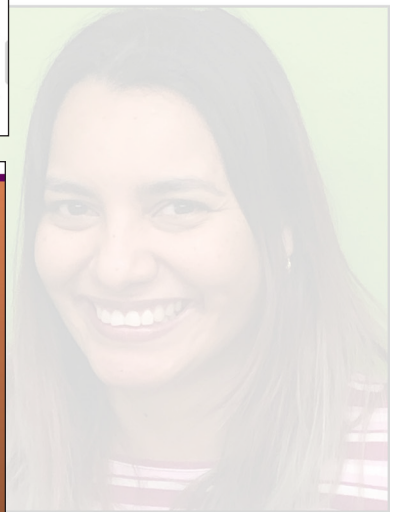
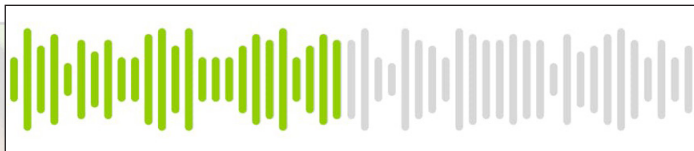
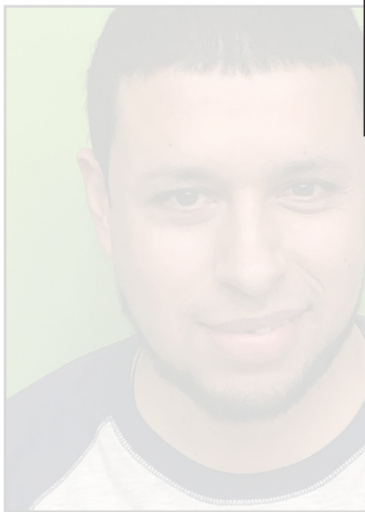


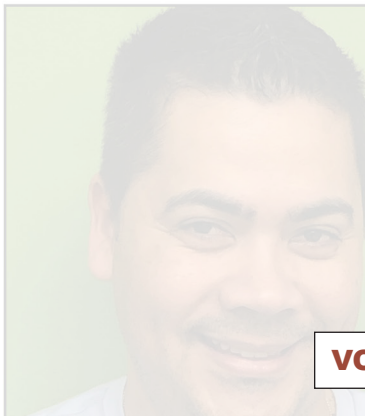


TRANSCRIPTS

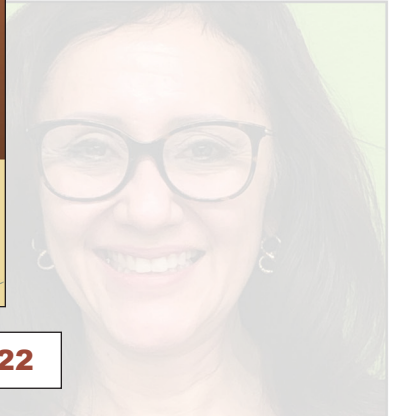


IMMIGRANT VOICES

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



VOLUME NINE: EPISODES 25-27 • SUMMER 2022



IMMIGRANT VOICES

Episode 25
PEDRO
from
EL SALVADOR



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES

IMMIGRANT VOICES

Episode 26
REMZI from
TURKEY



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES

IMMIGRANT VOICES

Episode 27
IRANI from
Brazil



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES



**EPISODE #25 — PEDRO
FROM EL SALVADOR**

•

**EPISODE #26 — REMZI
FROM TURKEY**

•

**EPISODE #27 — IRANI
FROM BRAZIL**

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 #25—PEDRO FROM EL SALVADOR

GUEST INTRO/00:37

As a teenager and bait for gang recruitment, Pedro reluctantly fled El Salvador. This young father had to leave his wife and newborn son to seek asylum in the U.S., only to find himself ten years later deported. With his life threatened by gangs and his desperate need to return to his growing family in Boston, Pedro escaped El Salvador a second time. Arrested at the border, he was sent to a Tacoma Washington, detention facility. Against all odds, Pedro won his release. Pedro's story is a testimony to his resilience, passion for this country, optimism, and determination not only in the face of life-threatening gangs but also in his intrepid desire to increase his English vocabulary word by word.

ESCAPING TO THE U.S./01:52

DEBORAH:

My guest tonight is Pedro from El Salvador. Welcome Pedro. What were the stages of your coming to the U.S.? What were the turning points? What was the moment you knew that you were going to come?

PEDRO:

The reason I choose to make the big step which is me to think about left my country is because first of all, I know my wife for long time. I think we met when we was eight or nine years old. And we go to the school together pretty much and then come the relationship. Was such nice moments. What I remember from when I was little and then when I turned 14, no, 13 and 16, that's what I think from when I was 13 it started like getting worse and worse. I mean the whole country but most of the place where we used to live was terrible with the gangs and all that. And the thing

is everything was okay. We went to school together and first of all one of our friends was get killed. That one was a really serious like, like, because we never thought one of our friends—he don't even do anything bad. He just enjoy the life, do sports, go to the school, have fun, like teenagers do. But after that, I saw, believe or not, after four days after that we saw that they kill a little kid seven years old. A blow for our house. In that moment made me sad is because I just went with Xiomara because she went to the school in that moment, I think was around seven. I just left her in the bus. And soon when I turned my back and back to home, I just heard the shot. Pow! When I heard that, I just turned around and I saw the kid just go down in the ground. And I saw a lot of blood and all that. I still have that one in my mind. My those moments. Before was one of our best friends. And then I see that and then it start getting worse in the nights. Those guys start ask for money. The entire country was really worse, but the place we used to live was one of the worst parts then in El Salvador. And then three weeks and up it was we cannot even go outside anymore. Like used to be. I used to do a lot of stuff. I used to dance too. Good stuff for part of the school and then some of them on the side. Because of that, my mom— she's the one has a friend lives in here, in Texas, I believe. And those back in the days and my mother start talk about that friend if she helped for me to come over. Because for me, most for men in that moment, it was very dangerous. In that moment, we already have the first kid, which is made Francisco.

DEBORAH:

How old was Francisco at that point?

PEDRO:

Four months old. Yeah. I mean only remind me that moment it's hard because I was between 16 and 17, I believe. About that age.

DEBORAH:

So you were a very young father.

