

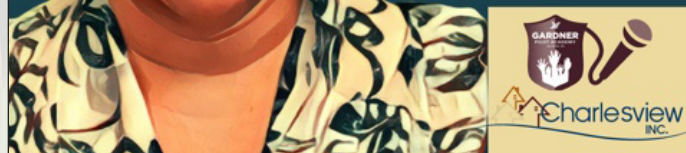


# TRANSCRIPTS



## IMMIGRANT VOICES

Our journeys.  
Our struggles.  
Our successes.  
Our stories.



VOLUME TWO: EPISODES 4-6 • FALL 2020

## IMMIGRANT VOICES



Episode 4  
**HERMELINDA**  
from Peru



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES

## IMMIGRANT VOICES



Episode 5  
**CONNIE**  
from  
**COLOMBIA**



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES

## IMMIGRANT VOICES



Episode 6  
**VALTECIR**  
from Brazil



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES



**EPISODE #4 — HERMELINDA  
FROM PERU**

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**EPISODE #5 — CONNIE  
FROM COLOMBIA**

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**EPISODE #6 — VALTECIR  
ENTREPRENEUR FROM BRAZIL**

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**THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS**

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## EPISODE #4— HERMELINDA FROM PERU

### GUEST INTRO/00:37

While Hermelinda pursued a degree in early childhood education from the University in Peru in the mid-80s, she interrupted her studies to come to Boston to help her ailing sister. Her advanced education in her native country did not translate to a career in her field because she knew no English. Instead, her first job plunged her into the world of donuts, muffins, and coffee at Dunkin Donuts where she learned to serve her customers with a smile while increasing her language skills. After going back and forth from Boston to Peru to complete her university education, Hermelinda chose permanent residency in the U.S. With the help of classes at the Gardner her language skills grew along with her confidence and career goals. She now has a demanding job as a caseworker for the state of Massachusetts. In addition, Hermelinda, who has not forgotten her early struggles with English, volunteers at the Gardner Adult Education ESOL program where she inspires immigrant students to learn English, to stand up for their rights, and to embrace their American life while preserving their cultural roots.

### GETTING TO U.S./02:04

**DEBORAH:**

Welcome, Hermelinda.

**HERMELINDA:**

Thank you.

**DEBORAH:**

So tell me a little bit about where you came from, what you left behind the people, family.

**HERMELINDA:**

I was born in Peru in a town 35 minutes from Lima called Chacacayo. The town at the time was only 20,000 people and the weather was beautiful. Always the sun is there. Always we have a shiny day. Even sometimes in winter in the morning is cloudy and foggy but by noon the sun is gonna be bright. Like I said, all year around, it's like springtime.

**DEBORAH:**

What made you decide to come to the States?

**HERMELINDA:**

My sister. I have a sister who married somebody from Boston, and she got sick. And she invited me to come because she didn't have any of us with her. So she made the petition for me to come to the United States. That's why I came.

**DEBORAH:**

What were the shocks that you encountered when you got here? Was, what season was it when you went there?

**HERMELINDA:**

It was winter! I came from summer. It was summer in Lima and summer in my town that of course we don't have a drastic winter and I came here the first week in December, I remember December 8. And it was cold, and that was the first...

**DEBORAH:**

Did you have a coat?

**HERMELINDA:**

Oh yes. I had a coat. My sister had a coat for me. It doesn't matter how many layers of sweaters I was wearing, I was still cold. And every time it was to go out, it was ooooh.

**DEBORAH:**

Tell me about the language part.

**HERMELINDA:**

And that was another thing, I didn't speak English.

**DEBORAH:**

Your English is terrific.

### FINDING WORK/03:58

**HERMELINDA:**

I was limited. Go to my sister, a few different places and after a month I was here, I said to my sister, I want to work. And that's when I started working in Dunkin Donuts. I remember my sister spoke with the owner who was a Greek guy and he said, "If your sister is patient and nice with the customers she's gonna be OK." My first day at Dunkin Donuts was the manager gave me all these instructions about how the company works, showed me a video, and then he gave me a tour to the store and from his body language I knew what he was talking about when he showed me the donuts, the muffins, the coffee. I knew what he was talking about but I didn't know exactly what he was saying. So at the end of the tour, he said, "Do you understand?" and I said, "No." I didn't understand so we started laughing. I started there and the first two weeks it was hard because I had to learn the names for the pastries and the type of coffee and recognize when the customer came and what he wants because some of them had been coming there for years. And the only thing he has to do is sit down and people who are serving whatever they usually get. Two, three weeks, it was hard.

**DEBORAH:**

Did anything funny happen with the language, like in terms of misunderstanding?

**HERMELINDA:**

Oh yes.

**DEBORAH:**

Can you remember any particular?

**HERMELINDA:**

I remember it was difficult for me to say "schedule." I said "choodle." I couldn't say "schedule" for years. I would ask, "What are my hours?"

**DEBORAH:**

That's wild. Did you take classes in English?

**HERMELINDA:**

I did off and on. I stayed here six months and then I went back to Peru. I stayed in



Peru for one year and came back again.

## RESIDENCE VISA/06:18

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**DEBORAH:**

What made you come back?

**HERMELINDA:**

I had my resident visa and I didn't want to lose it. I had finished school in Peru. I was finished at the university. A few courses I couldn't finish when I came and that was I was back and forth for three or four years.

**DEBORAH:**

What were you studying at the university?

**HERMELINDA:**

To be a teacher. Elementary school. So that was why I was going back and forth. I missed my family, my mother was there, my sister, my nephews. Everybody was there. My friends. That was the reason why I was back and forth, back and forth until finally the economic situation was getting tough in Peru. The inflation. Terrorism was getting worse. So I decided to stay here. And because too one of the times I came through immigration, they said, "If you don't want to lose your resident visa, you have to spend more time here than in Peru." So that was one of the things. And you're getting older. My sister was always saying, "You're getting older and you have to get something stable. You will never get a stable job or a good paying job if you are back and forth." With Dunkin Donuts, I was able to do that. But my sister said, "you've got to get a better job."

**DEBORAH:**

Did you feel frustrated doing Dunkin Donuts job after you'd been in the university to become a professional teacher?

**HERMELINDA:**

No. Not really. Because my mother prepared us to do anything. And here nobody knew me. Maybe if I were in Peru because people see you in a different way if you're working cleaning tables or sweeping the floor, you are less than whoever is not doing that. But here, no. I said, nobody knows me and it's a job and I was happy because I was because I was learning English. And started getting familiar with the customers and they came. They know you. You start knowing what they want and without asking them and it was different.

## FACING PREJUDICE/08:44

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**DEBORAH:**

What was the most challenging thing other than the weather and the language? Cause you were mastering the language enough. You began to just . . . Was there some event or something that was really tough for you in addition about being an immigrant? Did you ever encounter any prejudice?

**HERMELINDA:**

Oh yeah. [Even] until now. You go to the store and they don't pay attention to you. They don't ask you what you want. Other people come who are from here and they run and say, "What do you want? How can I help you?" But it doesn't affect me because you know I just take I just laugh inside. They don't ask me because I'm not from here. One day that happened a few years ago. I was in one store and was looking for clothes. No one came and told me what do I want. Nothing. I said, well. My husband came. My husband is American. As soon as he came they ran to see what he needs. He was looking. He said, "No my wife is here." I said OK. So I was laughing and I said they didn't ask me anything. And another time I was in the store and I bought something and I was requesting to get a box for that because the store provides boxes for that. And the guy gave me a box that was half the size for the thing I was buying. He told me they didn't have a box when they did have a box. And I was so upset I talked to the manager.

**DEBORAH:**

How did you handle it?

**HERMELINDA:**

I talked to the manager.

**DEBORAH:**

What did you say?

**HERMELINDA:**

I said, "I always come to this store to buy things. You should educate your people to treat everybody with respect. I bought this. I came here because in the other store they told me that you have this type of plate here. And I asked him to give me a box and he gave me half a box. What does he think, I'm stupid or what?" And I said, "You should educate your people to treat everybody the same." And there are some people who are no good to deal with people. Maybe that's these people. How is somebody have half the size of the box that the object you buy.

He apologized, things like that. But still you see that. Little things that.

**DEBORAH:**

How does your husband feel about, has he been with you and you've encountered that other than in the dress store?

