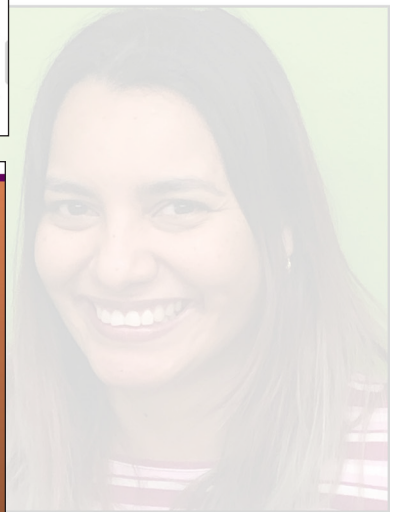
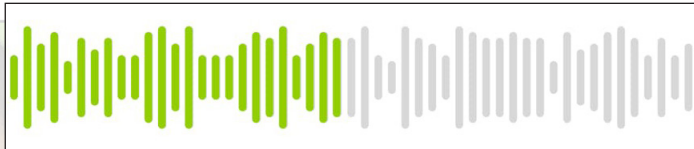
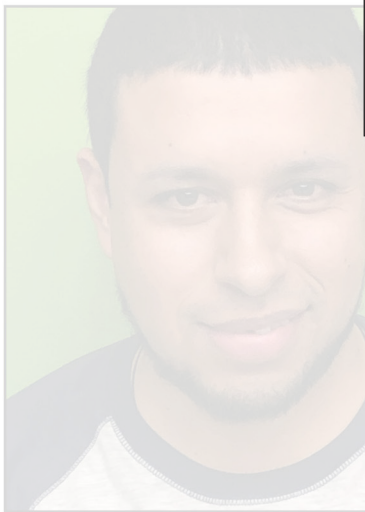


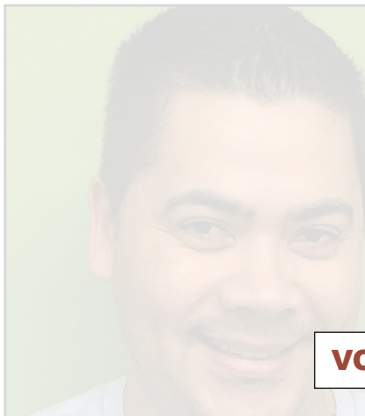


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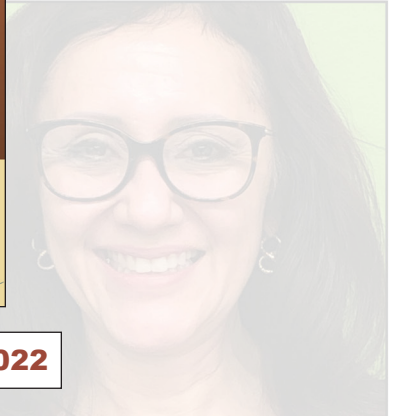


IMMIGRANT VOICES

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



VOLUME SEVEN: EPISODES 19-21 • WINTER 2022



IMMIGRANT VOICES

Episode 19
YONGXING
from CHINA



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES

IMMIGRANT VOICES

Episode 20
SANDRA
from COLOMBIA



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES

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Episode 21
WILLIAM from
GUATEMALA



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES



EPISODE #19 — YONGXING FROM CHINA

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EPISODE #21 — WILLIAM FROM GUATEMALA

THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS

Thank you for your interest in the Immigrant Voices Podcast Project, the brainchild of Michelle Duval, the Program Director at the Adult Education Program at the Gardner Pilot Academy in Allston, Massachusetts and podcaster and producer ESOL teacher Deborah Bluestein. You can learn more about the English for Speakers of Other Languages Program at our website www.gpaesol.com. or by emailing Michelle Duval directly at m.duval@live.com. Without the funding of Charlesview, Inc., and the support of Jo-Ann Barbour, its Executive Director, this project would never have been possible. We send a big thank you to all the guests who participated in the 2022 series of interviews, and to our listeners, we say thank you and do come back for the upcoming episodes. You can hear all of these episodes going back to the fall of 2020 as podcasts on your favorite podcast channels: Apple Podcast, Google Play, and others as well as directly from our gpaesol.com website.





EPISODE #19—YONGXING FROM CHINA

GUEST INTRO/00:39

Exposed to the United States through Hollywood films, Yongxing developed a craving for all things American. When a business trip brought him here for the first time, his infatuation with our country grew into a full-blown romance, and he decided to relocate. After obtaining green cards for himself, his wife, and his daughter six years ago, his dream was about to come true. His daughter preceded him to do her high school years in Maryland. At the same time, Yongxing and his wife stayed in China to bolster their finances. Three years ago, Yongxing burnt his bridges behind him to start a new life in this country. Unable to speak or understand English, he immersed himself in the language. His studies intensified during the pandemic, attending 20-25 online English courses a week. You'll hear how Yongxing's optimism and determination carried him through the most unexpected and challenging part of his immigrant journey.

COMING TO THE U.S./02:04

DEBORAH:

Okay. So tell me, Yongxing, what brought you to the United States?

YONGXING:

This is a good question. I have been asked by many people, not only you and, I mean, people in China. They just question me "Why don't you stay in China? Why you go to the United States?" This is the question that they don't need me to answer, but I want to answer your question. Many, many years ago, I think 10 years ago, I read, I read a books, I read newspaper. I read something. I was not here. I just I was in China, so I read something. I thought I was

American people living in a different style, different difference in our life. I have an opportunity to came in here. First came here in 2012. That in my company my employer offered me a business trip. After that time, I think, "Oh, I needed to move here. I want to move here to spend the rest of my life." Now I'm fifty-something. So I want to live the rest of my life in the United States. I have been to many other countries in Europe like UK, Switzerland, Italy, but, and I never thought that I wanted to live there. I wanted to live in the United States. I only wanted to live here. I don't know why.

WHY THE U.S./03:29

DEBORAH:

What is it about the US? Do you have any idea what it was that drew you more than the other countries?

YONGXING:

I watched the many movies when I was in China—Hollywood—but most of them are in Chinese language. I know my English language in Chinese subtitles. There are two movies that are my favorites. One is a *Forrest Gump* the other one is *The Pursuit of Happiness*. I watched these two movies many, many times in China. I think it's just different. The United States is just a different country from all the other countries in the world. I think every person has the opportunity to have their own life. That's more of my thoughts many many years ago. I think at the most that the movie the *Pursuit of Happiness*. You know, a person, a black person, who is hardworking to get her, get his dream job seemed like me. My former career is an investment banker, but my major, I want to call it each other, but a major was not financial. It took me almost 8 years to get to my dream job. I don't have any financial professional knowledges.

DEBORAH:

What is your dream job?

YONGXING:

But do you mean investment banker?

DEBORAH:

That was your dream job?

YONGXING:

I got it. So after I graduated from college, I got my dream job. Investment banker. It took me many, many years. It's very hard. So the movie, just to get some experience so I think the United States can offer people a opportunity to get their own life. So that's my thought. I just, it's very, I mean, at that time I was young. Not, thinking too much, so that's what I saw I wanted to go to the United States.

DEBORAH:

So in China, did you feel that you couldn't do what you wanted to do?

YONGXING:

Not very easy. I think like *Forrest Gump*, the movie *Forest Gump*, some kids, like *Forest Gump* have a mental condition for them it's too hard. It's kind of like, I mean, discrimination in the United States people always talk about discrimination, but it's different from China. If you have some conditions, it's impossible for you to have your own life. That's, that's, that's very hard. So I think, oh, even a person who has a mental conditions can live their own life. So, perfect. I think that's a place that I want to live.

CHALLENGES OF CHANGE/06:08

DEBORAH:

So now that you're here are things different from *Forrest Gump* or from *The Pursuit of Happiness*? Did you feel disappointment when you came? What's been your experience?

YONGXING:

I mean half and half. My immigration process I think that is different than from most of the people you interviewed. I think most the people you interviewed had a hard time but my first part is a little bit easier. My second part has much uncertainty.

DEBORAH:

I mean, can you explain? Give some details?

