on weekends, so for us it is normal, but there is love, and sometimes I say, quality time. If we see each other one day, two days, quality time, even though we are far away. So,

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ways of living are different. For sure we have more here, more opportunities. We live better financially. We are comfortable. If we work, we live better, but love is what we teach our kids and family remains together. So, days when we can see each other, we show love to each other. Then, it is very important. When we visit Mexico, we feel love. So, even though we are far away from each other, we still feel loved.

WARREN: You have two children, right?

NOLASCO: Yes.

[11:02]

WARREN: Tell me about the two children, their names and where they live and what they do.

NOLASCO: Okay. My oldest son is Cristian Alberto, and he is a young thirty-year-old guy. He is living in Mexico, in Mexico City. He works in *marketing*. He is bilingual. And he loves to be there. I mean, he is also a hardworking man, he is like my husband. He got married with my daughter-in-law Gris and we have a grandson, Tiaguito who is little. He is turning one, and Christian was here. He went to *high school*, then he took some classes, but he didn't finish a degree because he didn't want to.

[11:59]

My daughter is Anah, Anah Laura Nolasco. She lives here. She's a very innovative woman, she's a very good girl. She finished college. It was something that... honestly, it was a great gift from God and from her. She has a small business where she is working and she's there. It's going well and keeps going day by day. We like to cook a lot. I love to cook. Honestly, my dream was to have a restaurant where I would cook, but I think I see it in my daughter. She is the one who inherited that. My son loves to cook too, he loves it. Well, I see myself in them too. In them. Without wanting to, I never thought it would happen, but she likes cooking and I do too. They're my two kids [laughs].

[12:58]

WARREN: We also like her cooking, too. [laughs] I'll take a step back because I want to ask, thinking again about your arrival. How were you treated at the beginning when you came to the United States and do you feel that people are still treating you the same or different?

NOLASCO: No, I think I was very lucky. The one who opened doors was my husband and I also came to work at the same place. For me, people have been kind to me. They're still kind. Sometimes we see people in places where we used to work and we greet each other. I think we

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are respected. People smile at us and that's what's important. I still feel people are the same or better now.

[13:51]

WARREN: Can you think of some of the biggest challenges you've had when you got here?

NOLASCO: I think that the first challenge is getting there, right? Coming with my kids to an unfamiliar place, the language is different, everything's different and it's a little scary, because you leave a life, you leave everything. I think that was my first challenge. Second, I faced new things I'd never done. I worked at a plant. I worked in an office before, so I said to myself, "I don't have fast hands," because they told me, "No. You have to work fast here." "Oh, my God, please, help me," I said. I faced that, but I think that what was easy for me was always trying to do my best, right? Always.

[14:50]

When we opened the store, it was a really tough challenge for me because we didn't have money. And we had this business and it was... What happened here was something really supernatural. Supernatural because, really, we didn't have money. So, to start supplying, to start having something, it's really hard. It was hours and hours of work here. I remember that I'd get here at 7:30 in the morning. I'd drop off my kids at school early. From 7:30 until 12:00 at night, maybe 1:00, working. My kids too, Anita would put her apron on. Anita, just a little girl, cleaning pans, because we'd make bread. We'd sell bread, so the baker would get there at 4:00 in the morning and we'd have to leave all the pans clean. Anita was, and my son, but Anita, I have a lot of memories of her because she'd put on her apron, alone, and she'd start scrubbing the pans and that hurt my heart, because I'd look at her eyes and...

[15:51]

I'd tell her, "Go lay down on the floor for a little bit and I'll finish it," because I couldn't leave. "No, no, I'll help you mom," she said. She was little. I mean, my kids would be very little when they helped me, so that was very hard for me, but we overcame that. We started little by little to go forward and I think this was one the hardest challenges. I saw my little children helping me instead of being in bed. But I believe that made my kids strong. I feel like that taught them that if one establishes goals, one reaches them through effort, because nothing is easy. It is possible because there were many hours of work here, many hours. So, I think that it was hard for me to say, "I have to raise my children."

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If they had no shoes, my son would tell me, “You know what, mom? It is snowing and my shoe has a hole.” I had never lived that. I never lived that in my country and I told him, “Hold on, son, I am going to buy you shoes. I am going to buy you shoes.” Because it was difficult when Anah also would say, “Mom, I need this.” It hurt when I wouldn't have money to buy them what they needed. My soul hurt. I would go to secondhand store to buy clothes for them. For me, I wouldn't mind. I wouldn't be ashamed because it was important to be together. I would say: it is important to be together.

So, I believe moving this business forward was very important because our bills increased, rents, I felt like we were losing our house, and my husband would tell me, “No, God gave us that house, I saw it, He revealed it to me. Don't worry, we will succeed, we will make it, we will make it; resist, don't give up,” he told me. “I will hold up,” I told him. I will keep it up.