**HERMELINDA:**

No, that time when I have these, I was very upset and I came and he called the manager and he spoke to the manager. He told him. Of course, the manager apologized. And he said you shouldn't have people like that. If they don't want to deal with people, don't. So a few things that think once I was flying to Peru. And I called the airlines and I asked how many suitcases? My daughter was small. "Is my daughter able to have a suitcase?" I asked. And they said yes. And when I went to the airport they said, "Oh no, you have to pay for the suitcase." And I said, "No! Because I called and they told me that she doesn't have to pay for the suitcase." "No, no, no. You have to pay!" they said, and I answered, "I'm gonna call customer service right now because someone from customer service told me that I can come. And I called in English and I called in Spanish. So, two people cannot be wrong."

**DEBORAH:**

So what did they do?

**HERMELINDA:**

They called. And then they let me go. They let me go, yeah, you find some people.

## SUCCESSSES/12:56

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**DEBORAH:**

What are the biggest successes you've experienced here? Personal, professional, whatever, any kind of success that you've experienced, that you feel proud of?

**HERMELINDA:**

Personal thing? How I raised my child. My daughter. And my job. I'm happy with what I'm doing. I'm proud of what I'm doing. I'm trying to be honest with my job.

**DEBORAH:**

What kind of work do you do?

**HERMELINDA:**

I work for the Department of Revenue, Child Support/Enforcement Division. And I am very. I love it. I love the job and I am

proud for what I do. I try to do my best in every case that I touch.

## ESOL AT THE GARDNER/13:38

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**DEBORAH:**

And you've been connected to the Gardner for how long, how many years what's been your journey at the Gardner?

**HERMELINDA:**

My daughter, I was coming here for classes here in 2004 or 2005. Michelle was my teacher and I loved the classes. Michelle and Amy. They were wonderful teachers.

**DEBORAH:**

Ah! Amy Pechukas!

**HERMELINDA:**

They were wonderful teachers. And I felt comfortable and it was a place that was close to my house, so I enjoyed coming to the classes. But then, I stopped coming because my daughter went to school, and I had so many duties at home. And then I came back when my daughter started school here. She started the third grade and I moved her to this school. That's when I met Michelle again, but then I started my classes again when Lucero was here. I don't remember. But then years after that, I connected with Michelle again. I saw that they needed some volunteers. And I said, I would like to do something to volunteer. Because sometimes you waste time and I said 2 hours or 3 hours a week is not much, and I can help somebody that came to this country and doesn't know English and maybe I can understand better because I had passed through that process too. So that's when I started coming to the Gardner back again.

## FUTURE & HOBBIES/15:28

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**DEBORAH:**

Great. How about the future? Do you have dreams about the future or dreams, some goal that you would like to achieve?

**HERMELINDA:**

I like just want to enjoy my family, my daughter, my husband. I would like to be healthy. It's possible.

**DEBORAH:**

You like you're beaming with good health to me.

**HERMELINDA:**

And, maybe to volunteer more. More two

days. Not from, for my job. I walked around in one day, but maybe to volunteer, to be a volunteer for more days, increase my hours here.

**DEBORAH:**

Do you have any hobbies?

**HERMELINDA:**

Oh yeah.

**DEBORAH:**

Oh tell me.

**HERMELINDA:**

I like to embroidery. I like to knit. I like to do puzzles. I like to play volleyball.

**DEBORAH:**

Really? Are you on a team or something?

**HERMELINDA:**

No, I'm not. I'm not, but when it's summer, I usually play with my nephews, my daughter. I like to play volleyball. I like to knit; I always knit all the time.

## GIVING ADVICE/16:35

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**DEBORAH:**

If you were going to give advice to other immigrants coming to this country, what would you say to them? What's like the most important thing that, advice that maybe no one gave to you, but that you having gone through it that you could give to them?

**HERMELINDA:**

I will say, "Learn the language! It is very important. Try to prevent any problems, any kind of situations that you can be involved in. Be honest with what you do. If people you feel don't treat you Ok, I would tell them. The problem is not with you, it's with them. You try to do your best. Be respectful with everybody. When people see that you are like that, people respect you. When you start a job and you respect everybody, basically. Learn the language and don't feel that you are less than anybody."

**DEBORAH:**

That's good advice. Did you always stand up for yourself the way you did in that store? About the box and . . .

**HERMELINDA:**

In Peru I didn't have that problem, you know but here, yeah.

**DEBORAH:**

Were you surprised that you were able to stand up for yourself?

**HERMELINDA:**

I think age makes you stronger and not to be afraid of anything. Probably, thirty years ago I would have been afraid to say something but at the same time I think I came.... my mother was very strong. She said when you are right, you're right. You don't have to tell people why you feel that you are right. Sometimes and it's true because I didn't have to suffer like other people suffer like they don't have legal status. They are afraid and they have to take everything because they are afraid that they can do something today like call immigration, call the police, and get in trouble. And education, too.

## CITIZENSHIP/18:51

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**DEBORAH:**

When did you become a citizen? You're a naturalized citizen, right?

**HERMELINDA:**

Yeah.

**DEBORAH:**

When did that happen? Was that hard?

**HERMELINDA:**

No, it wasn't hard. I was lucky because when I went to have the tests, the lady who interviewed me was, was nice, was very nice. She asked me questions on, I studied the basic question that they do and for the naturalization. Yeah. No, it was not hard. Nervous, of course, probably I didn't sleep. They were the days before the day of the interview. Yeah.

## MEMENTO FROM PERU/19:30

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**DEBORAH:**

Thank you so much for sharing your story. Is there anything else that you would like to add? Some quirky thing. Did you bring something for example, from Peru that you always keep with you? Tell me about that.

**HERMELINDA:**

Pictures. And the one special thing that I brought is my baby doll. That when I was, I had my doll for years. Yes. Really when my, aunt gave me the doll when I was like five years old.

**DEBORAH:**

Describe it to me. Tell me, tell me what is it like big doll. Yeah.

**HERMELINDA:**

This size. Yeah. Yeah. I dunno. It's a boy or girl, but sometimes I put the clothes, pants have some flexible dress. I don't know, but I love that doll. I love that doll.

**DEBORAH:**

Where do you keep it in your house?

**HERMELINDA:**

I have an extra room. So I keep it in the bed there and I used to, I, every time I used to go to Peru, he was back and forth with me back and forth.

**DEBORAH:**

You put him in your suitcase.

**HERMELINDA:**

Yeah. I carry it with me. Yeah.

**DEBORAH:**

Wow. A little piece of Peru.

**HERMELINDA:**

Yeah. Thank you so much.

**DEBORAH:**

Really. I've really enjoyed this conversation. Thank you. Thank you. Yeah.

## PANDEMIC DAYS/20:43

My conversation with Hermelinda took place just before the pandemic hit. When I spoke with her by telephone a couple of weeks later to get her perspective of living through this global crisis, I learned that her husband had suffered a medical emergency right in the middle of it all. Here's our conversation.

**HERMELINDA:**

Well, I never thought in my life that I passed through earthquakes and things like that but never this coronavirus is something that practically paralyzes the whole world. And it's scary because it's there and you don't know from one moment to what situation you can get the virus. What can I say? I think it's very scary and I still feel that there are some people who don't see how dangerous it can be. And I think that something that has to shut down the whole world to fight this virus.

**DEBORAH:**

At the same time. Everywhere.

**HERMELINDA:**

At the same time, everybody has to shut down because we are taking precautions here but in other states they don't. People are in and out from the states carrying the virus. Back and forth.

**DEBORAH:**

What did they say in the hospital when your husband was there? What happened?

**HERMELINDA:**

I was able to go to him to the emergency, but as soon as we arrived, they told me I couldn't be there because of the coronavirus. They don't allow anybody in the hospitals only the person who needs, who needs the help, no assistance they needed. Yeah. And they told me just go home and we are going to call you.

**DEBORAH:**

But he was having a heart attack!

**HERMELINDA:**

Yeah. But they don't want anybody to be there. Not even the waiting room was empty. They don't want nobody only, they don't want nobody. That is not for health issues.

**DEBORAH:**

So what happened? Where did you go?

**HERMELINDA:**

You'll have to go home. So you'll have to go to, you have to go home because they say we are going to call you.

**DEBORAH:**

And so what happened?

**HERMELINDA:**

We got there and they tell us you have to go home, but in the meantime, I have to give information about, health insurance, age, all personal information. And they told me, we were doing that somebody, another nurse said, "Don't go. Stay here for a few minutes cause I want to talk to you." So we wait ten, fifteen minutes, they came and told me, "Your husband had a heart attack. So they are sending upstairs that they have to put a stint. And it seems like that other two arteries are blocked."