PEDRO:

Yeah, because, that's what I said. We met each other with Xiomara, my wife, in high school. We start do things and then this all good Francisco came. I remember that

night we was talk mostly the whole night. Talk about that. Because my mom, she finds someone can help us to come in the U.S. And but for me to make that decision and Xiomara as well was very hard because on one side I know, in that moment was really dangerous for me to be there. As a man. Because every teenager it was worse, like really worse to be out, to go out, take the bus. But we was talk about the whole night and then we just decide, I have to, no matter what I have to do it.

DEBORAH:

Were the gangs trying to recruit you into the gang?

PEDRO:

Yeah. Basically they force us to do part of them. This is the really the issue for because if you don't be a part of the gangs, you have to you have to do stuff for them. That's what they force you. No matter what you or no, if you don't like it, they kill you. That's it! That that's simple. That's it! So you refuse. Soon as you turn your back, they shoot you.

DEBORAH:

So when you decided to leave, did you sort of just kind of escape?

PEDRO:

Yes. Kind of escape. They don't even know about the day I left from my country. Soon they don't even saw me anymore go out anything like that. They asked Xiomara, they went to our house to knock the doors and asked for me. And she said, "I don't even know. He just move." She just said, "He just left me. He just move out." Because she don't want to either tell nothing about where am I going that moment? And after, one part of me is okay—I do this because if I stay here, I have to be part of them. If I refuse, I gotta be killed. That was the reality in that moment. But for me in my mind, I was okay, I have to leave my love, my mom, my dad. And then my son was only four months old. And Xiomara, I mean, was really very hard moments for us. But we have to do no matter what. And then my mind was like, okay, if whatever I go, sooner or later they are going to be with me no matter what, because I just see my son in my hands when he just born and was everything for me in

that moment from there and up, be a father was privilege for me. I can't even imagine to be in that position again anymore because I have, we already have three kids, Francisco and two baby girls. And, but wow.

DEBORAH:

The girls were born here in the States, right?

PEDRO:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DEBORAH:

So is Francisco considered a Dreamer?

PEDRO:

Yes. He's a such a nice kid. We try to do the best with him because we both of us was really young when we have Francisco and for us was kind of start to learn how to be a father or parents. We try to have good relationship with him, but so far we think, just, we, we do the great 'cause with him because he's really such a nice kid. Yeah. With the schools, everything he been done. Also right now he's enjoy a program in Harvard because he won the program. He's pretty smart kid.

ACROSS THE BORDER, NOW WHAT?/09:42

DEBORAH:

That's great. Tell me about, so once you decided to basically escape from El Salvador, did you have some kind of visa or how did you make it to the States? I know you had somebody there, a friend of your mother's that was going to help you out.

PEDRO:

You just come like anybody else, when they escape from the countries you just, for in that moment, I don't even know he just told me, they told me, "Okay, someone has gotta come over in some sort of place to pick you up. You need to just follow him whatever he said. And then he's gotta take you on the trip." And then was really hard moments because I never thought in my life when I was that age and when I was a kid I have to leave my country because the situation that we used to be living in. And then but we just decide—my mom she's the one was really concerned more because she know the reality in that moment. She don't want me to be there anymore. My mom call everyone because we don't even have money to afford it any trip or anything like that.

That's why my mom, she's the one, start call people, friends, and thanks God, she finds a nice friend. She said, "Okay, I can help your son to come over because I see it." And she knows too the lady, she knows the situation that was El Salvador what's been through.

DEBORAH:

What happened when you got here? Was this woman in Texas? What brought you to Boston?

PEDRO:

This is another part of this story,

DEBORAH:

That's okay. All the parts count. Any part you want to share.

PEDRO:

After I came in Texas, right. Everything was fine. I start do some work and decide with some friends that she knows and talk to about me then that she finds a job for me. But the thing is she don't even have a time for me to show me, take care of me, like put me in the school to learn English or whatever, because she was extremely busy, like everybody else in this country when they came. She basically has three jobs and nobody being home. Most of the time I be alone. And then when she just called me, "Hey, someone's going to go to the house to pick you up if you want to work. Okay?" I just went, you know, I work with these guys and then with the other guy. But one day I was talked to with Xiomara because her father was up here in Boston and her father told her, "Yeah, if Pedro wants to come to my house, I can help him." In that moment we don't really have good relationship is because he knows the beginning of the story. Because we know that we just became parents like that age. He basically support Xiomara the whole time, but when Xiomara tried to get support from him, he basically he saying no, because he—I'm totally understand. Because he don't even know me. He don't even know who I am. But long story short, I was talked with him on the phone and he told me, "Yeah, if you want to come I can know you better and I can get you a job or whatever." After two months, he is the one told me, how do I can get a ride. And the bus you buy the ticket and then I don't even know about nothing about this country. Every everyone speaks English. I don't even know anything. And

I don't know how I did it to go to the bus station and get into that. What I remember I took seven different buses to get up here. Was a good experience for me. After that, when I came here, he was pretty good with me. He found a good job for me in restaurants. And after that in Boston, I feel more comfy for the weather. Believe or not cold weather, I don't know why, but I love cold weather. And then I know more people and I start hear about the programs, this program for English, and I started, went into it, because I want to learn the language. I need to know more people. After we start work, we make a plan to see if Xiomara can come with Francisco. She was there two years alone because believe it or not, every single days around the country was around 20, 26 kills. Every days. Every days—one block, two blocks, another one, three blocks all around the area. That was a part of the life in El Salvador. Every day, about 20, 26 kills, every day, every day. It was that terrible, terrible, like I have a lot of family still in there, but some of them getting killed, same, because of that friends. Usually because of Facebook, we met old friends for the school and when we asked for, "Hey, how's Jose? How's? Oh, no, man. He's they kill. He'll kill him." When you started ask for them, "Oh, no, he's not here anymore."

DEBORAH:

That's terrible.

PEDRO:

Oh yeah.

REUNITING THE FAMILY/15:18

DEBORAH:

You must have been really happy to finally get Xiomara out of there and Francisco. Some relief. Where did you all live once they came up here?

PEDRO:

When they came same with my father-in-law he rent me a bedroom. But when Xiomara came with Francisco we live together the whole family. And from that time and up, life was more calm because from the time I left my country, left my kids, Xiomara, my parents. And those two years, I can't even sleep well. I can't even be well in the days, because only for think about how, how, where they was in that time, this is what we was talking serious about to get out of there.

DEBORAH:

I can't believe how dangerous it was there for you.

PEDRO:

I think for most of the peoples, they have a really bad times in our country.