YONGXING:

Sure. You know, my former career as an investment banker—it was a very good job

in China. I mean, I got paid very well, so I saved much money so I can get, I can get approved by the United States to move here to have green cards for all my family members. Me, my wife, my daughter, we got a green card six years ago. My daughter went here to Maryland to study in high school and me and my wife still worked in China because we need money to pay many everything—tuition, living costs, my daughter's tuition, even cost and our own. We couldn't move here immediately after we got a green card. So we still worked in China. Just three years ago, I think, my daughter will graduate would have graduated in 2016. So I think I can have my own life I will release myself. So it's time for me to go to the United States. So in 2019, February in 2019, I moved here physically.

DEBORAH:

Did you bring your wife too?

YONGXING:

No. Our plan was, I move here first, and then one year later my wife will come. But a 2020 after one year later, 2020, the pandemic came we all didn't know that but this is one reason among many. But other major reason, just last year, 2021, the second half, I feel like my wife might not want to move here any more. This is a hard, hard part of my immigrant life. So I don't to mention too much. Just last month, we are divorcing. Not finished but now we are. That's a hard one for me. So pandemic and the others maybe happen. So now I'm living alone.

DEBORAH:

So now you are a single man now!

YONGXING:

Yeah. Yeah. Single man, it's not always bad. It's sometimes good. It's hard. My daughter is in New York City. Now she is in grad school. She will graduate this year. Yeah.

MISSING CHINA/09:26

DEBORAH:

What do you long for? What do you miss about China?

YONGXING:

Actually, I was still missing my wife and then my parents and the food, Chinese food.

DEBORAH:

Are you becoming a citizen? So that you

could go back and forth?

YONGXING:

Sure. Last year, August, I became a citizen of the United States. But for now, one thing even worse, the two countries has been the two countries, bad at relationships. That's the thing I didn't, I didn't know before.

DEBORAH:

That's complicating things very much for you.

YONGXING:

Medical or other, maybe others. I don't know about. It's hard for me to go to China to visit my parents. They will not give United States citizen a visa. No, that's impossible now. Maybe if several years later I can go. I need to get a visa to go to China maybe.

WORKING IN THE U.S. & LEARNING ENGLISH/10:29

DEBORAH:

What kind of work are you doing now?

YONGXING:

That's a good question. Three years ago, when I moved here—I studied English when I was in middle school, high school, but at that time, it was only writing and reading, no speaking, no listening. So three years ago when I moved here, I couldn't understand, I couldn't speak. But I found out that something—there are so many adult programs, I mean, ESL classes around the greater Boston. So I went to education center in Malden. I don't know, there were many classes around me, but I went to Malden. A madam asked me, "Where are you from?" And I said, "I'm Brighton, I'm from Brighton." "Well, that's the very far from our center. I will give you some information that there are many classes near nearby you." So she printed several pages, information for me. There were so many classes around me I didn't know. So I started to apply for ESL classes but in 2019, there were long waiting lists and I didn't get even one and I waited for several months. I got a one in my community, Brighton—Jackson Mann Community public school. I got in that one. So I had started to learn English. But in 2020, every classes went to online, Zoom. It's bad, but not bad for me. I found after several, several months, it's good for me because I can take it more on the more classes one week. But before I only take

three classes one week. But in 2020, every week I took 20 to 25 classes.

DEBORAH:

Oh my God! You speak so well. That's amazing for three years, being here three years. You speak extremely well.

YONGXING:

That's why I, I appreciate it. There are so many people, so many classes helped me to get here. In last year, I think in April, April, last year, I got my first part-time job school crossing guard.

DEBORAH:

That's what you're doing now. You're a crossing guard?

YONGXING:

I just resigned the last two weeks ago. So I said many people helped me for my English study and to find a job and, you know, Michelle from the Gardner Pilot Academy. One day told me she sent me an email, she said, "I have a job. I think you are fitting very well." I said, I asked, "Really? Are you sure?" So she offered me a position as a community ambassador in Brighton. It's another part-time job in Brighton as community ambassador. I just had a meeting this morning.

COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR/13:38

DEBORAH:

What do you do as a community ambassador?

YONGXING:

The role of the ambassador is to collect opinions or thoughts of our neighbors if there is some developer who wants to build some residential building or commercial buildings, "What's your opinion?" "Do you like it, or you don't like it." So we collect the thoughts to send it to maybe the mayor or the counselors. So like the developer to not only build a fancy building, you needed to benefit the current residents. So we just do that. And we have a meeting how to benefit our neighbors. That's affordable housing grants basis and a reliable transportation.

DEBORAH:

And did you interview people online or did you see them in person?

YONGXING:

We just started. It's a new program called People's Planning Initiative. We just started one month ago. Tomorrow we will have a meeting. There is a project will be performative by the Harvard University/Allston. There is a project called ERC. They will build a huge commercial community in Allston. So that's so many people concerned. So tomorrow we will have a meeting.

DEBORAH:

You're going to get so much practice with your English. My goodness.

YONGXING:

So for the crossing guard it doesn't need to talk, right? Just gather kids to cross the street. Just small greetings like, "How are you?" "I'm good. I'm fine." "Thank you." "You're welcome." Just like that. But as ambassador I need more. I need more excuse to talk. That's a very huge challenge for me. So I am practicing how to talk.

DEBORAH:

Constantly using your English. That's fantastic. Really. That's good. And your smile is very engaging. I think people want to talk to you.

YONGXING:

Yeah, I think that the kids like me. Every morning, every afternoon when they are releasing. Just last month, I got another job—FedEx as a package handler. I wanted to keep the three jobs at the same time, but, two weeks ago I found, oh, I can't do it because for the crossing guard I will never be late to get there. You know the kids are crossing and won't be there. That's horrible. Right? So the time is essential. So I do all the same. I mean to do the three jobs is just too rushed. So I have to decide which job I want to keep because a package handler job gives me options. I can work part-time or full-time. So I think they will give me benefits three months later, but crossing guard is a small part-time job with no benefits. So I think I need benefits. And, additionally last a year I enrolled in a program in Bunker Hill Community College. I started to learn a major named paralegal.

DEBORAH:

Wow!

YONGXING:

So I need more free time. So I have to quit

one, at least one job. So I quit the crossing guard because time is essential. I can't be late.

STUDYING TO BECOME A PARALEGAL/17:26

DEBORAH:

So you're enrolled in school?

YONGXING:

Yeah.

DEBORAH:

Bunker Hill Community College.

YONGXING:

Yes.

DEBORAH:

Wow!

YONGXING:

I wanted to become a paralegal but it's hard. I wanted to become because for the immigration. Paralegal worker, I mean as an assistant, the lawyer or attorney who prepares something. But after one year study, I think because that needed more talking, maybe native speaker or local people have been, I mean people have lived here maybe 10 years, 20 years because I know even, in Chinese, when we talking, that doesn't mean, literally. There's something behind the talking. If you are not a native speaker, you could not understand that. So as a paralegal, when I have a conversation with some people they need help who need help I might not understand what they really mean.

DEBORAH:

Are you saying that it isn't just the words that people say to you, but there are emotions and feelings underneath the words? And that you feel that your language skills aren't up to that yet? What about working with Chinese immigrants as a paralegal? Have you thought about that?

HELPING EVERYONE, NOT JUST CHINESE/18:45

YONGXING:

That's no problem for me, but I was another thing I want to [say]. I mean. Three years ago you know there are so many Chinese people living here. Yeah. Right. My English was just so poor. I could not understand, I could not speak. So many Chinese friends

told me, "You don't need to study English. So many Chinese people here you can just talk Chinese. There are Chinese restaurants, the Chinese grocery, many Chinese people. We can live together. Don't need to study English." But after a while, I saw that I would not apply. If I only always the speaking Chinese, I will stay in China. So I want to study English. I want to understand the people. I want to be understood by people. So I think I probably would not like to work only to Chinese people. I work too, maybe Spanish or are people from South America or Africa, maybe other countries. So that's what I think I needed to study English.

DEBORAH:

Do you miss your dream job of investment banking?

YONGXING:

No. I worked as an investment banker almost 20 years. Why? I just got bored. So, I didn't think I wanted to work as an investment banker in the United States. Then not only get bored, another thing then what would be the lessons as a professional.