**DEBORAH:**

So they didn't send him home then, obviously.

**HERMELINDA:**

No. They took immediately. They have, they immediately, they went to the operation room or whatever they in and they said, you go home and we are going to call you in a couple of hours to give you how the procedure was. So that's why we come home and then they call us and they told us, he had one artery that was blocked. So they have to put this stint and they're going to check with the doctor because the other artery seemed partially blocked.

**DEBORAH:**

This is all in the middle, all in the middle of this coronavirus thing going on.

**HERMELINDA:**

Yes. And my husband had pneumonia two months ago. So I, we were more concerned about the coronavirus, but when he has the pain in the chest, so suddenly, I felt it was not coronavirus, because I don't think that the signs of coronavirus. So my husband, they did the first stint. They put it on Friday and then on Monday they put the other two in the other arteries.

**DEBORAH:**

Wow. And so was he in the hospital the whole time?

**HERMELINDA:**

Yep. And he came home the next day. Tuesday, they came home, because of that, they have to be more careful. Now don't go out to them.

**DEBORAH:**

What do you do for groceries?

**HERMELINDA:**

My daughter drops the groceries here because we have to protect Michael from and protect me too from contact with any people who have the virus. I am very anxious. I have a lot of anxiety. A lot of concerns. I think we just have to wait.

**DEBORAH:**

Have you had any kind of strange dreams?

**HERMELINDA:**

Not really.

**DEBORAH:**



Because I've had a couple of nightmares.

**HERMELINDA:**

I had a dream when I lived in Peru. My house was close to a river. The river increases at this time in the Andes, and I dream that the river was full with a very dirty water. In Peru, there is this thing, if you dream something with dirty water, it means somebody is going to get sick. But this is. I try not to believe too much in those things but they stick in your head because you grow up with those ideas. If you dream that dirty water is that somebody is gonna get sick, if you dream this, it is because all those ideas that they have about dreams. But here dreams mean different things that it means over there. Yeah, probably but I didn't pay much attention.

**DEBORAH:**

You were saying that this coronavirus situation compared to some of the things that you went through in Peru or just all the years I've been, how does this compare?

**HERMELINDA:**

I passed through earthquakes. Earthquakes are one fifty seconds or one minute and destroys things but it's in one part of the world but this is everybody. There is nobody here that can say, "No. We won't be having the virus." It's everybody.

**DEBORAH:**

I know. And we don't know what the end is. We don't know how long.

**HERMELINDA:**

We won't be in peace until they don't find a vaccination.

**DEBORAH:**

Oh, you think so?

**HERMELINDA:**

Yeah. I think so. They said, then you say that probably in, it can be a year, that this is going to come back in the fall.

**DEBORAH:**

That's right.

**HERMELINDA:**

So until I think until we don't find the vaccination, it will be around.

**DEBORAH:**

So what are you doing to stay calm? If you can.

**HERMELINDA:**

In the house, I have to do cleaning, cooking. I embroidering, reading or watching a movie. Today I decided that I won't watch television anymore because everything is about coronavirus.

**DEBORAH:**

That's too much.

**HERMELINDA:**

Increase in anxiety because you see that. The cases increase by the minute, the dead people increase by hours. So I just don't, I don't want to, I don't want them, I don't want to watch anymore TV right on the one that I don't want to know, I know I have to, I do embroidery and knitting.

**DEBORAH:**

You were going to send me, you were going to send me a picture of your dog. What was his name?

**HERMELINDA:**

My doll. My doll. My doll. Yeah.

**DEBORAH:**

*She did send me the picture of the doll. You can see it on the cover graphics for Hermelinda's episode. After learning about her doll, the conversation quickly returned to her concern about her husband's vulnerability during this time of Covid.*

**HERMELINDA:**

You know what? I'm very, I don't know. I'm very worried about my husband.

**DEBORAH:**

I don't blame you.

**HERMELINDA:**

Yeah.

**DEBORAH:**

His condition is compromised.

**HERMELINDA:**

Yeah. He feels good, but I don't know. I see him a little bit weak. He's still recovering. I'm afraid of the coronavirus. I think life won't be the same.

**DEBORAH:**

I think you're right in terms of the life isn't going to be the same.

**HERMELINDA:**

Socially, anything. It won't be the same. Like I said, we don't, it should be a com-

plete shut down the whole world. So that virus will, we can fight against the virus, but if it's still people that are gonna, now it's in Peru and South America. When we get better here, people from there, they can come here or they can come from Europe, and they think it will continue. So we live in a very insecure times and I'm worried about people that are losing the jobs, people that they don't, they're losing their jobs. It's a lot, it's a lot of things.

**DEBORAH:**

I know, it's touching everybody. My son is a professional musician and he goes on tour all over the world and they had to cancel, they had to cancel the tour.

**HERMELINDA:**

What kind of things does he do?

**DEBORAH:**

He's in a band, a classic rock band called Foreigner. Yeah, Foreigner's the name of the band. You probably would recognize some of the music, but, so he's in Los Angeles right now. And my other son is a dialect coach. He's doing some work through the internet, but he's doing mostly the childcare while his wife is working from home, but every everybody's affected.

**HERMELINDA:**

Everybody is affected. And I admire those nurses doctors, and the people who clean the hospital, cleaning people; it's just, I think all of them, they should get a prize Nobel.

**DEBORAH:**

A Nobel prize for the whole, yeah, the whole category. I'm just thinking about your husband and I'm thinking to help his immune system, you should watch very funny movies.

**HERMELINDA:**

Yeah.

**DEBORAH:**

Laughter is supposed to, or funny books or something, because it really makes the immune system stronger.

**HERMELINDA:**

Yeah. yeah, no, he likes to read, he has a library here.

**DEBORAH:**

I know. I just finished reading Jane Eyre for

the first time. I had never read it before and it was, I just got lost in it. It was wonderful escape from all of this stuff. Anyway, thank you so much for talking to me and sharing.

**HERMELINDA:**

Thank you.

## **FINAL WRAP UP/31:43**

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I hope Hermelinda's story, shared so clearly in her fluent English, inspires other immigrants who may feel overwhelmed at the prospect of adjusting to a new way of life in a new country. The confidence she has gained over the years to stand up for herself, the contributions she has made to her community, and her professional accomplishments along with her strong family life, tell the story of someone who has never given up, and never lost a chance to help her fellow immigrants.

Thank you for staying with us right to the end of this episode. The Immigrant Voices Podcast Project is the brain child of Michelle Duvall the Program Director at the Adult Education Program at the Gardner Pilot Academy in Allston, Massachusetts. You can learn more about English for Speakers of Other Languages courses at our website, [www.gpaesol.com](http://www.gpaesol.com) or by emailing Michelle Duval directly at [m.duval@live.com](mailto:m.duval@live.com).

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And last but not least, a big thank you to all the guests who are participating in this series of interviews. And to all our listeners, we say, "Thank you. Do come back for the next episode."



# IMMIGRANT VOICES



## EPISODE #5/ CONSUELO (CONNIE) FROM COLOMBIA

**DEBORAH:**

Really?

**CONNIE:**

When I find out, I was, you know, I didn't have anything. All my property was under another name. When I started to investigate that myself, I find out some people are receiving the money to allow the papers, and the person who did it changed my policies so I was really dangerous. I was absolutely. Because I'm still investigating. And I tell them, "I need my properties back or otherwise I gonna, you know, sue you to demand it." And they say, "No. You don't do anything if you want to live. If you want to live, you better be quiet."

**DEBORAH:**

Wow!

**CONNIE:**

Then they start to send me papers to follow me wherever I was. Was a terrible, terrible experience. So, my family and I we decided that the better thing to do because we were afraid that I would be killed. They used to do that. Is the way Colombia some things function. The power.

**DEBORAH:**

Were you married and had children at that time?

**CONNIE:**

No, no, no. I'm a single person.

**DEBORAH:**

Okay. When you decided to leave Colombia, how did you leave? What did you do?