DEBORAH:

Is it still like that?

PEDRO:

This time is because of the new president, right? Seems like it's more controlled about gangs, but there's another things that's pop up. Now there's no the gangs anymore for this moment. But the police, they start getting corrupt, ask for money. One thing is getting fixed little by little, but another part it's starting getting worse, because now there's not the bad guys anymore. They say gangs they still, they still do stuff, but not like before, not that the crazy like before. They still do stuff on but kills probably were once a week for now is good because for seven years straight was between 20, 26 kills per day, but now I think it's getting better.

TRANSITIONING FROM RESTAURANT TO MOVING BUSINESS/17:23

DEBORAH:

I know you said you started working in the restaurant business for a while. And then what was the transition from that kind of work to the moving, to working at Michael's moving?

PEDRO:

I was work in restaurants for about seven months and was okay for me because I started doing dishwasher, you know, and then after four days, the owners told me, "Oh, if you want, you can move in the front to help the guys clean the tables, put some tea and tea cups and whatever and okay." I was kind of nervous, "Okay. I can probably, I can handle that. Okay," boom, boom, boom. And then he, I don't know what he saw in me but he start to take me to another restaurant because I think in that time he owns three different restaurants and then he take me to different places, right. And then after, basically I help him to get orders cause he just make order everything they need for from their restaurants, for whatever they cook. Then I start do that with him, help him carry stuff, all other type of stuff.

But one friend I just met someone and he told me about this job about moving and the way he described me, it look interesting. The pay, the tips and when I had the day off, right. At that moment I say, "Okay can you ask your boss? Can I work there?" And he is, "Yeah, yeah. Okay. Let me ask him." And then I, that's the first sign. I just went and do that type job, moving stuff. After that day the tip was well, the hours was less job, more money. And I said probably I think because I was, "Oh, but he's good with me. He took care me very well, but he don't pay me well." That's the thing, basically, when I did my math, he paid me like \$50 per day. He don't pay me any hourly. He paid me \$50 per day and I was working six days sometimes seven. Seven days of the week for about 11, 12 hours. And because we need the money we do no matter what. And the moving job, I just went to that day, I get well tips and the hours, basically the hours I make in that day the whole, I mean, for the whole money basically was for three days on the other job. And in that moment made me realize that I got to talk to him.

DEBORAH:

In the moving business you were making in three days what you had to work seven days on the other job.

PEDRO:

No. Only in one day the money I make was about three days in my other job and this is where I say, what? I don't know this not every day like that but I think this job it's better. If in the future I want to have a better life, better opportunities. And when I start talk with my boss and he's pretty much can not refuse to let me go. He's, "No, no, I can pay you more because you are a good employee, blah, blah, blah, blah." In that time I don't need to talk English at all. Someone else next to me was help me translate and I ask him, "Hey, tell him how much he gotta pay me. If he want me to stay." He's like, "I can pay him ten more dollars." Basically, he pay me 50 and he gotta pay me \$60 per day. I said, "I'd be honest with you. I had a better opportunity." And he's call me every single day. "How much you want? How much you want? Pay you 70 per days." He's still per day. No, I don't wanna be lied to you because by that moment, I know the other job better. And from that moment and right now I've been there for more than 14 years, I think because know owner is good

and I'm not just too, because I started as a helper and then beside I went to the school with Michelle and I started right from the beginning, the programs, and we decide we started learn the language and at the job too, we started asking, "How do I say this?" And then little by little, we was grow and grow. But now I have a better position, thanks God, little by little everything's been changed.

DEBORAH:

You have a lot of responsibility in that job.

PEDRO:

A lot. Because the thing is, I know a lot about this business and Mike, he's the boss, he's the owner, and he trusts me a lot for anything I want to do in the company. He knows it's for better or for help, for always it's for support.

LEARNING ENGLISH/22:36

DEBORAH:

He trusts you and you bring a lot to the business. Tell me Pedro, about how long it took you to not need somebody standing next to you to translate and that you were able to understand and speak English without needing a translator next to you. What was that journey?

PEDRO:

Wow. I remember, I was already three years working in a company three years already from the beginning. After those three years, nice such a person Will, was the name of the dispatcher and on those days, we need more foremen, four more guys, more foremans. And he saw pretty much I can defend myself to the base of the staff, collect the signatures, display the little things. I don't want talk too much English, but for the job and for the things that needs to be done, I know pretty much a lot of the stuff and he know me and he one day he asked me, "What do you think? You want to be a foreman tomorrow?" And my heart was boom, boom, boom, boom. Start like really fast. And, "You are for real?" "Yeah. Yeah. It seems like you can handle it." Oh my God. No, really okay, no, what he told me, what I gotta have. "I'm going have someone next to you if you need support and that person, he can explain to the customer you are a new foreman." And then I was, "Okay, okay, okay. All right." Boom. That day I was very nervous before I show up customer house

I was very nervous, but I introduced myself “Hi I’m Pedro,” or whatever. And I ask him what are the stuff he need to be moved? Can he show me the stuff or whatever. But the thing is by the time I need to collect the signatures— back in the day was the contracts a piece of papers. Because now we use iPads and all that, but back in the day was like regular.

DEBORAH:

It’s all electronic now.

PEDRO:

I remember when I was about to collect the signature to pay that my hand was that shaking like this. When I try to show the customer, “Oh, do you mind to sign here please?” My voice was like, because I remember that was, and the other guy was next to me. He says, “Sorry, he’s a new foreman,” and then the customer was, “Oh, okay.” He try to support me. “Oh no, don’t be nervous. You gotta be fine.” I was, “Oh, thank you.” And after that day, next day I just was alone, and then, but was hard for me, but the good thing I do and decide after that I done the job. The classes I think was around 8:00 PM. I always in the night I went to the classes. I was interested to know more about the language when I was at work all the time. If I know someone was good person to ask any, I was, “Hey, how do, how do I say this? How do I do this? I know I’m this way, but how do I can do more polite?” I was always that ask, ask, and then my, this is how I grow, grow, grow my language, learn more, more English.

MISSING EL SALVADOR/26:08

DEBORAH:

Tell me, Pedro, do you miss anything about El Salvador?

