

Coming to the Plains

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

WARREN: Can you tell me what your name is and where you are from?

VÁZQUEZ: My name is Lorena Vázquez de La Torre; I am from Mexico City, Mexico.

WARREN: And could you tell me about your life there? Let's begin with your childhood.

VÁZQUEZ: My childhood was very nice. I was always the spoiled one in the house, everything for Lorena. They respected my dad so much that, around the neighborhood, no one could do anything to me, because "It's Juan Vázquez's daughter, La Chinita" [someone with curly hair]. It was, "There comes La Chinita," and everyone was glad to see me, and they always gave me everything. I never wanted for anything. Thank God, I had the best life. No, I can't complain, I was brought up very well. I always felt loved, I felt like I was in a little bubble because nobody could do anything to me because I knew that my dad or my sister were there.

[1:47]

WARREN: Tell me a little bit about why you left there.

VÁZQUEZ: I left Mexico because it didn't go well for me with my daughter's dad. I felt he was always on my back, harassing me. I didn't feel comfortable anymore. I had to work to give my daughter something better. I said, "No, I don't want this for my daughter or for me." I was always one of the people that said, "Why go to the United States if you're doing well here?" And it was a very spontaneous decision for a teenager to say, "I'm going." To grab my one-year-old girl and to say, "I'm taking that risk and I'm leaving." In that moment I didn't think. I was nineteen years old then, I said, "I want a better future. Whether it goes well or not, I'm grabbing my daughter and I'm leaving."

[3:15]

WARREN: Can you explain to me what your experience was like coming here, or how you arrive here? Was it walking? On a plane?

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VÁZQUEZ: When I came to the United States, I crossed illegally. We made it to Ciudad Juárez and to a hotel with my daughter. From there, they came to pick us up. They took my daughter away and took her across separate from me. They took me across in a car. They gave me an ID and they combed my hair just like the ID, slicked back hair, because I had to look like the girl on the ID, and thank God, I didn't have it too bad. The first time, they caught me, and I was in jail all day and night, then they sent me back. I was stuck in the hotel the whole weekend, and on Monday I tried to cross again, and the officer caught on. I had to learn the name on the ID and the name on the birth certificate for my daughter. I didn't know whether to learn the names on the ID's, pray, or keep watching the movie that was very good. So when the officer caught on I said, "God, let whatever has to happen, happen." The officer approached me and asked, "What is your name?" And I was able to tell him the name on the ID and when he asked, "Is she your daughter?" I was supposed to say she was my goddaughter, but at that moment I only did this [shakes head and shrugs shoulders] and the officer told me, "Go ahead" and I was like [thinking to myself] "Are you sure you are going to let me go through?" I could not believe it when we arrived to Denver, because I arrived to Denver and everything was really different to me. I didn't suffer much. The truth is it was luck that I arrived alright and with my daughter.

[5:45]

WARREN: Since you've come to the United States, where have you lived?

VÁZQUEZ: When I arrived, I lived in Denver. I lived there for two years, but it didn't go well with my daughter's dad. I lived in isolation, a lot of violence. I couldn't dress up, I couldn't go out, just from work back to the house. I was used to living that type of life, so I thought that it was normal, because my dad was like that with my mom. It made it so that, to me, it was normal. Later I said, "I don't want this". My sister lives here in Kearney and one day I told her, "Sonia, do me a favor. I don't want to be here anymore. Either my daughter's dad comes with me or I leave alone, but I've had enough. I don't want this life anymore." My sister said to me, "Yes, come." I came to live here with my sister.