**CONNIE:**

First of all, I went to another city and I just met somebody that said. You know what, I asked him. We were talking like those things that happen in your life that you don't expect; that you are waiting for. I didn't know how. So, one day I was with somebody and I said, "You know, I want to go to the United States." And the other person said, "I know how you can do it with no problem, blah, blah, blah." And I said, "Really?" He said, "Ya, and he showed me his passport with all the times he comes in and out without a visa and anything and I say, "Wow. Ok." So we make a deal. "Let's go! I will go with

you." He said, "Let's go. I'll go next month." I said, "OK." I didn't really know that guy. But I thought I knew I wanted to go out of Colombia.

**DEBORAH:**

So did it work out? Was he trustworthy?

**CONNIE:**

No. I paid him some money. We flew from Colombia to Panama. After that, we went to the Bahamas.

**DEBORAH:**

Did you say that after Panama you went to the Bahamas?

**CONNIE:**

Ya. But he said, "We going to do this only you and me." And I said this is great and he said, "Only you and me." But wasn't true. He lied to me. When we arrived to Panama, actually, there were three more guys with him and I started to feel "Oh, oh!" But nothing to do. So we went to the Bahamas. In the Bahamas I gave him some more money and that was the last time that I saw him.

**DEBORAH:**

Oh my God. And you were stuck at the Bahamas?

**CONNIE:**

Yeah.

**DEBORAH:**

So you were stuck in Bahamas. What did you do?

**CONNIE:**

In the Bahamas, remember that he has three more guys with me. We start to make a relationship with them. They were from Colombia too. The last thing he said, "You know what? You gonna take this car with some guys and they gonna take you to this home and you'll be safe there and you gonna wait there until the time is proper to go to the United States." We say, "OK." I was in his hands. What can I do?

**DEBORAH:**

Right.

**CONNIE:**

Anything he say, I have to say "Yes." Because

### GUEST INTRO/00:037

In 2013, Connie knew her life in Colombia was in danger. In her eagerness to escape, she gave thousands of dollars to someone who had promised to safely escort her to the U.S. Instead, he brought her to Panama, then on to the Bahamas where he left her and three more Colombians, dumping them into a car headed for a remote hideout. For weeks, she shared one room with 12 other travelers, all men. One night they were put, without life jackets, into a four-person boat destined for Miami. A thunder storm raged and the boat leaked. With only their prayers for comfort, they were finally rescued by the Coast Guard. Today Connie exudes optimism. Her philosophy of hard work, always seeing the good, and counting her blessings has brought her a life of great satisfaction. She loves the United States and feels that her challenging experiences have made her stronger.

**DEBORAH:**

I recorded today's guest, Connie, via telephone so the audio leaves a bit to be desired. Let's begin, Connie, by hearing what led to your coming to the United States in 2013.

### GETTING TO THE U.S./02:04

**CONNIE:**

Deb, the reason I decided to come here was because I felt unsafe in my country.

**DEBORAH:**

Okay.

**CONNIE:**

I was unsafe because I realized some of my government people received money from somebody to steal my signature. And take all my property.

I was alone and I said, "Ok. Let's go." So we went there. We went to some house, one house, and, Deb, they put us in the house in one room. We were like 12 people inside that room. Only one bedroom. The only lady, the only woman was me.

**DEBORAH:**

Oh. Did anybody attack you or abuse you?

**CONNIE:**

No. I attacked them first.

**DEBORAH:**

How did you attack them first?

**CONNIE:**

That is the way that I tell them, "You know what, I'm not afraid of you!" So I tell them, "Don't worry. We have only one bed. And I am young and I am strong so don't worry about it. So we can handle it." So they started to laugh and make a good relationship with me. And I tell them, "I know that I'm the only woman here, but I'm not afraid of you. I know you guys are nice guys. You don't want to trouble with me, believe me."

**DEBORAH:**

Good for you. Good for you.

**CONNIE:**

Oh yeah. So, I tell them, "I'm not dangerous." During the night. The first night I ask, them, "Who of you want to live with me because there's only one bed and I'm going to sleep on the floor?" The bed was big. Maybe two on the head side, two on the feet side. And they say, "No, that's OK." I said, "No. Ok. This is the situation, this is what happening now to us. We have to do the best we can. Don't worry about me. I'm not dangerous. I'm not going to do anything with you, believe me. I'm going to respect you during this time." So that way for me was the best way to tell them, it's better to keep a distance from me. And made a relationship with them. All the men became my friends. And they took care of me because they knew what happened to me and that guy. No food.

**DEBORAH:**

How much money did you have to give that guy who left you?

**CONNIE:**

Oh my God, Deb. There, by that time, we are talking about like eight years ago where

I said thousands of dollars. Thousands of dollars.

**DEBORAH:**

How long were you in that room, in that house before you got to the United States?

**CONNIE:**

Like a couple of weeks. They don't allow us to get out from that room. All the time locked in that room. All of us. One bedroom and one bathroom for all of us. No food. One person once a day goes to the room and brings some little thing. Nothing. We was really [hungry]. Some of those guys they are more they seemed more hungry than me, maybe. And they was getting crazy some of them. I said, "I need to eat." If they don't bring. Once we realized we were alone in the house, I tell them, "Take care of my back and let me know if somebody's coming and I go into the kitchen and I find something you like." So that's what we did. I stole things from the kitchen and I bring to them. Little things. Ya, the house was empty. Nobody was there. Only one lady that take care of the house.

**DEBORAH:**

So you were there two weeks? Then what happened?

**CONNIE:**

So one night we was there. Somebody interrupted us and said, "OK! Let's go, let's go, let's go! Everything is ready. Let's go." And put two or three pounds don't take anything. Only things you can put on your body. No more. Let's go, let's go, let's go. We don't have time. So we went out and we take in the boat.

**DEBORAH:**

Ok. You went into a boat? All twelve people in one boat?

**CONNIE:**

We go in a little fishing boat. The capacity they told us for that boat was like maximum four persons. And there were 10-12 of us.

**DEBORAH:**

Oh my goodness!

**CONNIE:**

The idea was to cross the ocean to Miami Beach. The thing was that the boat broke down in the middle of the ocean.

**DEBORAH:**

Oh my god!

**CONNIE:**

And was an electrical storm that night. Was a lot. It was drifting on the water. The night was really, really dark. Was a huge storm with raining and lightning.

**DEBORAH:**

How terrifying! How terrifying!

**CONNIE:**

Yeah! Absolutely. It was terrible. The water was starting to coming into the boat. And the guy who was driving that boat. Everybody I start to ask him, "Come on! Do something! What are we gonna do now? Do you have something like a life jacket?" "No." "Do you have at least a lighter or something?" "No." "Do you have a phone, some way to call your friends and come here to rescue?" "No." Nothing. Nothing. At that point, I guess that everybody starts to pray. Nobody say anything. We was just quiet and waiting. Personally, I was thinking, the only thing that I remember that I think and think, "Thanks, God, to bring me home! Thanks God to bring me home." I don't know what home means. That's what I remember I started to think. Somebody behind me, cause I couldn't move. We were 10-12 people in one boat with the capacity for 4. Somebody behind me said, "Consuelo, we're gonna die." I say, "I don't know." "Consuelo, please." I say, "What can I do? Just relax, relax. Nobody died before the day is through so don't worry. Right now, we're alive and we are here. Wait. Do you have faith? Do you have a god and believe in something or somebody, so please. That's the only thing we can do now."

**DEBORAH:**

What happened?

**CONNIE:**

It's the only thing, God send us the Coast Guard. They saw us and they rescueded us.

**DEBORAH:**

The Coast Guard found you?

**CONNIE:**

Yes. How? I don't know. Why? I don't know. But that's what happened. Because we had no way to call somebody. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.

**DEBORAH:**

And the Coast Guard brought you to Florida?

**CONNIE:**

Ya. They took us to Palm Springs, Florida.

**DEBORAH:**

So nobody died. All 12 people lived, nobody drowned or fell into the ocean?

**CONNIE:**

Only one almost died. He started to throw up on my back. When the Coast Guard rescued us, he was in very very bad condition. But he survived.

## **A ROCKY START/15:24**

**DEBORAH:**

What happened in Palm Springs?

**CONNIE:**

They started the process of immigration and they put us in jail.

**DEBORAH:**

In jail?

**CONNIE:**

Yeah. I was in the jail for four months.

**DEBORAH:**

Four months?

**CONNIE:**

At least. And they interviewed us. But I don't know what happened with the other guys, because some of them, oh Deb, when I realized after all that some of those guys was really dangerous guys.

**DEBORAH:**

Oh really? But they had been nice to you.