PEDRO:

I miss a lot of stuff. From sixteen down my whole life, my family the place where I was born and then the place where I grew up, was a nice, nice time. I used to, dance, hip hop, do a lot of type of sport. Those, moments was a nice, I can’t even describe they’re in my mind and I can’t even believe it’s not like that anymore. It’s totally changed. If I go to my country now, I’m totally feel like stranger personally. This is how it is right now. It’s nothing compared for back in the days. It’s totally different, everything, everything. But I miss a lot, most

of the part of our family, because my mom, she used to travel around the country to see the family here and there. And I love those moments. Because for me it was a nice experience to be travel like for three, four hours here and there. That was, because of my mom, this is how I know my country.

DEBORAH:

Is she still there?

PEDRO:

Yeah, she’s still there. She’s still there.

DEBORAH:

When was the last time you saw her?

PEDRO:

Was about seven, seven years, I think seven years.

DEPORTATION WOES AND A SECOND ESCAPE/27:40

DEBORAH:

Did she come for a visit?

PEDRO:

No, the thing is because of my immigration status, when, okay. When I came in the U.S. in the border I asked for asylum, right? And they opened the case for it. But the thing is I never show up because nobody helped me. That’s what I said, the lady in Texas, she don’t even have a time for it. Basically I don’t have nobody to help me about lawyers or how to continue my case. And I was for about seven years already without show to the court. And this is how my case was like. Basically, the judge, she already deported me because I don’t show up in the court, right. This is how the the immigration systems were. If you don’t show up in the court, basically, they deport you no matter what, and you don’t have a chance to apply it or to ask for bond, anything like that if you get arrested.

DEBORAH:

So what did you do?

PEDRO:

After 10 years, from the first time I came in U.S. after, we’ve been through with the really rough time. The immigration was knock our door and there was looking for me ‘cause they have a piece of paper with my name on it and they have all the info. I never show up in the court and that sort of time, whatever. And for that case, I have

to go up with them. From that time, we already have Haley. She is the first daughter. And from that moment, was another bad dream, another bad story. Immigration systems work, if you don’t show up in the courts, you basically don’t have a chance for nothing. Basically they take you and they just deport you no matter what, without listening to you without nothing. Because you lost everything when you didn’t show up to the court.

DEBORAH:

So how did you get through it? How are you able to still be here?

PEDRO:

Like I say, was really rough time for me, ‘cause for us, for everyone and our family because they take me out of the house. They put me in the detention and after four days they deport me to El Salvador. That’s what I said after around seven years I don’t see my mom because when they deport me, this is the time I see my mom. And by that time was really rough too is because when I get there, I just went to the different place, not the place where I left the first time. I just went to the different, because my mom was really nervous. So if I go to the same place where I left that first time, because if they saw me, a hundred percent, they gotta be killed. Cause they know I just left, I just escaped from there. The place I used to live was part of the MS-13. That’s the name of the gangs and the other place was the the opposite was the Eighteenth Surenos, stuff like that. But the thing is, and from that place, if they know I just came from the other place, it’s basically only for that reason because I’m from different places only for that reason you can get killed too. If you are from the enemies.

DEBORAH:

If you’re in the wrong place.

PEDRO:

Yeah. I was in the wrong place.

DEBORAH:

How did you get back to this country?

PEDRO:

I can’t even sleep in that time because I can’t even go out, has to be indoors every time, because I feel I go out, I have a hundred percent chance to get killed in that place. It was brutal, really. And, one day I just, I

went out in the front porch, in the house, because I was for five days straight, locked in the house indoors. 'Cause everyone around told me, "Don't go out because you are stranger here. If they saw you, they gotta ask a question. They gotta find out where you used to live. And then they gotta have was terrible." But the thing is I went out one day, right. And one guy for somehow he saw me and then I just go into the house after five minutes, five, six people just went, knock, knocked the door. And they asked, "Who's that guy. We don't even, know that guy." And my family was a cousin, he tried to explain, "No, he just came from United States. He get deported blah, blah, blah. But he don't even live here." He started, ask questions or crazy questions and all that. Basically they force my family to get me out the house because they wanna know me. If I have tattoos anything, if I'm part of another gang. Then I was okay. Nothing crazy happened. After they left, we make a plan, no matter what I have to move from there. And we start our calls, Xiomara, whatever. And we just find our friends try to help me as well to escape again, because I don't wanna be there even another day, 'cause I know sooner or later I gotta be killed for no reason. This is how it was, I'm sorry, our country in those moments. And by that time, it's not was just Francisco anymore. It was my baby girl, Haley. It was really brutal for me, for them.

And, and then we make a plan again, we just escape from there. And same, I just came and knocked the door on the border say, "I know before I do the same thing, but I don't even know what I do because now I don't have nobody to help me. Now, please. I beg for asylum," because part of my family, friends I was spend like four days in the detention. "Please. Can I see the asylum officer please, 'cause I need to talk, I need to talk. I need to tell, I need to tell, because I was being, please, please." They help me. After four days I was in the detention and they helped me to make me an interview with the officer and after that I tell him all the details, how my life had been through from the first time and this moment and all that. And he give me opportunity to go the judge and tell the judge about my situation. But I was in Texas, right. And that one of the detentions in Texas, but they know my family was up here in Boston. What do they do? Because they don't want us to be close

to the family to have more support. What do they do? Peoples like me? They take me all the way down to the west. They send me to Washington state, Tacoma, far away from my family.

DEBORAH:

It's so cruel. It's so cruel.

PEDRO:

Yeah. And we ask if they can transfer from different detentions more like close to my family, they say, no. it's that doesn't work like that.

DEBORAH:

How long ago did this happen?

PEDRO:

It's like seven years ago.

DETENTION CENTER BLUES/35:06

DEBORAH:

Seven years ago. How did you get out of there and how did you get back to Boston?

PEDRO:

Because, what I told you, because I lost the court the first time, only because of that make my case worse. And because I reenter in United States get worse again. And because I get deported. I don't have no criminal records, nothing. Everything is clean, thanks God. I try to be a good citizen, follow the rules and everything, those are one of the things helped me too, in my case. But the thing is how I get out of it was every day and that detention, that what I talking about and inside and the detention, basically they have three courts, different courts that place that was, I think, like four judges. The only way you get out of there, if you get deported, or if you won your case. That's the only two ways you get out the that detention. But one day I was feel already, because I know my case, Xiomara went to different lawyers to talk about my case. Every single lawyer tell her it was no chance to get released from there, no matter what, in the end of the day they're going to deport me again to El Salvador.