[6:55]

VÁZQUEZ: When I got here to Kearney my life completely changed. I started to work, to have more freedom. I learned to drive by myself. My daughter's father hadn't wanted to let me drive because he was very jealous, very sexist and controlling. I said, "I'm going to learn." I started to make my own money, but it wasn't the life that I wanted; I would say, "We have to get ahead. That's why we're in this country." But no, he didn't want to and I started to say, "I have to do something." After seven years together, we separated. I made the decision to say, "I'm going to be a single mom, but I can do it. I'm going to give a better life to my

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daughters. I don't want them to live how I lived with my parents, to see violence between them. I don't want that for them. I want them to have a different life." So, I made that decision. It wasn't easy but I don't regret it because from then on I started to overcome more. I started to live better in all aspects, financially, socially. I started to get to know my daughters better. I struggled because I had to be dad, mom, work quite a lot - two jobs, here and there. It was a very drastic change. My daughters also struggled in the beginning because I was the one who then had to discipline them if they did something bad. I felt a distance because they would say, "If mom didn't discipline me before, then why does she discipline me now?" but we've done very well. I've tried to tell them that little by little you can achieve what you set out to.

[10:13]

WARREN: I'm going to ask a question to clear one thing up. When you came here, you wanted to get away from your partner at that time, or he came with you?

VÁZQUEZ: When I came to the United states, he was already in Denver and I met back up with him. In Mexico we did not live together. I came to live with him and at the beginning it was really nice and then later...he was a good dad but he was very aggressive when he drank so no, I didn't want that life.

[10:56]

WARREN: How was your family life in Mexico? As in, life with your parents, and your oldest daughter was a year old when she came?

VÁZQUEZ: Yes, my daughter was a year old when I brought her.

WARREN: So how was family life at home as a child?

VÁZQUEZ: My life with my family as a young woman...we lived with a lot of domestic violence but we were a family that sometimes was very united and then all of a sudden when there were problems between my parents... I could feel the distance but we would get along as a family. My dad would spend his time working. My mom would clean the house because everything had to be perfect when my dad got home. I always liked to go play soccer, play arcade games. I dressed like a guy with my hat, my braids, my Converse and I would play. It was only when I saw that my dad came back kind of drunk it was "now there's going to be some hitting here", but when it wasn't that life of violence, we would have a good time. We would watch movies, go out. There was the fear of having those fights but the few moments that we had together were very, very beautiful.

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[12:46]

WARREN: Tell us about your dad's personality. What was his personality like? Or what is it like?

VÁZQUEZ: Ah, his personality. Yes, my dad's personality is a person who is very tough, "You do what I say here," but with a lot of that Mexican craftiness, a real smooth talker. He knows what he wants. He started at the bottom. He didn't even know how to read or write; my mom taught him. He overcame a lot. He is a blacksmith, so it started to go well for him in life; he started to make money. He made us a house; we had a car. Financially, we didn't have it bad. He was the first one to have a phone in our neighborhood, so everyone wanted to go with Juan Vázquez to talk on the phone. And he was very witty. When we would say anything he would answer with a pun.

[13:53]

WARREN: What is your mom's personality like?

VÁZQUEZ: When my mom lived with my dad, her personality was very timid, very reserved, but very affectionate, very loving. She was always worried about raising us right. "Sit up straight, Lorena, eat right. Lorena, speak respectfully to people." She taught my siblings and I that good behavior is the foundation that lets you excel in any place you go. Dress well, make yourself look nice, respect your elders, tell them about yourself. She always was very affectionate with us. I was the closest to her. She can talk with me. I can tell her everything and she's content. And she tells me everything, too. We talk a lot.

[15:08]

WARREN: Can I ask you if your parents separated? I don't want to intrude where I shouldn't.

VÁZQUEZ: My parents separated.

WARREN: Okay, so what happened with your parents' marriage?

VÁZQUEZ: After my parents had separated because of all the violence my mother had suffered, my sister who was there told her, "Either we leave or he kills you." I was eleven years old at that time, and my sister was the one that said, "Let's go." It was then that we made the decision. We weren't well off financially, because we had been accustomed to a good life, but I think that it was one of the best decisions that my mom made, because if she hadn't, I don't know what would've happened.

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[16:15]

WARREN: When your parents separated, how were the children split up? Who lived with whom after the separation?