DEBORAH:

What's your dream job now?

YONGXING:

My dream job now is just to make a living. I think physical jobs could fit me very well. So for package handler, crossing guard, I can work very well, but, if I need deep talking, that's I think that's more hard.

FEATHER IN YOUR CAP & OTHER IDIOMS/20:40

DEBORAH:

But you're doing well. The fact that you've been appointed an ambassador and it's an actual job. As they say, "It's a feather in your cap." Have you ever heard that expression before? It's an idiom. It means that the feather goes into your cap means, you know, it's almost like a reward. It shows that you've made a huge accomplishment to get a feather in your cap. It means people believe in you and you're getting promoted. It's a feather in your cap.

YONGXING:

Oh, thank you for letting me know that. Actually, I learned idioms from two teachers in Newton Free Library. In one year, I never heard this idiom.

DEBORAH:

What are some of your favorite idioms?

YONGXING:

Oh, there are huge numbers. I, I can't count of all of them for me, but I learned something relative to my life. In China people always say, "You should not, you should never burn all the bridges behind you." But in the United States, people say "You always want to have a plan B." But I grew up the life in two ways. I burned all the bridges behind me before I came here. And I didn't have plan B that American people say you always want to have a plan B. So burn the bridges behind me is idiom. Another thing is "No Spring Chicken" is harder to turn over a new leaf, but I tried. I'm trying to make lemonade from lemons.

DEBORAH:

You know lots of idioms. You know the true meanings of them.

YONGXING:

Yeah. These are really relative to my new life. So I don't need to remember that when I heard that. Oh, I remember that. That's my life I see are the one. I read a book. There is a sentence in that book, it says "The older you are, the younger you will get when you move to the United States."

DEBORAH:

Where did you read that?

YONGXING:

It was really a touching story. At the beginning I did not understand that. After I finished the story, oh, that's what that's what it means. So I'm a fifty-something. The older I am. So when I moved to the United States, I needed to learn everything. The language, the culture, the people, the environment. I can be like a newborn baby, so that the older I am, I get younger I get. When I moved to the United States this is a really touching story.

PLAN B/23:27

DEBORAH:

[Did you]bring anything with you from China? Some object or something that you would take with you anywhere, maybe something that even goes in your pocket, anything?

YONGXING:

Actually our plan was to bring everything

to the United States. You know, we have money in China. We have our apartments in China. You know, over the years, the housing in China just goes up so high. Right. It costs huge money. But, just last year, I felt like my wife might not want to move here. So I, we can't do that anymore. So I think I needed to restart my life. So that's that turnover a new leaf. So I didn't bring almost everything here. Because my wife said after you move here, after one year, I will come, but now she didn't come. She will not come. So I think I left most of the things in China. Now I started my plan B—to start the work. Last year I found a crossing guard job, and then last month I found a package handler and I started to work as an ambassador, community ambassador. Maybe if my language skills improve, maybe I can work as a paralegal. Maybe several years later. But I think I will. I can. Maybe it just needs time because just the two or three years I think my English gotta improve.

OPTIMISM IN THE FACE OF DISAPPOINTMENT/25:09

DEBORAH:

How do you account for your, your positive, your optimism? You're very upbeat and positive about your life. Having to start it all over again and, and you know, some disappointments that your family didn't follow.

YONGXING:

Sometimes I pretended to be positive. When I started English, I forgot everything else. I always study, study. But when the classes is the over, actually, at night when the surrounding gets quiet, so quiet, I recall many things I had in China. Is very, I mean tragic, so hard. Actually I pretend to be happy, to be positive.

DEBORAH:

There's another idiom. Well, it's not quite it's, there's an expression in English and you may have heard it. It says, "Fake it until you make it." Have you ever heard that? That's what you're doing. Fake it till you make it. You're pretending to be happy and upbeat. So you keep pretending it and you become that. That's the expression. "Fake it until you make it."

YONGXING:

Yeah. Fake it until you make it. Okay. Thank you. Thank you. Learn a new one. So what drove me to study English I think this is the

life I wanted to have. That's why I wanted to go to the United States. I needed to make my own living, but I don't complain, I don't blame my wife. I, we made our own decision. We each other has made our own decision. What I mostly regret was we didn't make clear the meaning to move to the United States. Maybe we have different ideas in my mind. We didn't it speak very clearly. That's what I most regret.

DEBORAH:

Were you saying that your idea of moving to the United States was very different from your wife's idea of moving to the United States and you regret that you didn't have a conversation to clarify the differences?

YONGXING:

Yes. That's what I want to say. Yes. Yes. That's true. So just last year we all were clear that my wife didn't want to. I can't go back. I don't want to go back. I can't go back. So that's the thing. Now I'm here so.

ADVICE/27:52

DEBORAH:

What would you tell somebody? Another immigrant that you wish you knew before you came here, if you were going to give advice, but based on what you've learned since you've been here. What might you say to somebody who maybe has a similar dream that you had? What advice would you give?

YONGXING:

I really didn't think that. If I, if I want to say, I say, if you have a dream, just to move on, leave your old life if you want. You live your own life. You walked, it's hard. Oh, I have another quote I learned. I mean when I was in China. It was a hard time. I was still thinking about my future is uncertainty, but I think I will be good. A quote I want to say is, I think it was said by the president of the United States. "We do things not because it's easy. We do things because it's difficult." It's not a complete quote.

DEBORAH:

Kennedy said that. That was his famous quote about getting to the moon.

YONGXING:

Yeah. It's a famous quote, but to be reality, I mean, seems always. It's easier said than done, right? So it's difficult, but we needed to figure out try our best to, to figure out something. And that's what I wanted to do.

SELF-COACHING & TENNIS/29:25

DEBORAH:

Aside from your professional goals and dreams that you might have now, what other, dreams or ambition do you have about your new life here in the United States and in Boston?

YONGXING:

I didn't bring any material object to the United States, but I think I have some skills. I call it self-coaching. My major was not a financial, but I got a job as an investment banker. 10 years ago, I learned to play tennis. I self-coached myself. I didn't hear any coaches. I watched videos to learn how to play tennis. So that's a hobby. As you came to the United States, I play tennis—two to or three times in one week. Even now last week.

DEBORAH:

Where are you playing tennis?

YONGXING:

Everywhere possible. In Newton, in Brookline, Brighton and West Roxbury, Wellesley, Weston, Waltham. Anywhere possible I will go to play. Last week and even this week. Wednesday I will play with another guy.

DEBORAH:

In an indoor court?

YONGXING:

Outdoor. Outdoor.

DEBORAH:

Just around the corner from me is a beautiful building. It's on Hemenway Street and it's indoor tennis courts. And I believe that people who play for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, that it's kind of a private club for them, but I don't know if it's open to the public. But, giant indoor tennis courts are on Hemenway Street.

YONGXING:

Hemenway St. So for me I can play all through the winter just if no snow covering the courts. I can play. No problem. And it's free. So no problem. So are these free no need to pay the court fee.

DEBORAH:

Who do you play with?

YONGXING:

American people. American person. I think probably he's 65 years old, 65 to 70s, 65-years-old.

DEBORAH:

One person. And you play with him everywhere?

YONGXING:

Everywhere. Yeah. But in summer season, fall season, I play with other people because other people don't want to play in the winter.

DEBORAH:

How did you meet this tennis companion?

YONGXING:

That's a very good question. I remember in 2020, I think in it was Memorial Drive. I play tennis. I play tennis with a wood board. And a person behind me asked me, "Would you like to play tennis in the court?" I turned around and see, oh, the old the person. I said, sure, I wanted to find a person, but it is harder to find a person who wants to play tennis. So that's the first time we met. So after that time we schedule two or three times one week to play tennis.

DEBORAH:

That's fantastic.

YONGXING:

That's been one and a half years.

DEBORAH:

That's fantastic. I love talking to you. You're so upbeat. You generate a very good, warm, friendly feeling. I think you're going to be a great ambassador.

YONGXING:

Thank you for saying that. That's really encouraging me to do my job.