Myself, I really, I know how hard was my situation. And for one moment I was feel kind of sick, but not okay in my mind. Basically, I kind, I mean start kind of crazy. Think about how if they deport me again, it's like hundred percent I gotta get killed in

there. And my kids and all that stuff make me sick in my mind. And I asked them, I banged on the door for the security, for the overseer and I ask for help and I can see someone and they ignore me. They don't help peoples inside. They just send me to my cell to just go lay down in my bed and that's it.

But one day I just realized it's only one person is gonna help us to get out of that jail. And that person is, it's gotta be God. In that moment, I realized nobody else. Lawyers said basically she has some money for another people can support us to pay the expenses for the lawyers. But even the lawyers they don't want to take the money. They say they go straight with Xiomara, say no it's not about money. That's I don't want to take your money. Because I'll be honest with you. He's going to be deported no matter what, three different lawyer four.

We just pray God. And I remember one night around 2:00 AM, I was read the Bible and that night I was crying like a little kid, pray God, "Please help me to, come to my family, to see them again." I asked him for one more opportunity to be a better person, a better father, a better husband, a better son, from the bottom of my heart, that's the first moment I talked to God and those four walls in there. And from that moment and up, I feel released all my stress out because I tell God, "I don't ask you for time. If you want me to stay here for six a year, I don't even care about the time the, only care is about is if you bring me to my family, cause that's, I don't, want another woman, another kids. What I want is to be together with my family."

This is what I thought. And, everything after that night, next day was totally different because we usually ask, before that, we ask for a court, for a bond court, they don't, they don't take, I mean, they don't, they don't allow, they don't allow me to ask for anything because no matter what they want me deported again, but after that night, we talked to God, we, we just prayed and asked him. And I told him, "I don't even care about how much time I gotta spend there to, to be released inside, to be together with my family." After that night, believe or not, when I talked to with our friends, some of that they don't believe, but some of them they believe because they believe in God. After four days after that night, I was more okay. More relaxed, more calm because I

just trust God, no matter what. I don't trust nobody else, except God in that moment. And then after four days I saw my name on the board because was a big board and there like every person that has courts every days. Every days I just woke up about, about five to serve, to help with the breakfast.

A MIRACLE AT LAST/40:26

DEBORAH:

You got up at five, five in the morning to help with the breakfast at the detention center.

PEDRO:

And every days, I try to do some don't get crazy inside. After four days I saw my name in the board. One of the seniors told me, "Hey, Sosa, you have a court today," when I was served the food. I look at him like, "What?" "You have a court today. You, it is you name it." My heart was again, "Really? How do I have a court? We don't even ask for a court." I went to see the names and all that. And I see my name. And then the board. At that time was, I think 5:20 in the morning and just went, called Xiomara, that emotion, I can't even talk, "Xiomara, I don't know how, but I have a court today." She's, "What?" Yeah, I don't know. "Just call the lawyer because I had court today." After I just get dressed and all that. I went to the court. I was so nervous because I don't even know what's all about that court. But one of the lawyers was just fine and that detention, he just came and he told me, I asked him, "I just had a court today." He say, "No, I don't even know. I don't they don't send me letter, nothing. Your wife, she just called me said, and I just look at, and I, and I saw you, it's you name it in the court." When I got in front of the judge, he start looking my case, ask me questions. And then we find out that one was bond court, the one we was used to ask for like months and months, and they refused to give me one. For somehow, they, they, they put me there, a day for the court. After that day and the next day I get released. I can't thanks enough life, Jesus. When I remember those moments, it bring me those chills emotions, because I don't know probably those bad moments make us be a good person, be the look the life in different ways, and enjoy it with friends. I can tell you from before that life was okay. We always try to be a good person as good friends, but after all of that, we just came a

different, we enjoyed the life more than we usually do before. Yeah.

DEBORAH:

It was a kind of rebirth for you and for your family.

PEDRO:

Yeah.

MOVING TOWARD CITIZENSHIP/43:16

DEBORAH:

So what is your status now? Are, are you gonna be able to be a citizen?

PEDRO:

Yes, in the future. Now that I started, it is like everyone else, it's go step by step. It's one thing so far for now I had a working permit, and then sooner or later because of the COVID make this more long, courts being postponed every year. But I learned to be patient to just enjoy the life, enjoy the time. Thanks God, we are blessing for and all the part of us. Yeah. We are so blessed. Yeah.

DEBORAH:

That's quite a story, Pedro. Thank you for sharing the highs and the lows. I was right there with you while you were talking and the suspense of thinking that you were going to be deported and then four days later to be released. It was a miracle.

PEDRO:

That's what I said. Those bad moments, we used to have a lot of people, we know a lot of people, but when that happened, that bad moments, that what I said, seven years ago, we basically, only have close three, four people. You can imagine, we basically, we know a lot of peoples, but when you have bad times, that's the time you know who is your friends right there.

DEBORAH:

You find out.

PEDRO:

You find out and then yeah. We still have really good, good friends. We met more people, more friends because now we're more open. We love to know more people, if we can help, we help no matter what, if we can support. I say you can't imagine that's part of our life. We've been through really

rough time and we really enjoy the life better than before.

GIVING ADVICE/45:17

DEBORAH:

Is there anything else Pedro, that you'd like to talk to me about or any advice you might want to give to somebody who's coming to this country for the first time?

PEDRO:

My advice always I tell anybody just been here for couple of months. First thing I told everyone, no matter what, just find a job, but do the best to learn the language. Because if you wanna be part of this country, if you wanna know this country better, you have to learn the language. Because when you speak the language, you have better opportunities. You met more people, you know more peoples around, you have more chances to have better jobs, stuff that. This is my advice to give it. Don't try to do drugs drink. If you already drink, try to control yourself. Be focused in what you want to be in the future, because we have one goal when we come in this country. Because this is one of the beautiful countries. It give you a lot of opportunities. If we want to be someone, this country let us to be someone, but we have to know this country. We have to start from the bottom, start, learn the language and then, learn more about this country, and then the life is getting better and better for everybody. Because I met a lot of people, a lot of friends. They've been here for 10, 14, 20 years. And they don't even know how to talk English and they don't even care about it. And they still stuck in the first job they, they start doing this country until 20 years is because of the language is because they don't because of the language. They don't have the opportunity to open and seek better jobs. This is my advice for anybody to the first thing little by little cause me, I don't don't get frustrated to, oh, I can't, I can't get the words. It's too hard for me. No. Word by word. Just try to repeat that's that's what I beat dumb, in myself, if it, some words is ah, what's so difficult for me to learn. I was okay, how do I say it again? Boom, can I start, repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat. I don't put attention to learn more until I get that word, like, okay. All right. Now that I know now I know now it's in my mind now. Okay. Now I can get another one like this boom one by one, one by word. Yeah.