VÁZQUEZ: When my parents separated, we went with our mom. At that time, my dad didn't really worry about us but after a while it hit him and he was like, "Where is my family?" That's when he started to worry, sending food and money and asking, "How are you guys?" But we didn't want to be with him anymore, especially my mom. My mom started to work and be more independent so she said, "I can't get back with him".

[17:09]

WARREN: Talk to me about your siblings. About your sister and your brother - what are they like?

VÁZQUEZ: I was the youngest, so when I saw my sister, I would admire her. I loved how she was, how she would do her hair. She loved rock music, so then I started to like rock, too, because she liked it. I wanted to be like her. She loved to work. She would do this and that, and I would always follow her. I would say, "Sonia, take me. Sonia, take me" and sometimes she wouldn't take me, but she taught me a lot of things when we separated from our dad. She was in charge of me. She would buy me clothes, she would give me food, she was always there for me and very involved in every aspect of my life.

[18:10]

WARREN: And your brother?

VÁZQUEZ: [laughs].

WARREN: If you don't want to... no.

VÁZQUEZ: I'll say a little. My brother, he was really protective of me. We were never together because there was such a big age difference, but I remember that we would always play soccer, and we would break all the things that our mom had hanging. He was the only one that could call me Lorenza and he would say, "Lorenza," and there I would go, "Pollo, Pollo," because we would call him Pollo. And I remember he would always hug me, "Lorenza come over here, Lorenza..." or he would take my money! I would always save my money and I would tell him, "Pollo, you stole my money?" "No, I borrowed it." And I was like, "Why do you do that?"

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When I was being bad, he would always scold me. He'd give me a little kick to keep me in line, "Lorenza, be good," or if I was outside, because I was always outside, he would always come get me. "Lorenza, come in now!" "In a little bit." "No, come in right now!" And he was always like, "Now!" That was his thing.

WARREN: What are their names?

VÁZQUEZ: My sister's name is Sonia Vázquez, and my brother's, Juan Manuel Vázquez.

[19:43]

WARREN: Okay. Is your family's life completely different now? Because families here are...it's a different way of living here, right? Tell me about your family here in Kearney.

VÁZQUEZ: When I started my life here in Kearney with my daughters, it was something beautiful...I didn't cry for my brother, but for my daughters, I do. I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

WARREN: *She's laughing it out because I asked her about her brother who died young of cancer and she didn't cry, but when I asked her about her daughters, all of a sudden she was crying. So...*

VÁZQUEZ: Sorry, I'm a cry baby.

WARREN: How is life here, family life with you and your daughters?

VÁZQUEZ: When I started living with my daughters, we totally changed. We started to get along better, to get to know each other better. I started earning and managing my money better. I've always had the habit of taking them to visit some state or travel or spend time together. I really like to support them in what they want and respect their decisions. When we are together, the three of us, for example, if it snows or we have to be stuck inside, we've made it a tradition to sit on the floor and have a picnic with popcorn, ice cream, cookies and watch movies and play, spending time together. I want to teach them to always be united, that we three are the only ones here in this state. I tell them, "We three need to support each other, we need to be united," and apparently I'm doing a good job, because they have been very good girls. Sheila is a teenager and she hasn't turned out to be too bad of a girl. Naomi is more restless. With her I have to be running all around, but, if it's an important event for Sheila, for Naomi or for me, then the three of us are there supporting each other. We like to go to the movies. We like be together when we're eating. We know that, when it's time to eat, the phones are put away, because we are eating, and [speak] in Spanish, please. I don't understand much English, so we're going to speak in Spanish so that I can converse well with both of you. And sometimes if a little English

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slips out, they're like, "Sorry, ma, sorry, ma." Yes, Sheila is in the teenage phase and I like to give her freedom and trust in her. And everything has been very good.

[24:10]

WARREN: Talk to me about the different personalities of the two and their interests because the two like different things?