**CONNIE:**

Yes, they was really dangerous guys. Because I said to them, "It's not a bad thing the Coast Guard arrested us. At least we are alive! The worst thing is that we have to go back to our country, but, hello? We are alive." But some of them said, "No. That isn't gonna happen to me because I killed, because I stealed, because, . . ." Oh my God! Uh oh, I feel sorry for you. We have to do the right things all the time, because we never know. Some of them had to stay in the jail for a long time because they have things here. They did things here before. And they was deported. And they came back and were trying to get in again, so. They took

me, only me.

**DEBORAH:**

How did you get out of the jail after four months?

**CONNIE:**

Because. In the jail they started the process with us, with me. I went. One part of the jail was for ladies and the other part was for the guys. And they started to call us for an interview. "Why you here? Why you come here for? What you looking for blah, blah, blah." So I tell them the truth why I was here exactly what I'm telling you now and I applied for asylum. So the process was started and after four months I was allowed to leave. And I flew to Boston to live with my friend.

**DEBORAH:**

So you had people here in Boston.

**CONNIE:**

Yes. Some friends. And the friends that helped me. The only thing that I have here was one friend, a couple of friends in Boston. Because I'm alone here. I have no family. I have nobody here. So I went there. My friend help me a lot. God bless her. And I started my asylum process.

## **MAKING A LIVING/18:46**

**DEBORAH:**

Did you get a job in Boston? What happened?

**CONNIE:**

Yeah. I started to work in Boston as a housekeeper and studied English. Of course, Deb. All the time. I worked all the time, no matter while anything I'm available to learn. Maybe I don't know how to do that, but I have the ability to learn. So I don't care. What you need to do? I can do it.

**DEBORAH:**

You'll do anything.

**CONNIE:**

Anything.

## **ON TO CALIFORNIA/19:19**

**DEBORAH:**

You're in California now. What brought you there?

**CONNIE:**

Why am I here now? Because my lawyer

who gave my case in Boston was retired. And also, I have something. Along long time ago, Deb, like 30 years ago, I came here to California. On that time, I did one DUI [Driving Under the Influence]. Thirty years ago. I paid everything. I did everything right. Everything was fine, so when I was in Boston, I said, I'm going to go to California to get my driver's license. Because I know that I can get it in California. When I came here I went to DMV [Department of Motor Vehicles] and I said, "This is my old driver's license. I know that I had a DUI but I'm OK because I paid everything." And the DMV said, "No. I'm sorry. It shows that you have two DUIs." I said, "No, it's not true." So I went to the court and required for my papers and tell them. The court has nothing to see with DMV. And you have to take 18 months of program for DUI. But I say, "But why if I did before? And was one time." "It's the system!" I said, "OK, OK that's OK. That's fine. No worry." So and I did all this, I get my drivers license.

**DEBORAH:**

Good for you!

**CONNIE:**

That's why I here in California. When I came here, my lawyer in Boston, he retired and said, "You know what, Consuelo, I gotta go. I'm going to Australia because I'm not working any more as a lawyer." So now I said, "What can I do?" And he said, "Well, you can find out somebody." So I work here so I found somebody here. Because I had to be here for 18 months. And also, I love California.

**DEBORAH:**

My sons live there, Burbank.

**CONNIE:**

Where?

**DEBORAH:**

Los Angeles. Burbank.

**CONNIE:**

Oh, really?

**DEBORAH:**

Remember I was going to come out there and visit and meet you in person. But then the virus.

**CONNIE:**

Oh.



## OPTIMISM IN THE FACE OF THE UNKNOWN/22:12

**DEBORAH:**

Tell me about the virus. After two weeks in the room with 12 people in the Bahamas, this is probably not much compared to that. How are you reacting to the coronavirus?

**CONNIE:**

Coronavirus?

**DEBORAH:**

How's that affecting your life right now?

**CONNIE:**

No, nothing. Nothing. Because, let me explain you, I believe that I create what I believe. That's simple.

**DEBORAH:**

So it doesn't frighten you?

**CONNIE:**

Not really. I take it, I take care of me of course, everything that you know that we have to do, because as I tell you, I did the right things the most time I can.

**DEBORAH:**

You wearing a mask?

**CONNIE:**

Yes. My mask and gloves, everything, but not because I'm afraid. Because I cannot get the virus. No! I do the best for respect the believers of others and my job and everything. But not because. Because I'm absolutely sure for me it's my point of view. If I really believe it's I gonna get it. That simple. Everything that I put in my mind, I gonna see in my life. Every single thing. What I really believe, from the deep of my heart, my body, I'm gonna see it in front of me.

**DEBORAH:**

You're gonna attract it into your life.

**CONNIE:**

Exactly. What I try to say.

**DEBORAH:**

So you think positively.

**CONNIE:**

Hundred percent. I learned that right here in the United States. That's why I love this country. This country I learn and I change my mind and I change my life. And the way that I was. In Colombia I was all the time

in the comfort zone. My whole life was drinking, smoking, dancing. Stupid things. Right here my world, is, oh my God is very different. Why? Because to live in Colombia it wasn't the best way to live. Right here, even if I don't have a lot of money, but I'm still richer than I was in Colombia with money. Because to be rich is not about how much money do you have, it's how rich do you feel that you feel that you are.

**DEBORAH:**

Absolutely. There are many kinds of wealth.

**CONNIE:**

Exactly. So that's I learned all those kind of things here. And I love the way that I you know, personal development. And I love how I grow emotionally, spiritually, and those things. That's why the Bible. I respect the people. And I believe that the people is dying because they believe that thing will kill them. So that's if I think, if I chose, if I believe that when I go out, I gonna get the accident. Make sure that we gonna get the accident. I'm gonna say right now. No matter, Deb, what happens in my life, you can see that I am that the in the worse situations, for me, is the best thing that happened to me in that moment, because I'm expecting the better things all the time.

**DEBORAH:**

You've become a true optimist.

**CONNIE:**

Hundred percent. Absolutely. I believe all the time, I'm expecting the best things in my life. That's why I find out great people like you, like Deb, because all the time I'm waiting for a blessing and not for, "Oh I don't have this. I don't have." No, no. The best things that happen to the people happen to me. The best. No matter what, I'm not my circumstances! I am not my thinking. It's not what happened to me. It is what can I DO with the things that happen. I cannot get better or become worse, is my decision. To be happy, to live in peace is my decision, not the circumstances. Not what happened. It's not if I have a job or not. It's not if I have money or not. It's to learn and to see how we can live better is not too hard. It's to be better.

**DEBORAH:**

Wow. You are a real philosopher.

**CONNIE:**

Ha ha ha.

**DEBORAH:**

So tell me, did you become a citizen?

**CONNIE:**

Not yet. At this time, I'm still waiting for the final immigration decision on my citizenship. The only thing I have is my work permission, social security, my driver's license, and my ID. But I'm waiting.

**DEBORAH:**

You do have a social security number?

**CONNIE:**

Absolutely.

**DEBORAH:**

Ok. And do you have the green card?

**CONNIE:**

Not yet green card. But I have social security and I have permission to work legally here, finally.

**DEBORAH:**

That's great. What kind of work are you doing now, Connie?

**CONNIE:**

Right now I'm working at a grave yard shift, 10 pm to 6 a.m at the gas station.

**DEBORAH:**

Where is it?

**CONNIE:**

In a gas station.

**DEBORAH:**

You could teach a course on optimism, Connie.

**CONNIE:**

Yeah. It's the best way, Deb. We cannot live in United States alone, no family, nothing and feel bad. No. We have to find out the way we can feel better without the things we want or we needed. So at the end of the day, Deb, I made my home wherever I am. It depends on me. It's not because Los Angeles is better or not. I'm not alone here. I have hundreds and hundreds of friends outside that I don't know yet. But I am not alone.

**DEBORAH:**

When you were in that boat and you were praying, "Bring me home!" and home was

going to mean whatever it meant. You obviously got your prayer answered.

**CONNIE:**

Yeah. The happiness does not depend on the circumstances, it depends on me. So no matter where I am, where I live, where I go, I leave my home with me inside me. Depend on me.

**DEBORAH:**

I really understand that. And now, before you came to the United States, before you left Colombia, are you saying that you didn't have this philosophy when you were still in Colombia? You weren't such an optimist then?

**CONNIE:**

No. I was not that kind of optimist, positive, because in Colombia, remember, we are the result of the people around us. Exactly. That's the problem. Right here for some years to now, I started to reprogram my brain.