DEBORAH:

You're very motivated. This has been great. It's been really gripping listening to your story. You've been through a lot and you're still very much an optimist and you certainly practice gratitude. That is very clear. So thank you so much, Pedro, for this interview.

PEDRO:

Thank you for your time.

WRAPPING UP / 48:27

From restaurant worker to foreman, then one of the managers of a prominent New England moving company, Pedro has survived life's ups and extreme downs as an immigrant in this country. A devoted father of three and husband to his childhood sweetheart, he has proven that hard work, honesty, patience, and curiosity have served him well. He has earned the asylum and new life he so desperately deserved. Pedro has been and continues to be a vibrant member of the Gardner Pilot Academy family and community.



EPISODE #26—REMZI FROM TURKEY

GUEST INTRO/00:40

Since his elementary school days in Turkey, Remzi's passion for history, geography, and meeting people worldwide has never ceased. In his early 20s, he befriended American GIs stationed in Turkey to practice his English. His career as a professional tour guide took off as he showed them the historical sites of his country. Lifelong friendships between Remzi and his tourists led him to visit and eventually move to the States in 2009. I consider Remzi an ambassador for peace because he brings together people from many different countries and cultures. Living in the U.S. seven months of the year, he spends his summers guiding tours in Turkey. I caught up with him for this interview while he was still in Istanbul.

MAKING AMERICAN FRIENDS IN TURKEY/01:49

DEBORAH:

Today my guest is Remzi and he is from Turkey. Welcome, Remzi. Can you tell me a little bit about how you first came to the United States and what motivated you to come to the United States and settle here?

REMZI:

My passion with the United States started when I was in the elementary school. In the fourth grade we started studying about geography and history of the States. And I admired that the U.S. had the longest railways and the longest river in the world, the Mississippi. And Rocky Mountains, I adored hearing all those. Then when I started studying English at the elementary school, I wanted to learn it and I wanted to go to the States one day. But I had no opportunity to practice my English. Then when I moved to a bigger city, I heard that

there was the U.S. Air Force base there. And I saw some GI's wandering around in downtown for shopping on Sunday. But I was a very shy boy. I did not know how to start the simple talk. When so shy, I asked them, there were two boys, I said, "Excuse me, Sir. I am studying English by myself. I need practice." They said, "Sure, come with us. We need you. We need your interpretation." And then at the end of the day when we left each other I said, "May I come and see you next?" So I started visiting them and they introduced me to their friends, so many friends. Finally, one of them said, "Remzi, you must be a tour guide!" because I started showing them the area. "You must be a tour guide!" Finally, I attended classes and I became a registered tour guide and started taking tours from the base to historical sites.

BECOMING A TOUR GUIDE/03:38

DEBORAH:

How old were you at that point when you became a tour guide?

REMZI:

When I started practicing my English, I was 22 and as a registered tourguide I was 27. And then one couple said, "You must be a tour guide." They encouraged me. And then, I started guiding them. I met another friend called John McDonald. One day I said, "John, all Americans tell me that I must visit the States to be more academic with my tours. Would you invite me?" He said, "Sure!" When he was back to Florida, he sent me a letter. I went to the Embassy in Ankara. And they asked me my purpose. I said, "All my American guests tell me I must see your country." They said, "Sure, you must." And they gave me the visa in 1993, January for seven weeks. I loved it. And then two years later John told me, "Your daughter must come and see here too." And my daughter spent summer holiday. She loved it. And I wanted to educate my children in the States because in Turkey we have a severe university entry test, very tough. The students from big cities have private classes, better schools. They have better opportunity. We did not have it because I was living in a small town and a friend from the base, a doctor, said, "Remzi,

we are moving back to the States. We would like your daughter to come with us." So it was a great opportunity, but my father, my father-in-law everybody, my wife said no, she cannot go to the States because gangs and drugs, you know they know America like that problem all the time." I said, "No. You don't know much about America. This is a great opportunity for my children's horizons. I want them to be educated there. Better opportunity, better income." So in 1997, September, I went to visit her in wintertime. So every winter I spent a couple of months with her there and that's how I started. Then 2001 they invited my second daughter for their friends. And then she came. Now the elder daughter works for the Brookline Bank. Then the younger the other works for Cisco Systems. That's why we are with them every winter. My purpose is to educate my children and then my son also came there, studied at the University of Southern New Hampshire. He got his master's degree MBA and he's in Istanbul now. He's a tour guide and computer programmer in the States.

DEBORAH:

Wow. So when did you come to the States to live?

REMZI:

December 2009. We got our green cards. Then we moved to the States.

LIFE IN TWO WORLDS/06:14

DEBORAH:

What's it like living in two worlds?

REMZI:

Actually, I love it. Both countries are special to me. I love both countries. Turkey has unimaginable, incredible human history. Because it has been positioned between continents and countries from every nations, even Celtic, from Viking to Mongolian, Arab history to Russians, Romans, Greeks, and Turks. And when I go to the States, I love that country. Everything is well-organized, people are friendly and hardworking, and all kinds of opportunities. That's why my daughters stay there. They don't want to move back to Turkey. We're expecting my son's green card next year that is his time. So he will move there.

DEBORAH:

How many months out of the year are you in the United States and how many months of the year are you in Turkey? And also what happened during COVID? Were you stuck in the States?

REMZI:

Seven months in Boston in the U.S. and five months in Turkey. And during Covid we were in Boston and we couldn't come to Turkey for two years. We were sad not to see our son because he was here in Istanbul. But I enjoyed. I was not bored. I enjoyed living in Brookline. I used to go there for fishing with a friend and also I enjoy reading books and studying English and it was fun. Joining ESL classes on Zoom. I followed all the ESL classes of Newton or Brookline—all of them.

A MOVE FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE TO BOSTON/07:55

DEBORAH:

What was the most difficult part of coming to the United States to live? Were there any obstacles? Did you have to adjust to life in the United States in a way that was different from Turkey?