VÁZQUEZ: Sheila Vázquez, she's a very shy girl, very quiet, very reserved. I can't talk to her until she wants to talk. She's the type that likes sleeping, reading books, watching movies, going to the theatre, more relaxed activities. She likes to take pictures. She's now starting to open up, to be a little more social with people, taking pictures, and is learning very well. She didn't want to study after graduating but now she wants to go to college to try to learn more about photography. Naomi Cordona is a more restless girl. Since I've had her in my belly she was always very restless. She likes to run, to do sports. We see her walking here and there. Sheila and I are sitting and we ask Naomi, "What are you doing?" She responds, "Oh, I don't know, I'm just walking." And Sheila and I are like, "Be still, please. Let us sleep," and she's like, "No." She's like the dad of the house, because it's, "Mom, there's no food anymore, did you pay the bills? Mom, have you already put gas in the car? Mom, we need this in the house, Mom"... She is on top of everything that happens here and what we're going to do... And she wants to have everything planned out. "At such and such time we are going to do this, now this, and that." And Sheila and I are like, "Naomi, just relax." Both are different, but they're very nice girls. What can I say? They're my daughters.

[26:32]

WARREN: What was your first impression of the United States upon your arrival? Did the reality of what you found here meet your expectations? What were your impressions once you arrived? After seeing how life is here, was it what you thought it was going to be?

VÁZQUEZ: When I arrived to the United States, my first impression was that everything was clean and it didn't smell bad. I don't want to put Mexico down, I love Mexico so much because that's where I'm from, but the difference between here and there is noticeable. They even wash the streets; everything is very clean and you can't litter. To go everywhere in your car is a luxury. It was very, very good, that I liked. The buildings...there are so many parks and that you can go out and about without having to worry about crime or being robbed, to me, was very impressive. That is when I said, "You are in a good place, Lorena." Even more when I came to Kearney, Nebraska, it was a total change. So far, my expectations have been very good, I've accomplished a lot, a lot of dreams. Sometimes, even now, I don't even believe it.

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[28:20]

WARREN: How did people treat you at the beginning when you first got here?

VÁZQUEZ: People when I got here... For example, when I got to Denver, there were a lot of Hispanics. Since I was always with the girls' father, I couldn't talk to very many people, but when I got here, the jobs were very good. In some jobs they appreciated you. In others, yes, they are very discriminatory.

WARREN: Do you want us to talk more about that or not?

VÁZQUEZ: I froze. I didn't know what else to say.

[29:18]

WARREN: Why don't we talk about something we mentioned this morning... your training in Mexico to become a teacher. Talk about your education, your schooling in Mexico.

VÁZQUEZ: When I was in Mexico I graduated as an education assistant. I really liked to be with the little kids, from one-year-olds to three or four. I loved to work with them. I graduated and I worked for a year before coming to the United States. In a place named the DIF. It's a daycare center that helps single mothers or those with low incomes. I was there from eight in the morning until six in the afternoon, but it was a very beautiful experience. I love to have that. Being able to spend time with the kids makes me forget everything. I love to teach them and have them leave with this in their mind: "Lorena taught me this!" I really like that. When I came, I had to leave my students and the kids would be like, "Teacher, don't leave!" They would cry a lot and they broke my heart because they were my kids. Since I had the smallest kids, I was always outside. I was not that type of teacher that was like, "Sit down and write!" No. It was more, "I'm going to teach you a different way. Let's go outside. Let's go so you can figure things out differently," not to stay sitting and doing something that makes the day drag on.

[31:22]

WARREN: How is your work life here in Kearney?