**DEBORAH:**

You started to program your brain once you were in the United States or when you were on your way to the United States?

**CONNIE:**

You know, in the middle of the ocean, I say, "God thank you for taking me home." And he bring me here. So I start to believe more. I believe all the time, of course. Not the way that I am. Now my faith I started to change my mind and then the circumstances around me started to change. As a wise person said, "Change your thinking and change your life."

## PRECIOUS OBJECTS/31:15

**DEBORAH:**

This is, I'm going to ask you one more question, which might sound silly, but did you bring something with you from Colombia that was either, maybe in your pocket or even on the boat, some object that you brought with you that you still have?

**CONNIE:**

My Bible.

**DEBORAH:**

And it was in the boat with you?

**CONNIE:**

Is with me all the time.

**DEBORAH:**

That same Bible?

**CONNIE:**

The same one.

**DEBORAH:**

Can you take a picture of it and send me a picture of it?

**CONNIE:**

Ya, of course.

**DEBORAH:**

Great! Ok. Wow.

**CONNIE:**

My Bible and I don't know how you call that it my rosario.

**DEBORAH:**

Rosary beads.

**CONNIE:**

Exactly.

**DEBORAH:**

You had those in Colombia. And you still have them?

**CONNIE:**

Yeah. Yeah.

**DEBORAH:**

Take a picture of them with the Bible, please, because after we do the podcast, I'm gonna, maybe make a little, ebook, so I want pictures and maybe I'd like to have a picture of you. Do you have a picture of you that you can send me?

**CONNIE:**

Yeah. Which kind? Anyone?

**DEBORAH:**

Yeah. Snapshot, something that I can actually see your face. And if not, we can do a phone call with FaceTime and I can take a picture while we're talking. That's you know, I can do that.

**CONNIE:**

I can send you a picture that somebody took me yesterday at my job, like a couple of weeks ago.

**DEBORAH:**

Perfect. That's perfect.

**CONNIE:**

Yeah.

**DEBORAH:**

Okay.

**CONNIE:**

You want me to send you the picture that someone took yesterday at the station?

**DEBORAH:**

Sure. Whatever you want.

**CONNIE:**

Okay.

**DEBORAH:**

And, this it's been so good to talk to you, very inspiring your life and your philosophy. I believe that our attitude is what determines if we're happy or not. Not the circumstances.

**CONNIE:**

Absolutely. That's why I learned. That's how I live now. And I understand that the life depends only your attitude. Attitude is everything. Attitude and energy is all about it. To live depends on your attitude. And, and just say, those grateful heart.

**DEBORAH:**

Yes. A grateful heart. I have a grateful heart that I met you and that we had this conversation. I'm very pleased that I got to talk with you. And, I'll be sending you some emails and stuff for a little bit more information, but thank you so much, Connie. Really Consuela!

**CONNIE:**

Consuelo. You can call me, Connie is how Deb called me and everybody called me.

**DEBORAH:**

I like Consuelo. I think it's a beautiful name.

**CONNIE:**

Yeah. Most of them. Yeah. And I am too.

**DEBORAH:**

I don't know what you look like, but you are obviously very beautiful on the inside. That's for sure.

**CONNIE:**

How we are inside is how we show outside. You will see it.

**DEBORAH:**

Thank you so much, Consuelo.

**CONNIE:**

God bless you bye bye.



In this time of the pandemic, as we all struggle to carve out some semblance of normalcy, I hope Connie's spirit of optimism has inspired all my listeners with a positive attitude. With the example of her resilience, along with her philosophy of gratitude and always being able to see the silver lining, Connie/Consuelo reminds us to count our blessings as we put one foot in front of the other, anticipating the good the universe will provide.

Thank you for staying with us right to the end of this episode. The Immigrant Voices Podcast Project is the brain child of Michelle Duval the Program Director at the Adult Education Program at the Gardner Pilot Academy in Allston, Massachusetts. You can learn more about English for Speakers of Other Languages courses at our website, [www.gpaesol.com](http://www.gpaesol.com) or by emailing Michelle Duval directly at [m.duval@live.com](mailto:m.duval@live.com).

Without the funding of Charlesview, Inc. and the support of its Executive Director, Jo-Ann Barbour, this project would never have been possible.

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And last but not least, a big thank you to all the guests who are participating in this series of interviews. And to all our listeners, we say, "Thank you. Do come back for the next episode."





## EPISODE #6/ VALTECIR FROM BRAZIL

and sending money and buying their houses. That's why I wanted to come over.

**DEBORAH:**

How old were you at this point?

**VALTECIR:**

I was 25.

**DEBORAH:**

Okay. What year did you come to the States?

**VALTECIR:**

2005. March, 2005.

**DEBORAH:**

What was the hardest thing about coming here?

**VALTECIR:**

The hard thing was getting a visa 'cause 15 years ago it was pretty much hard because I lived in a small town. Didn't make much money. So when I go to the consul, if you're low income, they won't let you come. Probably won't get you a visa.

**DEBORAH:**

So how many times did you have to go back to request one?

**VALTECIR:**

Three times.

**DEBORAH:**

And then how did you actually physically come to the States? Did you fly here? How did you come from Brazil?

**VALTECIR:**

Actually, I came from Mexico.

**DEBORAH:**

Oh. OK.

**VALTECIR:**

Because I didn't get the visa, but I really wanted to come over.

**DEBORAH:**

So you were pretty determined. Was there one week, one day that was the hardest getting here that you could talk about?

**VALTECIR:**

The worst day was crossing the border. I was

really anxious. And I didn't know if they're gonna work well or not.

**DEBORAH:**

How long did it take you to get to Boston?

**VALTECIR:**

It took me I'll say 28 days.

**DEBORAH:**

Did you have family here in Boston?

**VALTECIR:**

No, not at the time. I was I just said friends.

**DEBORAH:**

Okay.

**VALTECIR:**

Yeah, I was, for about 10 years living here without any relatives.

### IMMIGRANT STATUS/04:59

**DEBORAH:**

Wow. Yeah, but you've done a lot. Are you a citizen now?

**VALTECIR:**

No, not yet.

**DEBORAH:**

But you have green card, right? When did you get that?

**VALTECIR:**

Oh, it was five years ago.

**DEBORAH:**

I asked you what was the hardest day and what was the happiest day from the time you left Brazil to now, what's been, is there one particular day that stands out as a really happy time?

**VALTECIR:**

Yeah. When my daughter was born.

**DEBORAH:**

And she's how old? She's two now?

**VALTECIR:**

She's two in four months.

**DEBORAH:**

Oh, okay. And did you know your wife before you came here?

### GUEST INTRO/00:038

When three attempts to gain a visa to the United States failed, Valtecir did not give up his dream. After 28 days traveling from Brazil through Mexico, he made it across the border. Unable to say more than "How are you?" and "Goodbye," he set out to learn enough English to work for non-Portuguese speaking contractors. For many years, employed by others, he honed his trade skills until Valtecir summoned his determined spirit once again to start his own company. After 6 years as an entrepreneur, he has grown Val's Painting into a highly sought-after supplier of services to commercial and residential clients. Valtecir and his expanding staff are licensed to remove asbestos and lead and are fully equipped with the most sophisticated and efficient tools of his profession to tackle any job including large-scale wall covering installations. Still committed to perfecting his English, Val finds time to continue with English classes at the Gardner's Adult Education program and is an active member of the GPA community.

### GETTING TO THE U.S./02:21

**DEBORAH:**

Welcome Valtecir. It's great to have you here today. Everybody has a story. Tell me about yours a little bit.

**VALTECIR:**

First I'm gonna start. I grew up on a farm until I was 16. Then I went to a small town to work at the supermarket. And I see a few of my friends coming over and because my dream was to buy a house in Brazil, and go back over there. But because the economy is not like here. You work a lot but you make less money, so I see my friends coming over

**VALTECIR:**

No, I didn't because we're from a different state and probably eight hours from my state to her state.

## **FIRST BIG CLIENT/05:50**

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**DEBORAH:**

So when did you get your first big commercial client, Valtecir?

**VALTECIR:**

Was in 2016. That's when I got my first big job.

**DEBORAH:**

And how long was that after you started your business?

**VALTECIR:**

Actually I started doing small jobs and then a year later. I know the contractor because I used to do small jobs for him. And he asked me if I could handle the six townhouses—the interior and the exterior. That's when I really started my business.

**DEBORAH:**

How many houses were they?