DEBORAH:

And I'm very impressed with your language skills. You've done amazingly well, really, really well. You're have somewhat of an accent, but it's so easy to understand everything that you're saying. That's terrific. Those 20 classes a week in 2020 paid off for you.

YONGXING:

Yes. Yes. Otherwise it's due to the pandemic.

FINAL THOUGHTS/33:49

DEBORAH:

Is there anything else that you'd like to say in this interview that maybe some other immigrant might hear it and that you could encourage them or anything you want to say to any of the listeners who will be listening to your episode?

YONGXING:

I think I have many things I want to talk about. I want to say if you want to talk with me later after my English gets well and well, I would like to talk to you to share my experiences as a new immigrant. That's what I want to do because I mean, I got help and support from the local people and many education programs. I think that's a kind of giving back. I can say something for new people. Newcomers. New outsiders. That's what I want to do. So if you, I will be a pleasure to do that.

DEBORAH:

That's a great offer, to friendship and help new immigrants adjust. And also just to have conversation, you'll get plenty of practice.

YONGXING:

Yeah. Practice. I see this conversation as an opportunity to practice my English.

DEBORAH:

Thank you so much, Yongxing for this interview. It's been great talking with you. I look forward to getting to know you even more and hearing all about your adventures. Thank you so much.

YONGXING:

My pleasure. Thank you for having me talk with you. Thank you.

WRAPPING UP/35:34

Focus, determination, and patience are words that characterize Yongxing as he builds his American life. While he continues to spread his optimism and good cheer, his English competency grows along with his circle of new friends. Whether a package handler, a community ambassador, or a paralegal to help fellow immigrants, YongXing will be successful as he spreads his good cheer to all he meets.



EPISODE #20—SANDRA FROM COLOMBIA

GUEST INTRO/00:38

After the government threatened her livelihood as a trained social worker who championed the homeless, mentally ill and gay population in a small Colombian town, 24-year-old Sandra sought asylum in the U.S. She soon found work in the restaurant industry, providing enough flexibility to care for her growing family and learn English. Still, she yearned to resume her chosen profession. Eventually, a volunteer position at a long-term facility filled the gap and reawakened her dreams. Last year Sandra earned certification as a nurse's assistant in geriatrics and she now works full time, fulfilling her passion there. Sandra is grateful for every step along the way that led her to her new life.

COMING TO THE U.S. TO ESCAPE PERSECUTION/01:37

DEBORAH:

Tell me Sandra, what brought you to the United States? And tell me a little bit about your journey, if you don't mind.

SANDRA:

This is a pleasure for me to be here. Thank you so much. Well, that was when I was 24 years old. It was in the end of 2004. I decided to come for the opportunities in a new land. Tired of the persecution that my family had been subjected to for a long time by armed and violent groups. So much pain to my eyes and to my soul, the hypocritical logic incorporated into the town where the government gave a deaf ear to the hundreds of complaints and the tragic endings of those who publicly claimed justice. So first the war diverted the vocabulary of our childhood when those who spread their role with a chainsaw, with head-smashing

armor, with crematorium ovens, came to my town and stayed. So I felt the decision to come, when the aroma of intimidation which filled all my senses and the rapid beating of my heart mixed with it the pendulum that mimicked the step of death when it's approaching. So that was the day I said, "I don't want this for my life. I want, I want something else." And I just came.

DEBORAH:

So was there a particular event on that day that happened? You said the beating of your heart, and there was one particular day that you said this is it.

SANDRA:

It was when I came back when we was—when I was like in fifth grade, my family flee my family life, the small town to that big city. There I finished high school and I went to the college. When I finished college, I come back to work as a social worker in the hospital in the small town and I was, I worked for four years and especially with certain groups in the community especially, gays. And at one point I was training for those kind of groups that they usually say homosexuals was part of the contamination, a source of contamination. So that was something I experienced when I was a teenager when my friend was killed when he decided to be whatever he feels to do where he was starting wearing like short, tight shirts like female blouses and makeup. Scandalizing the whole community. And I wasn't shocked when this human being was denied to enter high school because he was a source of contamination and eventually he and others like him was killed. And something that groups called social cleansing, so homeless, homosexual, and people with mental illness were barred.

DEBORAH:

Excuse me, you said, homosexuals, homeless, and . . .

SANDRA:

People were mentally ill, people with mental ill—they had to be eliminated of the community by the social cleansing. So when, when I lived this experiences, I reminded myself to one day work with

this community. And it was something that I wait, I wait for the shortest wait for the flowers and the beaches for the waves, and having achieved it, it made my heart full. Because it wasn't so long was only four years, but we achieved a lot. We achieve a lot of goals that was working for like rights and service for this groups in the community.

THE DAY OF DECISION/06:22

DEBORAH:

So something happened?

SANDRA:

Yes. I have a visit at my office and this guy wasn't that friendly and say, "Well, you know, you are walking through very sensitive, like a land, like, territory. So we want you to stop. We, we have been respecting your family." My dad was a person who works in the community as well. He was a nurse in the hospital. "But that is something we won't tolerate anymore because you know, what is the rules here. So are you still working in protecting and fighting or doing something else for that kind." They use disrespectful, or mistreatment, like word to the homosexual that they gays. They say, "You have to take the decision because we won't tolerate this. So you have to leave or you have to quit or do something else." So I was, I just was tired the whole life. So seeing kind of stuff I wasn't happy with that was the day I said no more.

DEBORAH:

So did you come to the States seeking asylum?

SANDRA:

Yes, that's correct. So, and of course I went with the official report about it and, actually, well, because to this process you will need to, it was a long a long list through my family so that kidnapping and asking for money every month. Things like that because to live in there, to work in there, to grow in there, to have to pay every month to live and to be like to have a normal life to move around. You had the permission, to have the permission you have to pay. So it was something that was, I was tired and especially how they treat the community

and help people live with fear. So it was something like, I don't want to live like that. I don't want to receive that. I mean, people introduce that kind of situation and that life and they train and they talk like this is normal. And I thought like, no way, not for me, not for me.

DEBORAH:

So from the time that you made the decision to leave and actually left and came, how long did it take you to come to the United States?

SANDRA:

A few months. Well, I traveled from this small town to the capital, the Colombian capital, and two months after I went here, I arrived. I landed in the United States. I landed in Florida.

DEBORAH:

So you flew?

SANDRA:

Yeah, I did. I flew from my native country capital Bogota. I flew to Havanah. I went to Cuba first, and then I stayed there a few days. And then came here U.S. It was a process. It was a kind of process to do that. But here was when my process starts right here by just traveling. When I came here, I asked for asylum here in the United States. Not there I just want to go and try a different place and seeking for help in a different place. No here because the whole life I want to see in like corruption and you want something that you can find that people, it was something like because when you see that kind of corruption the whole life you don't trust anyone anymore.

WORK, A NEW LIFE, AND FINALLY REIGNITING A LONG POSTPONED PASSION/10:01

DEBORAH:

So what were the steps you took to make a new life here?

SANDRA:

I came here. I arrived in Boston and the first thing I found a job in the restaurant about two or three days after my landing. I was in Florida. And for a few days I worked in there and I know some people in Boston, so I came here. There was in the fall actually. Wasn't at the beginning or April. I'm not sure but it wasn't that cool. It wasn't winter

was like April, I arrived to Boston. I was hired at the restaurant. I work, I work in the food industry for fifteen wonderful years.

DEBORAH:

Whoa! Fifteen years in the food industry.

SANDRA:

Yeah. Fifteen years full of learning and meeting people who have been a gift to my life. But something I was wondering all the time and my mind was what I can do here with my studies in Colombia? That was something, it was all the time here. Although I enjoyed working at the restaurant and I appreciate the opportunity to have grown in a field that I would never have imagined. And the years of the language, parenting I had been the fifteen years. I had three children to hold me back. Like, hold me back but not for a while. I started to look for information. I was curious about education and it was in the meeting with a career advisor that this person guide me step by step. And that process of transferring university credit from my native country to here, which helped me enroll mostly. And the courses that I am currently taking to specialize in geriatrics. So it was, I was so happy about it because I know to redo my careers from Colombia was too expensive and it take a long time. So this is something I can start doing right now. And I, I feel so excited, so happy about it. As I told you a few minutes ago, although I enjoyed the work in the restaurant, I found the passion, the passion to do what I love, why I feel connected when I began to be a volunteer in a long-term care facility, almost about four years ago. And the moment at that place I found my inner peace or finding myself in my heart overflowing. And it wasn't until last year with the pandemic and everything, I questioned in myself and I decided to take a break from the restaurant. And focus on becoming a certified nurse's assistant. I managed to do it, and I was hired for full time at the long-term care center and I feel like I living the dream. This is my time. And this is I want to. This is I want for my life. This is I want.