VÁZQUEZ: When I got to Kearney, I started to work at a hotel and I loved working at this hotel. I worked at this hotel for eight years. I became a supervisor. For a while, the manager liked me a lot because he said that I was a very good worker. I cleaned the rooms, did laundry and supervised. It was a very, very nice experience to be there. When I left after eight years, I felt really bad leaving. But now that I have different jobs, I say, "I won't go back to the hotel." I like

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to have my weekends free. I really like cleaning. I've tried to work in restaurants and it's just not for me. It's not something I'm good at, working at a restaurant. I like to clean; I do it with love. I also worked as a dishwasher and... I also liked that, even the manager would say, "Lorena, please go and wash that, I want to leave early!" and I said, "Why do you want me to do it?" "Because you are very fast, you finish before the servers and everything and we leave early." "Okay, but are you going to give me cake?" [laughs]. "Yes, I will give you cake, but please wash!" They liked how I washed so much at Red Lobster. I have always had two jobs in order to get ahead, but I like cleaning more. It doesn't feel like work to me. I go and have fun. I had other similar jobs. At one job, yes, I experienced some racism and it was not a very nice experience. They thought I didn't understand English and they started saying things I didn't like, and that I shouldn't be speaking Spanish and a lot of rude things. I got mad and I went to the manager and I told him, "This and this is happening." The manager was really bothered by it, and he put a stop to the people that were doing this to me. I felt bad at the time, but afterwards, I said, "No, I am here to better myself and those types of comments are not going to set me back."

[35:35]

Now I work at the "Y" [YMCA] which I think is one of the best places I've worked at, because I've met a lot of people that have given me opportunities. One of them gave me the opportunity to work with kids. After fifteen years of not being able to work with kids, they gave me the opportunity to work with the kids from the "Y". It was an experience that...I would have a panic attack before going to work with the kids. After fifteen years, and now being able to work with that many kids, it was like a dream for me and I would always tell my daughters, "The day I work with kids, I will be happy." If they would tell me, "Go and work with children," I would go and drop everything and work with children. And I even told my coworker, "Pinch me. Am I seriously going to work with kids today?" and... "I'm nervous." I prepared myself quite a bit to be there because it's not easy to be around kids. To work at the "Y" takes my stress away. I'm cleaning the glass at the entrance and elderly people enter and hug me, the kids play with me... so right now I'm very satisfied with what I have.

WARREN: Life makes us happy.

WARREN: What are some of the biggest challenges that you have faced in the United States, in Nebraska?

VÁZQUEZ: One of the biggest challenges that I've been struggling with, for the last fifteen years, is learning English. And I don't understand why I can't. Sometimes I get mad at myself and I say, "Lorena, you've been here for so many years and you can't express yourself in English. What's wrong?" I have tried. I am currently taking classes in English on Wednesdays. I don't know why it's so difficult for me. I understand a little but when I want to have a longer

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conversation, I struggle. Sometimes I say, “Aren’t you going to get this? If you’ve achieved so many things, why can't you just learn English?”

[36:58]

WARREN: This might not surprise you, but that's the answer we've had the most often.

VÁZQUEZ: Yeah?

WARREN: Yes from Pilar, who is the newspaper editor's wife, to the man we talked to...pretty much everyone.

VÁZQUEZ: Ugh, English [laughs].

[37:22]

WARREN: I'm going to ask you the question I always ask. If you had to give any advice to someone who wanted to come from another country to start over here, what advice would you give?

VÁZQUEZ: My advice is: firstly, don't come. Don't leave your family. Stay in your country, don't leave your family, and, if you come, come with all your family, because if you come here without a family, it'll be hard for you to leave. It's very hard. I did it. I said, “I'll bring my daughter,” and here I am. If someone wants to come, bring your family. If not, then it's better you stay over there. For me, family is the motivation that inspires you to keep going. There are times where there aren't resources to bring your family, but everything can be done and if your decision is to come and be here, do it. Come work, fulfill your dreams and go back to be with your family, if they are in Mexico. Don't stay here, go to your family. And if you bring your family here, it's a beautiful life if you know how to live it well. It's very beautiful because you can do really well for yourself. You can give your children, if you have them, an opportunity to be very successful. It's very, very beautiful.