REMZI:

We used to live in New Hampshire, Bedford, New Hampshire. And our condo was right at the outskirts of the town. No transportations. There was no public transportations. And my daughter needed the car to go to her work to drive her work. So we rode along, my wife and I. One of the biggest problem in small cities in the United States is the public transportation. And we wouldn't go anywhere. We used to hike around the condo and the same places and wintertime, very cold, very boring, isolated, no friends, that's why finally we moved to Boston.

DEBORAH:

Is there music in the background or TV on or something where you are?

REMZI:

It is the prayer call now finishing it, the prayer call for the night.

DEBORAH:

And how many times a day does that happen?

REMZI:

Five. And this is the last one. I woke up at five. 5:00 AM. Five AM this morning for praying. Second praying was at 1:00 PM. Number three, 4:00. Five, sunset 7:30 and this one is the last.

DEBORAH:

And do you follow that religious practice?

REMZI:

I do.

DEBORAH:

What happens when you're in the States?

REMZI:

The closest mosque is one mile from my home. I sometimes go by walking, sometimes by driving. But I go on Friday. Friday is the Islamic communal day. The other thing I can pray at home. Roxbury Crossing. This one is at the Roxbury Crossing. And so I go there for Fridays, but sometimes I go other times too. Only Friday praying at noon-1:00 PM is mandatory community. The other ones I can pray at home if I can't pray with the community, the other praying, even more good deeds. But if I cannot, it's still alright.

A COMPASSIONATE AMBASSADOR OF PEACE/10:05

DEBORAH:

Where were you when 9/11 happened?

REMZI:

I was in Turkey and I was guiding. I had a group, about 15 people. We have very interesting historical places. There was a rock castle. We call this rock castle, carved out of a huge cliff for their sheltering or for their events. I was up there showing them the sites from the top, the cave, all the historical places, panoramic view. When I was down I saw crowd people in a rush. I said, "What's happening?" And one of my friends said, "Remzi, your America is attacked (because they, they know, I have relations my daughter in the States). Your America has been attacked." I said, "What!" They said, "Come on in." There was a cafe and then they were watching it. Then I invited my guests. So we looked the second airplane hitting the second building. I thought it was a joke. I couldn't believe it was true. It was shocking events.

DEBORAH:

I was going to ask you if you had encountered any kind of problems.

REMZI:

I had an experience that year and then December I went to the State again with my wife and my daughter and it was this time of the night we were driving. I thought my daughter, "Can I pray in this park?" So she pulled the car and I had my praying rug and rolled it, unrolled it and I prayed. An American seeing me, "You see, you guys, you bomb us, but you bomb us, but we are tolerant. We let you pray here." I was shocked. You know, I did not expect somebody that night in the evening. I think he was watching at me praying you know? And so he blamed all the Islamic people, I said, "They are terrorists. And there they have no religion, no nation. I am a poor guy. I am innocent. I love America." Those were the words I could remember. And I can tell them because they have no religion. Even if they had a religion I would not do that.

DEBORAH:

That must have been upsetting for you.

REMZI:

Yes. I was shocked. I did not expect he was behind me waiting until I finished. And then he said, "Look, you are bombing us! And we let you to live here, to you pray here!" Incredible! It might happen. Because of tourism, I'm tolerant you know.

DEBORAH:

Tell me how being a tour guide makes you more tolerant.

REMZI:

I get people from all over the world, so different ideas, different views, different expectations. And I respect them because they come all the way from Japan or Hong Kong or New Zealand or South America, United States. And they spend time, they spend money and I feel the responsibility for this. So I try to have the best and some might be tired and so. I used to be a part-time English teacher. I also know students, the experience of all these and I always try to feel them and understand their feelings. And usually, I had no problems, usually all love my hospitality and my passion and paying attention to them.

AN EVER-GROWING PASSION FOR HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY/13:28

DEBORAH:

Your tours are so in depth because of your knowledge of history. You said when you were in grammar school you started to get interested in history. You want to say a little bit more about that?

REMZI:

I was interested with the geography and history and, I feel myself a kind of passion for it. I love learning about new countries and their resources, their people, their lifestyle, and also I adore human civilizations and their history. And even today I like watching movies based on true stories. I don't like *Star Wars* that kind of things. I remember in my village, people used to dig historical sites to discover things. I was curious what kind of things they will find, like rings, and from the Hittites or Greeks and Romans. I love it. I was number one in my class in elementary/middle school in English and history and geography.

DEBORAH:

That's great. Did you ever go on an archeological dig?

REMZI:

Yes, I have many archeologist friends. I also do interpreting, translating for them voluntarily. And they invite me digging. And I also try. You need more passion for it to work with the brush. Imagine whole area slow like you cannot hurt the item. You never know what you encounter. To one American guy I said, "You can try." He left the brush, and grabbed the shovel. He started digging. I said, "Stop stop! Because this is not like that. There might be a very valuable jar in there you can break you know." He has no idea about it. So I had the experience sometimes with my guests also I want them to see and especially I used to take GI's and John McDonald, my friend, those because they were permanent in Turkey sites working together and they loved it. Also the underground sheltering cave dwellings not only regular sites. We had many excavations together.

DEBORAH:

Great. And have you started your tour business in the States—having Turkish people, and showing them some of the historical

sites around Boston?

REMZI:

No, because I couldn't come to Turkey last year and I came here two months ago and now my daughter and my son they say, "Dad, you worked since you were born, so we will take care of you. You don't need to work. You take care of my mom." So I take care of their mom. And I do some guiding in Istanbul because I cannot stay at home. I have to have some actions, so part-time, I still do guiding. And it is great to be back to those places to visit. Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Topkapi palace. And those sites—the Egyptian obelisk from 1500 BC. Things are all here, you know, and Hagia Sophia, the greatest Christian Church from the sixth century and the items in the museums. So I cannot forget them. I have to see them.

DEBORAH:

How do the people find you now? People that you are taking on guided tours now—are they personal friends or how do they find you?

REMZI:

After two years there is a kind of platform I put my name and they recognize me right away. They remember my name and those travel agencies and friends call me all the time. They say, "Are you available tomorrow?" I have another call from a friend today, some travel agents and friends, you know, and so I will have another tour tomorrow.

SECOND GENERATION TOUR GUIDE/17:15

DEBORAH:

Are you booked most of the summer when you're there? Is your son doing a tour guide business as well?