[17:52]

He told me, “No. Hold on. Look, it is coming. The sun is about rise, the sun is about to rise.” So that was the way we started. We were in the sunset of January. Which is very hard. When spring and summer were blooming, we started to see the sun again, so we started fighting; it was like that. I think that was one the hardest challenge for me, seeing my little kids with financial needs, right? I would say that I never thought I would face this here. It never happened to me, in my country and it happened to me here. I said that God knows why. I only asked Him for my family and I to be together. That was a big challenge for me.

WARREN: I don't have any more formal questions, but I don't know if you have anything, an anecdote, or something special that you'd like to add to tell us. About your life, your hopes, your dreams...

[18:59]

NOLASCO: I think that we all have dreams in life. But sometimes they die because of circumstances or bad decisions that we make. Because we're responsible for the decisions we make. I think you have to work every day to keep those dreams alive, those desires, that hope, because there is hope. If we make the right decisions, if we behave ourselves in this country, if we obey the law, if we're obedient, there are blessings everywhere. Wherever we are, the dreams we have will be realized. But always, and when we have an order, because there is an order. So, I think that my experience in life has been: be obedient, put God first, and ask Him, “is it ok for me to do this?” because He's going to make me feel things so I don't make mistakes, because sometimes when we have made mistakes in something, we're asking God to help us, and He will help us, but it's better to ask for help in the first place to avoid those things.

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The effort that one makes is constant. It's punctuality, it's dedication, it's love for work or study. It can be achieved because my mom always taught me, "You have to be consistent; you have to be punctual, you have to be obedient, you have to be honest, you have to have faithfulness in life," she says. She says, "You will achieve [something]. Eventually, they're going to call you "Señora". Because when they call you "Señora," it's a name with weight." And my mom taught me those principles. She tells me, "Always be honest, never go stealing, don't take what's not yours. If someone leaves something, look for the person who left it". So, I had very strong principles from my mother, and I always followed them. So, I have seen that there are blessings and that things are achieved. I won't say, "No, it was very easy." It's not easy. There are challenges in life, but when you achieve it, you feel very proud.

[21:17]

I think we have. This is my house. This store is my home because I've put so much into it. If I counted the hours of my life here, I am here more than at my house. This store, we have always said that God gave it to us. When we opened, we prayed for this store. It was something that naturally happened... here. How the credits were opened, how people started to flow. We learned a lot, that's why we have a responsibility to the clients, to the people. But I want to tell you that they don't die... that dreams do not die. That your dreams - you have to resurrect those dreams. There is hope. Of course, it is possible. If you fall, get up, and if you fall again, get up again. It doesn't matter. There is always a new beginning. Maybe during the night there is crying but the next morning, the sun will rise. I never forget what my husband said to me.

[22:12]

So, I believe in that, where there's a will, there's a way. With a lot of effort, it is possible here in this country. I bless this country with all my heart because it has given us so much. The person who come here to this country to work, and follow the rules, it goes well for them. It is a lie, if doesn't go well because of this or that. It is not truth. It is because that person is not behaving. This person did something bad. So, behaving, following the rules and fighting, it is possible. This country has given us a big opportunity and the truth is I liked this place the first time I arrived. I liked Grand Island. It is a peaceful place. It is very good, beautiful, and fruitful.

[22:58]

So, I tell people to have dreams, goals. Yes, there is hope. Yes, you can [do it]. One must make an effort. Sometimes I worked from 5 am to midnight. I got up early every day, for two years in a row. Later, I started closing the shop at 10 pm. And for me it was very early. Really early. If I did it, others can do it, even better if they are younger, they can do it. I advise young people a lot, "You won't lie to me. I have worked hard, so you won't lie to me." I can tell you it is possible. Go forward, people who have the opportunity to study, study because that is the foundation of

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everything. Education, preparation, nobody is going to take it away from you. Probably, it can disappear, but what you have in your mind? Nobody is going to steal it.

[23:56]

Education is the best that could be. Education is the best gift a parent can give to a child. I told my daughter, “I have faith in you, I know you will accomplish it. Keep going, keep going.” When she reached her goal, it was a gift for me as well, and I tell her, “If you want to keep going, give it a try.” We must support our children, because sometimes instead of supporting them, we discourage them. We must tell them, “You can do it, you are smart.” Sometimes we discourage them, but we have to support them because they are the new generation. We don’t know if among them there is a new president, representative, etc. I mean, there are a lot of intelligent people, but they need support, they need love. I believe love is the foundation for raising kids. In that one, as a parent, shows love to his or her children so they don’t get lost. Families need love. Not much money, not pricy presents, but love, trust, that is what they need to move forward. Well, I just wanted to add this and keep going. Thank you for the interview. Seriously, we feel honored, for this.

[25:15]

WARREN: Well, it is a pleasure, seriously. You two are amazing.

NOLASCO: Thank you, thank you so much, for us it is a pleasure. We have never done this, but the truth is that we are very grateful.

[25:52]