[39:16]

WARREN: If you had to think about what you miss most about Mexico, of your life over there, about the culture, about the families, what is the thing you miss the most?

VÁZQUEZ: What I miss the most about Mexico is being with the people there. Being with family, with friends, or going out to the street and finding neighbors and, “What's up, how are you?” “Oh, just fine,” and you start talking with the neighbor. It's something very, very beautiful

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that I miss. I've always been very sociable, so when I used to go out in the neighborhood, everyone would say, "Chinita, how are you?" Being with family, living together and all that, is what I miss.

[40:23]

WARREN: Do you have a funny story or, any anecdotes? Sometimes people have that, "This happened to me, and it was so funny that I have to share it," along with the experiences of coming to live...

VÁZQUEZ: Of living here or in Mexico?

WARREN: Of coming here. Last week a man told us about the first time that the police stopped him. A traffic cop. And he said yes to everything because he didn't understand anything, something like that, I don't know if you have a story.

VÁZQUEZ: Yes, I do have a story. I don't remember how long ago, but about six years ago, I had a very funny experience because my sister sent my niece to Chicago, so I had to go pick her up in Chicago. I got up the courage to drive all the way there. I like to drive. It was night and I couldn't find the driveway to get to the house, so I drove onto someone's farm or something and a man came out with some dogs and a rifle saying, "What are you doing on my property?!" At that time I didn't know any English, none. None. "What are you doing on my property?!" and I was like, "I'm sorry, I can't find this street." "You have to get off my property." My daughters were screaming and I was like, "Shut up, shut up!" I don't know how I understood the English, and I then asked one of my daughters, I don't remember which one, "Tell him, please...I didn't want to trespass, I just want to find this address." The man, with the rifle in his hand, and the dogs barking.... and I was with the crying girls. And then I told him, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," and I left. That same night, trying to find a hotel, I went down the wrong street. There was a ditch where I went up and down with the car and the girls were like, "Mom!". So, it was an experience for the three of us, with a lot of scares, but afterwards we were laughing about what had happened. Later my daughters said, "Mom, you always drive where you shouldn't! You should have a truck with wheels, like, this big!" they said, "because you're a crazy driver." And we always remember that.

[43:10]

WARREN: I don't know if you'd like to share something more with us about your life, about your family, something that I have not asked that you really want to share?

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VÁZQUEZ: One of my biggest dreams that came true, and that a lot of people probably wish to do but haven't had the opportunity to, is being able to get my residency and fix my daughter's immigration status. It was something that I couldn't believe was happening until they gave me my ID. It was thanks to the Safe Center [provide free and confidential services for individuals and families affected by domestic and sexual abuse] that I was able to get my residency with my daughter. It really changes your life here by simply just showing your ID where it says, "Resident", but I understand, sadly, a lot of people don't have it. I'm not that type of person that likes to be showing it off and saying, "I'm a resident", or anything like that. For me, that's what's called "the American dream," something that a lot of people can't get, and I have that privilege. I was able to go see my family two times in a row. After thirteen years of not seeing them, the fact that I was able to go back and see them was a dream that I will never forget because I carry it with me. It has helped me go on, and it has helped my daughters have a better life as well.

Also, I'm a single mother. I've already mentioned that. There have been many people who have helped me. I don't want to say names because I'll forget one but many people have helped me and... This makes me feel very good, that if my car breaks down and people come help me, I feel very, very good to be able to say, "they'll come and help me", and maybe it's because I'm doing something good for my friends, because alone, I don't think that I would've made it. I am Catholic so I've always asked God and the Virgin for a lot. In this country I've learned a lot about religions; I would've liked my parents to teach me a little more about religion and now I try to teach my daughters this. My life has changed a little because I was very rebellious. I liked to go out a lot to dance, to drink. I felt free - that's being single, right? And when I went to confession with a priest, with the absolution from the priest, he helped me a lot. It was then when I settled down some. I'm really thankful to God that I am here.