A DREAM COMES TRUE/13:48

DEBORAH:

That's fantastic. So while you were working in the restaurant, you are also in school part of the time or not? When did you start the school program?

SANDRA:

Last year, last year at the beginning of the year, I decided, I said I will take a break. I want to be certified as a nurse's assistant. So I started school. I finish it a few months after. I started to take the courses to get a specialization in geriatrics. So I can be, I, I wanted to become, nurse specialized in geriatrics and it is a field that I can grow and I feel so excited to do. I think that is something that is my dream. This is my dream in a few years. I want to see myself, doing what I'm most passionate about. It doesn't feel like a job having more days of life to give back all the love I have a received.

BUILDING A FAMILY/14:49

DEBORAH:

Sounds like you've definitely found the work that you love and a way to do it. And it's so great that you got some credits from your education in Colombia. That's not always easy to do. That's great that you're able to do that. So how old are your children again? And when you came to the States, did you have any children? Were you married yet? Tell me a little bit about the birth of your family, if you don't mind.

SANDRA:

Sure. When I came here, actually my boyfriend at that moment was living in Boston for three years. We had our relationship. I was in Colombia. He went here and when I came to Boston, so we connected again. We had like a relationship through the distance. It was not easy. So when he noticed I was in Florida, so he said maybe you have more connection to Boston. So maybe. This is going to be more easy for you and I went with him. So I came, we reconnect again and, a few months after I was pregnant with my first child. So my oldest son, it will turn 16 soon. The middle guy's ten, and the baby is eight years old.

DEBORAH:

So were you working in the restaurant business while your kids were growing up? And also I'm going to ask you, how did you learn English? Because you speak very well.

SANDRA:

That's all kind of you. Thank you. Well, that's something I really appreciate about the food industry, the flexibility I have in terms of taking care of my family and being able to work and things that I achieve

some financial goals. At the same time, I was taking care of my family. And I have been blessed. I found people that I tell you, they are a gift to my life. That I had a manager with I work for the first time and this human being helping me. Enormously to grow. He pushed me a little bit at the beginning because when you, when you came here, you're afraid of everything. So I got a lot of support from him does the something I really appreciate and feel thankful. And I always thought to tell him that he's my family for my heart families is not the blood. He's just the heart. What make us family. And I have been blessed that the universe allowed me to be part of this family or being part of the family in this country. So I just left the restaurant last year. So all the time I've been in the United States, I've being working with him, with the restaurant and he actually, the guy left, the restaurant at the beginning, like, through our beginning to work, let's see, 10 years ago and I followed him to another restaurant and we worked together again, he asked me, "You want to join my crew? This is going to be a new project?" I say, "Of course! Let's do it." And we navigate together for another six more years together, but I was making money. I had with the flexibility to take care of my family, but it was something empty right here, I need something else. And always the question was in here and yeah, and I love who's that customer service, it was a great experience, but something was missing. That piece was missing inside my chest. I missed something else and I learned English or try it. And I still working on it to, well, you know, my silver lining when the pandemic in. We had a free GPA. They offer online classes. I wasn't able, I wasn't able to go to school every night. I live in East Boston. That was so complicated for me to go Tuesday and Thursday for classes. So I started, I started to take the classes online. And before that I went to church for classes. I went to so many community services that provides help the immigrants community to improve or help with a language and to help them, or to help us to find a better jobs, better communication, to be easy to go to a hospital, to help our children with homework. That was my biggest challenging helping my kids, my older son, especially with homework. So I seek for help and I found it and with many community programs. That was the way I try to learning.

LEARNING ENGLISH/20:04

DEBORAH:

How about your children, do they correct you and help you with your English?

SANDRA:

Actually, yes. They help me a lot and practicing when I'm practicing, my speech is something that was so funny because they usually sit down and just listen to me, look at me very serious. Like you are focused on your speech. And they correct me and they, and they help me, "Now pause, breathe, and start again." But once they look at each other, they just laugh. So they just pretend to be serious, but they can look together because they'll look at each other they feel so proud. Especially my oldest son. He went with me with the process of translate my high school and my college diploma and everything. And he was like, "Oh my God, you have an associate's degree?" "Yes. I was a social worker in my in my native country." He says, "Wow. I never imagined that. How cool you never told me." Well, yeah, maybe I was, you know, doing something else. I thought that wasn't that important. And I saw like a light right in his eyes like, oh, wow. I'm so proud of you. And now, so proud. Just more I can do in life. So they are, they're very happy and they helped me a lot.

MISSING COLOMBIA/21:35

DEBORAH:

Great. So what was the very hardest thing about either actually physically getting here to the States or once you got here, what was the biggest, biggest challenge that you had to overcome?

SANDRA:

I left everything behind everything. My whole life, my family, my childhood friends, everything is when you came here. I remember that I have a small suitcase and a couple dreams, but I feel like a huge bag of fears in my back. So it was biggest, the fears than everything else. I was afraid of everything. Eating. You mean a loss. Everything. I wasn't even, even, I wasn't allowed to eat because I was sick because the taste was not the same of my place. The water was different. Everything in smell, the color, the places that was the hard, hardest thing that I remember. The new start. When I came and I said, everything is behind me. When

I realize everything is behind and I am not allowed to come back. It was an impact. It is a shock, definitely. And I think the best way to describe my longing is to say, that that place over there, lay down for a nap and it stopped there and frozen in time.

DEBORAH:

You're saying that the past was like the place.

SANDRA:

Where I grew up.

FACING FEARS/23:22

DEBORAH:

You said that you had like a huge suitcase of fear on your back. When you came.

SANDRA:

So heavy.

DEBORAH:

It weighed you down. When did the fear start to lift and get lighter?

SANDRA:

Once I feel, once I get confidence, once I was able to communicate, because when, when you can't express yourself, you can't even say what do you want for eat. And in some cases, so you avoid to talk, you avoid, the being relationship, what you avoid everything. It is so many stories I can tell you in the restaurant about funny things, funny facts, like where you don't know anything about the language. And I was even afraid to talk and order food because I wasn't sure that was right or not the people will laugh at me. So when you come to get a little bit of confidence and improve a little language, the language, and you start meet or know the place where you going. Because at the beginning is hard even to take the train because you will not get lost. Right? So you start knowing the place. You feel confident, little by little you, I was dropping one fear little by little, another one, little by little, one more. And right now I'm flying. I am the air. So not that does not like that, but, but with more confidence I'm happy and I'm thankful for each single step that brought me here. And I will say I will take the same step again. And hopefully, in the future tomorrow, when I look back, hopefully with the certainty or have I am living fully, I have been tried everything I wanted regardless the results.

TRANSFORMATION/25:34

DEBORAH:

You talked earlier before we started recording about—you used the word transformation. You want to say a few words about how important that word is to you and to your life?

SANDRA:

Yes, of course. Sometimes I said, “We achieve some goals.” More time. We usually compare our life to somebody else. And this is a bigger mistake in something that I have learned during the years. Don’t count the time. Sometime we view the steps because each step is a reminder how capable we are and our ability to adapt. So when we focus on how long will it take me to take, to do this. Oh my God, how long? If I think seventeen years after I came to United States, I started to do it, what really I am passionate about it now. I said, I feel proud because I will work in a field that I never would have imagined it like in the food industry. And I have learned a lot. I have been surrounded for a wonderful people. So I have been transformed by the time and also by the people I have been learning a little bit of each person. So, so my main focus, my main idea right now is that focus and my transformation. Don’t count the time the time how long it took me to be here today.