**VALTECIR:**

They were six townhouses in Cambridge.

**DEBORAH:**

Townhouses. Okay. Wow. Were you a little nervous about it?

**VALTECIR:**

In the beginning, I was, because I have a lot of experience in painting but you know not that big a job to take care of on my own.

**DEBORAH:**

Yeah. So you were on your own and if something went wrong, it would be your fault.

**VALTECIR:**

Yes. Kinda.

**DEBORAH:**

So how did you deal with that nervousness? What did you tell the person you were nervous or did you, how did you deal with it?

**VALTECIR:**

No, I didn't because I knew that I was gonna get it done but you know, at nights when I got home, I started thinking there was a lot of work and wanted to get it done.

**DEBORAH:**

Oh, you were afraid you weren't going to get it done in time?

**VALTECIR:**

Ya. But then everything went smoothly and I got everything done on time and he was happy.

**DEBORAH:**

And that led to a whole long list of happy customers from what I understand.

**VALTECIR:**

Yes, and after that big job I wanted to expand my clientele and I went to the offices of a big contractor who does a lot of commercial spaces and I gave him. We used to work for him like ten years. And then I gave him the card and then a month later he called me to do a small job in Billerica and since then I do pretty much all his work, his painting.

## **MISSING BRAZIL/ 08:31**

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**DEBORAH:**

That's great. Do you miss Brazil?

**VALTECIR:**

Yes I do.

**DEBORAH:**

What do you miss about it?

**VALTECIR:**

I'd say the climate. The people that I grew up with and the mountains. There's a lot of mountain in my state.

**DEBORAH:**

Do you take any, do you do any hikes here in the mountains?

**VALTECIR:**

Not really, but I want to. I don't have much time now because I'm the owner and I work too. I work almost like 24/7.

**DEBORAH:**

Really? When do you see your daughter and your wife?

**VALTECIR:**

After I get home late at night, I do all my estimates, invoices, pay bills. So when I get home I play with my daughter for a while and then later I do my computer stuff.

**DEBORAH:**

Wow.

**VALTECIR:**

Yes. But I want to slow down a little because I need more time with my family.

## **THE PANDEMIC/09:37**

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**DEBORAH:**

About the virus, the coronavirus is that helping you slow down in terms of not working so hard, or you were working as hard as ever?

**VALTECIR:**

No it's slowed down. I stay home as much as I can. Just a little worried because we don't know what.

**DEBORAH:**

Talk to me a little bit more about what you're worried about. What are some of the thoughts you have and fears you have about what's going on?

**VALTECIR:**

Financial situation. A lot of pressure. A lot of things going around you and you can feel that pressure if you scared to get the virus. But you have to go out to do stuff.

**DEBORAH:**

Yeah. So do you think you're going to apply for that relief from the city of Boston?

**VALTECIR:**

Yes, I will. Because I have all the documents I qualify for. I think that covers pretty much.

## **BUSINESS EXPANSION/10:49**

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**DEBORAH:**

Yes, you really, you've got all these different licenses. And, do you, have you have lead removal? Do you have something for asbestos also?

**VALTECIR:**

Yeah. I think that covers pretty much.

**DEBORAH:**

What made you do that? Go for that certification?

**VALTECIR:**

Because painters sometime if you do old houses you have to test if they have lead or not because the law is if they catch you at the job and there's lead in the house, you can get probably a thirty-thousand dollar fine. If you don't have.

**DEBORAH:**  
\$30,000 fine?

**VALTECIR:**  
Yeah, I think from five to \$30,000.

**DEBORAH:**  
So once you realized that, you decided to become certified.

**VALTECIR:**  
Yes.

**DEBORAH:**  
I've been very impressed with all the equipment you have for wall coverings and all kinds of things that are very sophisticated. It's certainly not handyman type stuff—very professional.

**VALTECIR:**  
I want to have all the right tools because then the job goes smooth. If I don't have the right tools, it takes longer to do and sometimes the job doesn't come well finished.

## HOBBIES/12:18

**DEBORAH:**  
Wow. Tools are pretty important. Do you have any hobbies, things that you do other than spending time with your family and working 24/7, or maybe you had hobbies back in Brazil that you left behind that you'd like to do again. Music. Dancing. I don't know, mountain climbing, what sort of things, anything that?

**VALTECIR:**  
In Brazil I used to ride motorcycle as I grew up on a farm. Riding horses and I used to play soccer, pretty much every Sunday. Here I only go to church every Sunday and I used to go to the gym but not after my daughter was born. Because you know when I get home from work she wants to be around me. I [don't] feel good leaving her and go to the gym.

**DEBORAH:**  
That's not an option to go to the gym.

**VALTECIR:**  
Yeah. But I feel that I have to do more, spending more time doing . . .

## LEARNING ENGLISH/13:38

**DEBORAH:**  
Tell me about your English. It's very good.

and you're easily understood. When you got here in 2005. What was your English?

**VALTECIR:**  
Pretty much almost nothing. Oh, when he was "How are you?" and "Goodbye."

**DEBORAH:**  
That was it? What made you decide that you needed to learn English?

**VALTECIR:**  
Because my first job with an American who didn't speak any word in Portuguese and I worked with him for three weeks. On the fourth week he paid us and never called us again because he needed someone that could understand at least a little of English because he wasn't able to be at the job all the time. He had to go around to other jobs he needs to call someone to see what's going on at the job and me and my other friend didn't understand anything. Then I put my mind to it. That I really need to learn English. And when I was in Brazil too, I was really interested when there were English courses that were once a week. Just like a little writing. A few questions. But I say I wanted to learn another language. Then I started here taking courses at home twice a week. After three years of studying at home my friend told me about the GPA program at the Gardner.

**DEBORAH:**  
The Gardner. How many years have you gone to that?

**VALTECIR:**  
For the GPA, the Gardner, say almost 10 years.

**DEBORAH:**  
Wow. I know Erica is your favorite teacher. She obviously inspired you to keep going.

**VALTECIR:**  
Yes. Rita was a great teacher too.

**DEBORAH:**  
I don't think I knew her.

**VALTECIR:**  
She was before Erica. It was good taking courses. I still like to go to GPA because that are the best way to get involved in a community.

**DEBORAH:**  
So you're still going to classes.

**VALTECIR:**  
Yes. I'm taking classes online now.

**DEBORAH:**  
And what about your wife? How's her English?

**VALTECIR:**  
Her English is good. Yeah. Sometimes you ever have trouble understanding, but if speak slowly, she watches a lot of TV.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS/16:58

**DEBORAH:**  
Yeah that can help. What are you the most proud of your accomplishments of your many accomplishments Valtecir? What stands out as well? Almost a turning point. And then after that you felt, well, I think I'm going to make it here?

**VALTECIR:**  
Like I said. Because I grew up on a farm and now I look at how far I got. Come to another country, learn the language, and open my business. I can help other people like my workers. I can help them get a job.

**DEBORAH:**  
How many of them do you have?

**VALTECIR:**  
I have four. I can see my next goal, I want to buy my own house.

**DEBORAH:**  
Ah Ok? Is that your dream? What was your dream in Brazil?

**VALTECIR:**  
I have my two houses over there [in Brazil] which is good. There is not expensive like here. One my mom lives in one and another one is my sister.

**DEBORAH:**  
So you still have lots of family back in Brazil. You've been able to visit them to go there?

**VALTECIR:**  
No, not yet, but I did. We have, FaceTime pretty much in. Okay. Pretty much every day or every week.

## PRECIOUS MEMENTO/18:44

**DEBORAH:**  
That's great. Did you bring anything with you from Brazil? Like some little trinket or



something that you have always kept with you? One person I talked to, she has a doll from when she was five years old and she took it with her from Peru. Do you have something that you've brought while going thru Mexico, getting into the States that you kept with you?

**VALTECIR:**

I still have a prayer. that, my mum wrote me in a piece of paper. She gave it to me. Yeah.

**DEBORAH:**

Very nice. What does it say?

**VALTECIR:**

I don't have it with me right now, but it's like if someone tries to come after me, it feels like their hands and feet are tied they can't get me.

**DEBORAH:**

In other words, when you say that prayer, you imagine that you're being protected.

**VALTECIR:**

Yes.

**DEBORAH:**

Is it by heart in Portuguese?

**VALTECIR:**

Yes. I can remember that whole thing now.

**DEBORAH:**

Can you recite it? What you remember in Portuguese? I love to hear it in Portuguese—in your native language.