[47:08]

WARREN: Tell me about what you did with the kids when it was your turn or the days you had to go sing or work with the kids at the Y.

VÁZQUEZ: When I had to go work with the kids at the Y, I rehearsed to start the songs because you have to know them well. Kids are like sponges; they absorb everything and it sticks in their heads. The theme was cowboy. So, I put on my boots, my hat and I took my guns because I sang to them first and I danced to the "Cowboy Mouse". They were all sitting there and I was nervous but, when the first song started, I started to dance and sing and I would have them clap. Then, in one of the songs, I made them get up and I made them do what I was doing, like, up, down, and the famous song "Chu Chu Wa" that they loved. Now when I see them coming in, the kids greet me. They enjoy being with me. It was a really beautiful experience to be there singing to them and dancing for them. If they tell me, "Come and do more," I'm there!

[49:17]

[49:55]

WARREN: How did you prepare for the trip to come to the United States?

VÁZQUEZ: Psychologically or...?

WARREN: Practically, psychologically, everything.

VÁZQUEZ: [laughs] When I decided to come to the United States, I prepared myself by saying, “I’m going to cross. I’m going to be over there.” Psychologically, I was afraid, because I would say, “I’m going to take my daughter,” and if something happened to us, or to me, or to her, it was that fear, but I’m one of those that have always said, “It can happen! We’re going, because we can do it.” If you have that faith, or that thing that motivates you, it will go well for you. You’ll have to fight because you always have to fight. But, preparing myself for something very, very painful...I was going to leave my mom. Only Sheila and I lived with her. She and my brother already lived with his wife, and my sister with her husband, so it was just the three of us. Leaving her hurt me very badly. And when I went down and said to my dad, “Dad, I’m leaving,” he’s not a crier, but at that moment, he started to cry. My brother stopped talking to me for a long time, because he didn’t want me to leave [Mexico]. This was, I think, the worst part of getting ready to leave. It hurt me a lot because I left everything and came. Preparing Sheila, also, to support her because my mother took care of her, then she wasn’t there. She [Sheila] was almost never with me, and when we came, I struggled because Sheila would cry. Sheila wanted my mom. It was a trip where every moment I had to be prepared. If we were on the plane, “Get ready to take care of Sheila.” If we were to cross, “Prepare for Sheila and prepare yourself.” “Take your backpack and let’s get to the hotel. Leave everything; you can’t take anything. Leave your clothes and your things.” You don’t know what awaits you here, and when you’re here there’s more beautiful clothes, but at that moment it hurts to leave everything.

[52:54]

[53:33]

WARREN: Tell us about how you got the chili.

VÁZQUEZ: My dad sent it to me because he said, “Lorena, you can’t forget what Mexico is about, the Mexican sense of humor, the chili.”

Coming to the Plains

[53:59]

VÁZQUEZ: It's my diploma from middle school, and this is for educational assistant. It has an iron stain on it because I was ironing and the papers were under the clothes. I was ironing with my mom, and I didn't realize this, so, I was ironing and it started to smell like something was burning, and my mom says to me, "What smells?" and I go, "I don't know." And when we heard the little, "shhhh" sound, it was my papers that were burning and have the stain. This is the picture of the first time I went to Mexico after thirteen years. We are at the Basilica of Guadalupe. This is my sister and my mom. They were very nice times, in Mexico City. They instill that tradition in you to go to the "villita" [the Basilica] when you want to ask for something or give thanks for something. We always go to the villita - it's the most important and fundamental thing. Ah, I have others here. I was always an active kid. Now I understand why Naomi is like that, too. I always liked to participate in all the school events. I was the type that would be like, "Are there dances, who wants to dance? Me! Me! [laughs]." And ever since I was little, it was always like that. I like to dance, I like music, I love to be happy. Here is one with my dad, my siblings and, with my dad and my mom.

[56:05]

[1:03:18]