DEBORAH:

Just take it one step at a time and don’t count how many steps you’re going to have to take.

SANDRA:

No, because every single step is a reminder for how strong or how capable we are. Every single day had to, I mean, I want to say, don’t regret of what did you did. What not because he had to be like that because we had something to learn. That’s my way to say that things

DEBORAH:

You look for the lesson in whatever is going on even if it seems like adversity, you know, you’re going to learn something from it.

SANDRA:

Yeah, absolutely.

ADVICE/27:55

DEBORAH:

What kind of advice would you give to

someone coming here based on what you’ve learned?

SANDRA:

Be ready to a hug for a long time the people you left behind. They’re there for long, long time. You will miss that. Miss the last hug, they will miss the people and enjoy the maximum. Every single minute you will have in that place because you will miss that. So, so much and be ready. Don’t give up, be ready to do your best every single day. Bring some pictures with you. Cause that’s going to be the reminder. How lucky you have been with the time ten or fifteen years after. That’s something important for me when I look at pictures that reminds me how lucky I have been. And also I can tell you that bring the faith with which you will tie your shoes every single day and your memories. Good memories. That will be like a holy water that irrigates the flow for your soul. That the most important thing that with that my advice of someone who will come. That’s the important things.

DEBORAH:

Could you just say one more time what you meant about tying your shoes every day? Was that it was that just from the past or for right now every day?

SANDRA:

For the past. And though as the right now, I mean, the faith, when the person came here. Faith to tie your shoes every day. That’s when I get up in the morning and say, I have the faith today, I will tie my shoes in my place and I will stand up. That’s my way. As the memories, that same memory as the holy water. Now you relate the flow of our soul.

THE MAGIC HAT/30:00

DEBORAH:

That’s beautiful. So, Sandra, did you bring any little item or anything with you from Colombia that you still have?

SANDRA:

Yes, I have. I have a magic hat. I have a hat with a magic singularity.

DEBORAH:

Oh, let me see it. Can you show it to me



SANDRA:

Yep. It’s a magic hat. And the singularities to keep the aroma of its former owner, my dad. So it was for me, a magic hat. Every time I want a hug from my dad, I smell it and put it here to my chest, and this is my favorite thing. So I brought this hat and also pictures in for my faith and my memories.

DEBORAH:

That’s great. In addition to the podcast, there’s a printout. It has the transcript that people can read. And so there’ll be a picture. I’ll include a picture of you holding that magic hat.

SANDRA:

Yes, I did. My dad gave it to me when when I decided to come. It was the best thing in that hat. He had his hat for a long time. So it’s a really old hat, a magic hat. And I can read you. I can tell you like a piece that describes where I’m coming from. A little bit words, what am I learning is where I’m missing. *It’s a place that I think, it doesn’t have many change through the years. So two years, because I believe the trees are still there, I do not remember if those trees bore fruit or shade, I do know they gave birds of many colors and sizes, the same happy trees that were smiling taught us the geometry of light. It also blows the same wind that is trained to direct the dance of the birds, while timidly wandering the same clouds where we saw traces of ghosts, angels, and fairies in the leaf-covered patio of the houses, still living a silence of three in the afternoon that accompanied the melody of a dying accordion. That’s my place.*

DEBORAH:

Did you compose that? It sounds almost like a poem.

SANDRA:

I just find a release when I write what I feel, what I miss.

RESILIENCE THROUGH GRATITUDE/32:46

DEBORAH:

It's very beautiful. Is there anything else that you want to share?

SANDRA:

Yes. hopefully I will see you in a few years and I will see you. I made it. I still working in hospice. I love it. I am still feeling the passion to do it. I would like to continue to encourage my children to worship nature and the importance when remind them the importance of celebrating and be thankful for the existence of others. And I'm trying our best every day, teaching them what we are made of, we are made of all the feelings all the passion or they work hard. Where we come from, where their mom coming from when they place, where the inhabitants are possessed by the folkloric spirit that allow the people who take solemnity out of life, laughing of the mysteries. And that is something I am mining. And that's something that maybe it's maybe in my genes and hopefully in my kids too.

DEBORAH:

Well, the best lesson is always the power of example. And the fact that you are pursuing your passion, doing what you love, that's the best example you can set for your children. That's for sure. This is great. Thank you so much, Sandra.

SANDRA:

I hope I've been clear and helpful in my message with you at the clear way, hopefully.

VISITING COLOMBIA AND PLANS FOR CITIZENSHIP/34:25

DEBORAH:

I have one more question. What are your plans for citizenship so that you can go back to Colombia and visit your family? And if so, what are the steps you're taking to make it a reality?

SANDRA:

Well, actually we have the opportunity, the kids and I went last year and that was something amazing. It was complicated because the pandemic, it wasn't that long. Bitter and sweet bite for me because when you get there, it is not the same. I don't find the people I left one day. Mostly they are

gone and the fear still complicated because the aroma of my children is different. And always you feel like I need to protect them or something. So we was allowed to do that. It was a gift to our life. No, I got my residence approved last year. And was allowed to move and travel.

DEBORAH:

That's fantastic.

SANDRA:

And we enjoyed it. That was the best ever thing with them. This is a gift we want to enjoy a few days. It was two weeks. It was so short. And I still want to bring, especially them to know where I grew up exactly place, but it's so complicated because there are security situation all the violence still. So it's not safe, it's not safe. So we visited some part that we really appreciate. And my way to the citizenship, it will come. It will come through I'll be there and I will let you know when I manage because you guys are being really, really important piece in my process. The classes last year was amazing. Have been really, really, really helpful. And, hopefully, more kind of people like you guys, being there like angels to guide and help our community. Thank you so much. And God bless you.

DEBORAH:

Thank you so much, Sandra, for this interview. And I'm so glad that you were able to go back to Colombia for a couple of weeks with your residency permit. That's fantastic. You're on your way. Thank you so much.

SANDRA:

Oh, Deb, I have been a real pleasure. Thank you so, so, so much. Hopefully I can see you soon. Stay safe.

WRAPPING UP/37:14

Always grateful for her journey, including any obstacles along her path, Sandra radiates good cheer for the life she has crafted for herself and her children. With a loving heart and a spirit full of wisdom, Sandra offers encouragement and is a powerful example of resilience. Finding the silver lining in whatever befalls her, her primary focus has always been a search for the lesson she can learn from every situation.



EPISODE #21—WILLIAM FROM GUATEMALA

GUEST INTRO/00:38

At an early age, William had dreams of growing buildings instead of the crops that his parents raised on their rural farm in Guatemala. In the 90s, as an 18-year-old, he came to the United States to widen his horizons and pursue his goals. Once here, he moved from restaurant worker to landscaper, handyman helper, and eventually became a licensed general contractor. William did all this while raising a family and becoming fluent in English beyond the few phrases gained from tourist books and audiotapes. A successful entrepreneur, William has more work than he can handle, and yet he has found that often elusive balance between professional and personal goals.

COMING TO THE U.S./01:43

DEBORAH:

My guest is William from Guatemala. So tell me, William, what led you to come to the United States?

WILLIAM:

First of all, because in my country I didn't have much opportunities, so and I have heard that here there are more opportunities. So I was like 18 years old and of course, I was looking do something to explore something new in a different country and all that because I used to work enough. My dad has a small farm, so I used to be a farmer. So we grow like corn, wheat, and potatoes and all kinds of vegetables. But that wasn't enough for me. So I said, "One day, I just want to." Everybody talks good about the U.S. and I said, "I want to go see how good it is." And then, you know, I make my decision. My family wasn't too happy about it because I left them alone. It's very hard. But here I am. Fortunately, I started

working right away. And I've worked in a restaurant as a cook helper and then I'm like for five months I was a landscaper. And then I met a guy who used to do who was like a handyman. Then I started learning a lot of stuff from him. Then after that in 2016 I got my work authorization permit and then after that, I study hard to get my supervisor's, my carpenter's supervisor license. So then I got it. And then I opened up my business legally in 2017.

DEBORAH:

Was it hard to get from Guatemala to the United States? Did you have any trouble? Did you come on a tourist visa or how did you get here?

WILLIAM:

It was hard for me because, yeah, I went to apply for a visa. So they didn't give me a visa and so I have to jump the border.