**VALTECIR:**

Yeah.

*Minha Santa Catarina, clara e Digna.  
Vós soste aquela senhora que passaste  
Pela casa de Abraão. Encontraste 100  
Homens parados, bravos como leões e  
Com vossa santa palavra abrandastes  
Os vossos corações. Assim minha santa  
Catarina, abrandai os corações de nossos  
inimigos.  
Se tiverem pés, que não me alcancem.  
Si tiverem mãos,  
Que não me agorrem. Se tiverem olhos,  
que não me vejão,  
Que se vejam acorrentados de pés e mãos,  
como o Senhor  
Se viu na cruz. Por todos os seculos e  
seculos Amém*

**DEBORAH:**

Beautiful.

**VALTECIR:**

Thank you.

**DEBORAH:**

Can you send me a translation of it by email?

**VALTECIR:**

Yes.

**DEBORAH:**

That would be wonderful. We can take a picture of the piece of paper. So that piece of paper, how old is that piece of paper?

**VALTECIR:**

It's probably 15 or 16 years old.

**DEBORAH:**

Is it falling apart, or if you take a picture of it, I'd love to see it. And maybe you could translate it.

**VALTECIR:**

I used to carry my wallet.

**DEBORAH:**

The same one from Brazil?

**VALTECIR:**

Yes. But, I think now I put it somewhere.

**DEBORAH:**

Oh, you would carry the prayer inside your wallet?

**VALTECIR:**

Now I keep it in my drawer.

## CLIENT LOYALTY/21:15

**DEBORAH:**

Okay. That sounds good. Anything else? Anything else you want to tell me about? You told a story in class about how you finished a job and the person gave you a thousand-dollar tip.

**VALTECIR:**

Yes.

**DEBORAH:**

Could you tell me that story again? Just briefly.

**VALTECIR:**

There was in Newton. I was doing inside the house. I took all the pictures down because

the girl told me. And then I removed and patched it. As the job was going. Would you help me hang this picture here, this one there? I was moving them around. I said sure, no problem and then you know. I was doing what she wants and then by the end, the husband came. He was in the garage and he came and said, "I would like to give you something because we are happy with the job and you're a good guy and we are so happy to have you at our house." And then he gave me that thousand dollar tip.

**DEBORAH:**

What did you do? Was it a check or was it cash?

**VALTECIR:**

Cash.

**DEBORAH:**

Did you realize at the time it was a thousand dollars. Did you count it right there?

**VALTECIR:**

No. It was cash. I didn't count it in front of him. I was happy about the money but really happy that they liked the job I was doing.

**DEBORAH:**

Yes. I think you are somebody that radiates a lot of honesty and pride in your work, obviously, and that makes the difference when people are looking for help with their projects.

**VALTECIR:**

Yes, because I tell my workers that I want to do the job that the client wants. Cause some people, they do what they think is right sometimes but not what the clients want. They argue.

**DEBORAH:**

They argue with you and say I'm not going to do it like that?

**VALTECIR:**

Some people think they know more than the owner of the house. They try say this looks better than this. I let them. I want to make them happy.

**DEBORAH:**

That's your philosophy.

**VALTECIR:**

Yes. You can't argue with them. Just do it.

## FURTHER THOUGHTS/24:14

DEBORAH:

Well, so your dreams are to own your own house. And what do you think is going to happen from this coronavirus? And, and I know you're worried about some things.

VALTECIR:

I hope, it's passes by soon. To go away soon. And can get back to normal life. Yes. And I think after that, things can change a lot. People will think different then.

DEBORAH:

And what way do you think they're going to think different? I think I agree. I think the world is not going to be the same and I think people are learning a lot about themselves while they're stuck at home. What are your thoughts about that?

VALTECIR:

Because I think people are just thinking working working, not much time with their family. And probably now, they might spend more time with the family, with friends. Now, you want to go to your friend's house but you can't. And I hope noone gets too scared to shake hands again or something. It's probably gonna be a while before we get used to like before.

DEBORAH:

It will be a while before it gets back to the way it was before. I think a lot of good is going to come out of it in terms of people realizing what's really important.

VALTECIR:

Yes that's true because now you can see that we can see that we are very funeral.

DEBORAH:

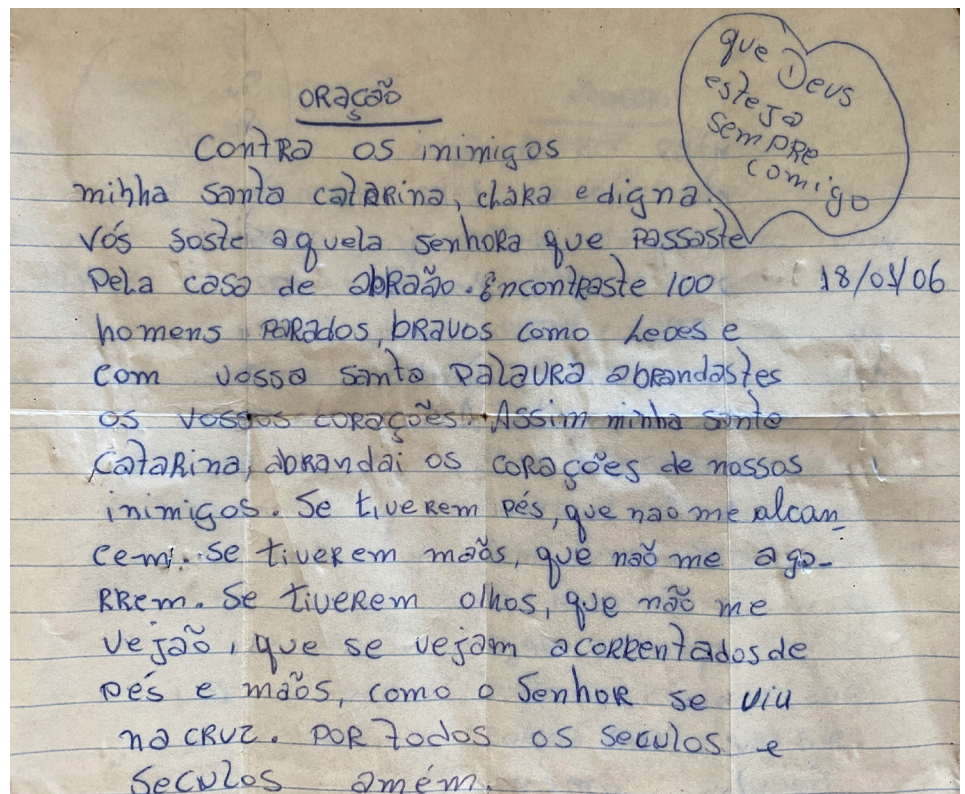
Funeral? You mean Vulnerable?

VALTECIR:

Whether you are rich or poor you are in the same situation. It's like you can have all the money you want but you're not so safe.

DEBORAH:

Right. Yeah, it's cutting across all economic racial, social. So everything it's a big equalizer. Well, thank you so much for chatting with me. Thank you very much. And I hope you'll be safe and I hope your business continues to grow, but I hope you slow down a little bit, work smarter. Maybe, maybe make more money, have more time



Sixteen-year-old scrap of paper with a prayer of protection Valtecir carried with him from Brazil.

with your family and not burn yourself out. Don't burn yourself out.

VALTECIR:

All right. I will.

DEBORAH:

Thank you so much.

## FINAL WRAP UP/26:55

Since this interview, Valtecir has become a father for the second time. You can see some of Val's extraordinary interior and exterior, commercial and residential projects on his website: [valspaintingservicesinc.com](http://valspaintingservicesinc.com). In spite of his accomplishments as a master painter, Valtecir remains a humble and grateful resident of the U.S., always eager to help his fellow immigrants and keep increasing his language skills while finding that balance between home and work, family and career.

Thank you for staying with us right to the end of this episode. The Immigrant Voices Podcast Project is the brain child of Michelle Duval the Program Director at the Adult Education Program at the Gardner Pilot Academy in Allston, Massachusetts. You can learn more about English for Speakers of Other Languages courses at our website, [www.gpaesol.com](http://www.gpaesol.com) or by emailing Michelle Duval directly at [m.duval@live.com](mailto:m.duval@live.com).

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And last but not least, a big thank you to all the guests who are participating in this series of interviews. And to all our listeners, we say, "Thank you. Do come back for the next episode."