DEBORAH:

Did you encounter anything dangerous on the way?

WILLIAM:

Fortunately not.

DEBORAH:

So you were 18 years old and what year was that?

WILLIAM:

1993.

DEBORAH:

1993 and you were 18 years old? I'm assuming you were single at that point or did you, did you meet your wife?

WILLIAM:

I met her down there because I went back years later, I went back. So I met her there and then I brought her again. So I came back.

ADJUSTING/ENGLISH/04:06

DEBORAH:

What was the hardest thing about coming to the States? Adjusting? Did you have any trouble adjusting? How was your English? Did you speak any English because your English is very good at this point?

WILLIAM:

No, I didn't. I mean, I knew a little, because, my mom, she and my parents were here in 1989 to 1990. So when they went back they brought some books and some tapes because that's the way they did it here when they were here to learn basic English. So they brought those and I was very, you know, I was very happy too, when they came back with them. And so then I started to learn because of the schools over there they teach England English and it's totally different. And then, you know, and the teachers, I mean they, they learn whatever they can learn so when a U.S. citizens, because there are a lot of people who's teaching English down there so that when you feel lucky that someone teaches you English from here and then is good. So when I came here, I didn't know much. I mean, just basic words, like "thank you" or "how are you?," or just you know, almost nothing. And then I went to school for like four years. That helped me a lot and I really paid a lot of attention. Because when I came, I said, I have to learn English because otherwise, I'm not going to be able to speak with anyone. And I know it's hard, but nothing that I could not do it.

DEBORAH:

You said you went to school for four years. Was that the Gardner or was it?

WILLIAM:

Jackson Mann. Yeah, I guess in those days, I think Gardner, I don't know if that was in 2011 to 2014 when I went to school at night time, but, yeah, so I apply over there. And then, yeah, they gave me a seat over there. So I used to go.

BECOMING AN ENTREPRENEUR/06:15

DEBORAH:

When did you decide to start your own business?

WILLIAM:

I decided that in 2006 because I used to work with this guy so and then I stopped, met a lot of people and then I met an architect in Cambridge and she helped us a lot because she hired us to do a renovation

in her house. So we spent almost a full summer in her house. We did the kitchen with the two bathrooms with the some exterior work like retaining walls and patios and all that stuff. So and then, after that, she asked me she said, "If you want to work with me." and I said, "Yup." So and then every project that when someone called her for drawings or this and that. And then she offered us, I mean, she offered the whole package and a lot of people got it. So that was the way that I start. And then it wasn't that easy because at the beginning, I remember we were waiting the whole winter we weren't doing anything because it was a little bit hard, but we survived.

DEBORAH:

So the name of your business is Merita Brothers. So was your brother in the States before you?

WILLIAM:

Yes.

DEBORAH:

How's his English?

WILLIAM:

Yes. It's good because he went to school too.

DEBORAH:

Have you been able to go back to Guatemala?

WILLIAM:

Not since 2005.

DEBORAH:

Is that a problem for you? You want to go back to visit or you're not able to?

RIDING OUT COVID/07:46

WILLIAM:

I'm not able to because I just have the work authorization permits. Every year when I talked to my lawyer, he said maybe next year or I'm still waiting to the first go to court. But I mean the one. Being so now it's, it's hard. So, and then COVID-19 is slow down a lot. So it's hard.

DEBORAH:

How did you manage during the pandemic, into the height of the pandemic? Did you have work to do, what happened?

WILLIAM:

I stopped for like a month because I got

sick. I got the COVID when I first started. The COVID just started in March I guess. And then I got the COVID in April, so all of the month of April I was home. It was hard. But after that I started, I always had work and, yeah, it wasn't too bad.

BECOMING A LICENSED GENERAL CONTRACTOR/08:40

DEBORAH:

What are you hoping to do professionally, in the future? Do you have a permit? Are you a general contractor licensed? What's the status with that?

WILLIAM:

Yes, I am a contractor. I'm a licensed contractor still. Yeah. I've done like three big renovations lately that two houses we converted a two-family into a single family, which is unlikely in these days. Everybody wants to make the other homes. I mean instead of one apartment they want to do two but then this. It was the opposite. So I act like a general contractor.

DEBORAH:

Was it hard to get licensed? What did you have to go through?

WILLIAM:

Just to study a lot because it requires a lot of studying and then take classes and that exam is I think they're like 75 questions. They give you three hours to and then you have to come up with 68 right questions. And I got it the first time. Right.

DEBORAH:

Congratulations. That's great. You only took it one time. That's terrific.

WILLIAM:

Yeah. Because I really started to study. When I want something, I just focus on the stuff and then I got it because you know, I took the classes and then the teacher says, "You should just study, study, study, and then take the tests. Don't wait until you forget about it, and then you're not going to pass it. I want you guys to pass the test." So I did exactly what he told me and I took the classes in, I think it was from June to September, and then the exam. I applied for the exam because it takes a little longer, but I did it in October of 2016. And I was okay. And I was surprised because when I finished the test and then the guy said he

was I wasn't sure what to do. And then I asked him and I said, "What happened? Did I pass it or something?" And he said, "Oh, you didn't see the score?" I said, "No." Then he said, "No, you pass it." Oh, okay. And then the architect she was very happy about that because she used to pull the permits when any job a big job. So she's, she used to pull the permits with her license. And then when she helped me a lot because the state did require a two-year list. You have to work for a company for two years, a registered company. So, and then I didn't have that but since you know, I worked with her for long time. So and then she wrote a letter saying that she knows me for many years and then they accepted that.

DETERMINATION RUNS DEEP/11:50

DEBORAH:

That's fantastic. Were you always so determined once you make your mind up about something like to learn English, to come here and to become, a general contractor, a licensed general contractor? How long have you always had this determined personality?

WILLIAM:

Since I was a child. Because you know, my dream was to be an architect, but it didn't happen. That's something that I've missed, but I love my work when I start learning. First thing, when I came here and I saw a big house, a big construction house they built they were building a big house. And I said, "Someday, I'm going to do that." I don't build houses, but I renovate them, which is I think is part of my job. And I love it because I you know I don't like to do the same thing every day. I like to learn something different or do something different every day. So, that's why I love my job.

DEBORAH:

How much of your job involves getting to design things? Since you had this desire to be an architect, you must have an artistic design sense. And are you able to use it on the job?

WILLIAM:

Yes. To know how to read the plans, that's the first thing. And then all the measurements and this and that, and then how are we going to start. How are we going to continue and then finish? And you know, all

those little details. So I don't think I missed a lot if I wasn't an architect because if I was an architect that was in be able to the design and do this stuff actually it looks like I am more happy than do the stuff than just draw a picture. So I am more happy that I can do—

FAMILY MATTERS/13:50

DEBORAH:

Hands-on. You do hands-on work. Tell me a bit about your family.

WILLIAM:

Yeah, my family. I have two daughters here and then a boy is 17 years old. My daughter is 15 years-old and an eight. And she's going to Boston Latin and I am very proud of her because she's really hard worker.

DEBORAH:

That's a very challenging school.

WILLIAM:

Yes it is. And now she's happy because she's learning Italian. So this summer she's going to Italy for 26 days.

DEBORAH:

Oh, that's fantastic. What part of Italy is she going to go to?

WILLIAM:

Rome. Yeah, so it's, yeah. I love my family and everybody.

ADVICE/14:39

DEBORAH:

What kind of advice, William, would you give to somebody just coming to the States for the first time, based on your experience, both the mistakes you might've made and the things that you've learned? What advice would you give to somebody?

WILLIAM:

Because it took a long time to go to school. You started learning English in the streets which is not the same as if you go to school. That was the first mistake that I made. And then I applied to legalize, to be a citizen because if I, if I had applied, when I first came, I wouldn't have this problem now, but that was big. One of the big, big mistakes. Because I know a lady who I used to work with her just a little work when I was doing working with this other guy. So one time I went to work in her house and she

says it says you should apply for your visa because that was in 1990 because it was very easy to get the green cards and then I didn't pay attention to her. And then later, like a few months or three weeks later she asked me, she said, "You have you applied for your visa?" And I said, "No." And she said, "Why?" "Because I have nobody to sign for me." And she says, "Why you didn't tell me? I should I can sign for you." But it was too late. So those are one of the biggest mistakes that I made when I came here. So and then the good things you know, I just tell them just go to school right away and then just be a good person. It's a country of a lot of opportunities that in our country we don't have it.

DEBORAH:

Did you bring anything with you from Guatemala all those years ago that you still have?

WILLIAM:

No.

DEBORAH:

Did you bring much with you? Just the shirt on your back or what?

WILLIAM:

Yeah, just not much.

DEBORAH:

You said from the time that you were a young boy, you had a determined personality. Do you have any stories that you could tell me about things that you might've done that maybe somebody else wouldn't have done, maybe a risk you took even as a child?

WILLIAM:

No.

DEBORAH:

When you said that you were going to come here, people discouraged you, your parents discouraged you.

WILLIAM:

They said, "You're going to be alone there" and this and that. Life is going to be different than this and that, but I said, "Okay, I'm just going to try."

MISSING GUATEMALA/17:18

DEBORAH:

What do you miss the most about Guatemala?

WILLIAM:

My family, my parents, and yeah. My grandma. She used to live with us, so and yeah, she passed away last year. So it was, it was too hard for me because she always tell me "When you get to come back and I'm going to die and I'm not going to see you again." And sometimes she starts crying. So that those kinds of things those are the things that make me sad. And that's what I've missed a lot.

DEBORAH:

Sure. Did you do FaceTime with your family and Skype?

WILLIAM:

WhatsApp. It's, it's a lot easier. Yeah. When the Skype when does that start. Yeah, we used to do Skype, but I don't use Skype anymore. It's easier with the WhatsApp application.

BALANCED GROWTH/18:07

DEBORAH:

So where do you see yourself in five years with your business and what you're doing?

WILLIAM:

That was one thing I was dreaming about to do—flipping houses. That was one of my big dreams, but I just find out that at this moment there's not a good time because I know a lot of a realtors, clients, and they're all telling me the same thing. I thought that was going to work to flip houses I was really going to work for me, but it looks like this market is, it's crazy. I have to have a lot of money and actually I know a guy who used to do that then he retired because he says it's not a good time to do it. I don't want to take the risk and it's something that now, I always want to be positive, and this moment, so I just want to continue working. And maybe just this year we hire another guy. So just probably grew up more with my business. A little bit bigger. I don't want to be too big too, because I think it's—

DEBORAH:

More headaches, more headaches.

WILLIAM:

I like to sleep very well. I don't like to because sometimes when I have two jobs at the same time and this and that, and I can't sleep, I can't rest. So I think life is short so really just be, I don't know, whatever. It's step-by-step.

DEBORAH:

It sounds like you're trying to find the balance between work and personal life, personal time. What are some of the things you do to keep that balance?

WILLIAM:

It has to be with my life and my family too because I wanna know that I have my kids, that we have our kids with us. I always tell my wife that we have to take care of them because spend time with them because once they go to college and they're going to disappear like I did. So I want to enjoy them. And I want to, I just want to make enough money to live. And fortunately, we bought this house two years ago, which was one of the biggest dreams and we have it. So from now until five years, I just want to save some money and maybe someday retire. And if I get my citizenship one day, I just want to travel. I would like to travel and know a lot of places.

DEBORAH:

Where are some of the places you'd like to go?

WILLIAM:

Europe is the first. I want to go to Spain. I want to go to Italy, Greece. Yeah. All those beautiful places over there.

WHEN TO SAY "NO"/20:46

DEBORAH:

So in getting a good work-life balance, it means you have to say no to some things. How do you say no to a job that makes you feel stressful just thinking about it? Do you ever say no to a job?

WILLIAM:

Yes. Yeah, because if I see the things that I can't handle it. So I said, no, I just I can't do that. I mean not that I can't do it, but I don't have enough time because sometimes people says, "Okay, can you do this by certain time?" And if it's a quite a big job, and then they say, "Oh no, you have to be done by a certain time because I have to move and this and that then I have to do this." And I say, "Oh oh forget about it. This is not for me." Because some people says sometimes "Oh I have another guy who can do it in six months. And you say, you can do it in eight months." So I said, "No. Okay. I can't, I can't take it." Because sometimes people try to cheat you.

DEBORAH:

In what way do they cheat you?

WILLIAM:

That way. Because sometimes they say, oh, no, because I have somewhere else that they can do it cheaper. And then and quicker. And I say, oh, I can't do that. I mean this is gonna, this is my price. This is what it's going to take me because we're not until we started the job and this and that. So I'd rather go that way.

DEBORAH:

That makes a lot of sense.

WILLIAM:

Many times I just say I can't do it. So just find somewhere else or something because if I see things too complicated or that I can't handle right away. So, like I said, I like to sleep well.

THE IDEAL CLIENT/22:24

DEBORAH:

Who's an ideal client? What would an ideal client be?

WILLIAM:

Ideal clients are the people that say okay this is going to be a little bit of extra time. This is going to be a little bit of extra money because we found this we found that and the people say yes okay, just fine. But some people start screaming and they say, oh no, you're bad. That was included when you didn't tell me this and that. And I thought this was going to happen. But I said, this is the so I always tell people at the beginning of any job I said, "Okay, this is to start, but when we are going to start opening up the walls, floors, we don't know exactly what we're going to find. If you want things done right, we found that it is going to be extra or just going to cost you more money because it's going to be more labor for me. We're going to have to spend more time, materials and this and that." And some people say "Yes. Okay." Is that people don't care about it. Sometimes they want the job done. But that's when we have to be careful about who we are dealing with.

DEBORAH:

You have to get a sense that the person that you can trust that it's a good customer, a good client versus somebody who is not going to understand this idea of pre-existing

condition. What's hidden. You have to have that loophole in the contract because you never know.

WILLIAM:

Yeah. And there's always always something, something, and some people don't want to understand that. I mean they understand. But they want to cheat you, but I try not to get into that.

FUTURE DREAMS/24:06

DEBORAH:

Well, William, is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about your experience either coming here, being here, and in the future? Any other dreams about the future?

WILLIAM:

Maybe just have my own house because this is we bought it together with my brother. I would like to get my own, my own house. Not around here a little bit far away from the city. But that's where going to be hard because all the work is around here, so, and I don't like to travel every day too far. So I don't know that's one of my crazy dreams but.

DEBORAH:

There's nothing crazy about that dream. How did you get in touch with the Gardner? How did that happen?

WILLIAM:

My two daughters are were studying there. Actually, I still have my little daughter she's in there. She's in third grade. Yeah. My elder daughter was there for eight years, seven years. So that's how we know.

DEBORAH:

You're a Gardner parent.

WILLIAM:

Yes.

KEEPING BOUNDARIES/25:26

DEBORAH:

Well, it's been great talking to you. I've seen some pictures of your work. It's flawless. And I think anybody that gets to work with you is lucky. And I like the idea that you turn work down if the goals are unrealistic. If they want you they'll wait for you.

WILLIAM:

So that's why last year I had a good expe-

rience with a lady in Cambridge. She was waiting for me like for four months. And then she said, oh no because you can't do it, this and that. And then she started pulling the permit for and then I said, I don't like to do that because, you know, if I don't have a license then the homeowner can do that. But then what's the deal. I said to her, "No, I can't. I can't do it. Because this is not the way, the way I work." Then there's a lot of people like that. Most of my work is just for recommendation. So people, say good things about us and then . . .

DEBORAH:

Word of mouth, word of mouth.

WILLIAM:

And that's the best way to go.

DEBORAH:

Thank you very much, William.

WILLIAM:

Thank you for interviewing me and thank you for this great conversation.

WRAPPING UP/26:41

Determined to grow and build his home renovation business to make a living, William has learned how to be a successful entrepreneur who balances his professional and personal life to allow both areas to flourish. With his expert carpentry skills, his designer's eye, and his role as a licensed general contractor, he breathes new life into old houses. Even though some clients must wait months for his services, they are always happy when his expertise enhances their homes. William and his family are a vital part of our Gardner community.