REMZI:

Yes. He speaks Portuguese, Spanish, English. He guides in three languages. He's booked every day. Sometimes he's too tired. So today he got a day off. But I've been working last four weeks because my kids don't want me to work. They said, "Enjoy!" So we were traveling, my wife and I were traveling lower Turkey. And so we are back to Istanbul. So last four weeks I've been working and soon my daughter from Boston will be here a month later. Then we will go another Turkey tour together with her.

She wants to see the sites and places. She missed Turkey, too.

ADVICE/18:01

DEBORAH:

Is there anything else that you'd like to share from your experiences as an immigrant starting your life in the United States, maybe some advice that you would give to somebody?

REMZI:

I would say America is a very nice country, beautiful country, all kinds of opportunities for studying, working, and no discrimination. We have no experience with discrimination in the States. I have never seen somebody—only my praying after 9/11. So people are very friendly as long as you are good. And it is easy to attend classes. There are all kinds of opportunities for work, profession, whatever you want. So when I am back, I would like to study Spanish. My son encourages me. I want to attend Spanish classes. He says, "Why not? Second language English is enough." All professions, whatever you want to and all kinds of so I will recommend them, "Don't be lazy or don't be shy. Just try to attend any classes for professions and they will have good jobs. And then you will not be unemployed and you will not be helpless." For example, in Turkey people don't have that much opportunity because of high inflation or high unemployment. And they cannot have classes like in the United States free of charge. So in the United States, whatever you want, you can get it. If you are willing, don't worry. Just wish it and desire it.

DEBORAH:

Desire it and you can make it happen here.

REMZI:

Definitely. Yes. In Turkey, many things you cannot have. Because no opportunities, no options.

CITIZENSHIP/19:58

DEBORAH:

What about citizenship? Have you thought about becoming a naturalized citizen in the United States?

REMZI:

Yes. Finally, my wife and I decided to take the classes when we are back. We'll also take online classes and I would like to take the test. I've been studying history by myself and I love it, you know. I like all the history, all kinds of human history. And I'll apply for it. And then I'll take the test.

DEBORAH:

Will you be able to have dual citizenship, two passports?

REMZI:

Right. Turkey and the U.S. have an agreement for it. So I will have two passports, dual citizenship.

DEBORAH:

Great. So the idea of being a tour guide in the States has been tabled for now. Your children are encouraging you to be semi-retired. Is that what's going on?

REMZI:

That's what they want.

DEBORAH:

You're going to limit your tour guide business to when you're in Turkey.

REMZI:

Right. They want me to take care of their mom. They don't want me to do anything else. They say, "Enjoy your life. Just for fun. Do it for fun." So they don't want me to work in the U.S. either. They buy our flight tickets. They don't let us spend money in the States either.

FUTURE TRAVEL/21:16

DEBORAH:

You have very devoted children, that's for sure. I would hope someday to be one of the people that comes to Turkey and gets shown around to these historic sites by you. I think your depth of knowledge is so great for the area. Is there someplace else in the world that you want to travel that you haven't seen yet?

REMZI:

Yes. I love traveling. I traveled a lot in the States. All my American guests invited me to visit. Saw the most places in the States, even taking by Greyhound. Travel by bus all over. Flight I did. But I want to see the land. I want to see the people. And now I would like to see South America, Asia, and

we might go to Egypt when my daughter comes next month. In Europe, I have been to Lithuania two weeks, and Amsterdam, the Netherlands, but I want to see more in Europe too.

PRACTICING ENGLISH/22:20

DEBORAH:

That's great. How long have you been taking English classes?

REMZI:

Several classes with Boston libraries, the libraries have classes, you know. And actually I started substituting for some of the teachers when they were busy, and I helped them as assistant also in some libraries.

DEBORAH:

You helped run some of the conversation classes at the libraries?

REMZI:

Yes.

DEBORAH:

That's great. Okay. Anything else you'd like to say about your immigrant experience or your adjustment to the language, to the food around the United States? How has that been?

REMZI:

I am very happy educating my children there. And that was my dream rather than myself. My dream is to improve my children's horizons. Despite all my relatives were against me. Even before my father died he told me, "Bring those children back to Turkey! Bring them, don't leave them!" Of course, he couldn't figure out how happy they were in the States would not know it, you know? So my dream happened. Both of my daughters have good jobs and they are very happy living there. And my son enjoyed studying in the States and taking computer science there. He's been waiting for his green card for 14 years. Next maybe he will move somewhere there. And so we will have family reunion in the States. As a computer programmer here [Turkey], he doesn't have much income. That's why he is back to the tour guiding in summertime. Wintertime there's no tourists and he does the computer business. So he will have a good opportunity there too. Working conditions, they're much more comfortable, you know, enjoyable, even Boston

area is cold and expensive, we don't mind it because they have really good life there. Very happy there.

FAMILY FEARS TRANSFORM INTO FAMILY FANDOM/24:22

DEBORAH:

You were saying that your relatives—other people had discouraged you from going to the United States and sending your children there? What did they say to you?

REMZI:

As I told you, my father, my mother, my wife's father, mother. My brothers, sisters, uncles, everybody told me, "Don't send your daughter." This was 1997. "America is very dangerous. Gangs, the drugs, you know, all those movies you can, you watch all them all problems in the, in the United States. You will lose your daughter. And then if you send the other one, you lose your children. Your generation in the United States don't send." Everybody was against, but they haven't been to the never have been to the States. And they had no idea. Just movies, news. I told them not to worry about them because I've been to the States many times and I have many friends there.

DEBORAH:

All these years later you've proved them wrong. Did they say, "Oh, we were wrong and you were right"? Do they say that? Or did they still think you made a mistake?

REMZI:

No, they say they are wrong and I am right. They see everything and they see how nice jobs my children have, have a nice life they have there. And they are happy and they have good income. But now my second daughter has her own condo and she has room for us. If she was here, she couldn't make that much income. She wouldn't have that a good life, comfortable life, you know, she would be ordinary people with little income and got married and then tough life. So my relatives, everybody knows, they say that well. They say, "Can you take our children? How can we send our children or neighbors?" It's not easy. And they want their children to get educated there, but it's not easy. Even as a student, it's not like that now. It's very hard to get a visa now.

DEBORAH:

It's harder to get a visa now?

REMZI:

Because people from all over the world will like to move to the States and educate their children, make it better life, better lifestyle there.

DEBORAH:

All right. Remzi, it's been great talking to you. I loved having you in my class when we did the English for Immigrant Entrepreneurs class. That was great. I'll catch up with you maybe in Brookline or maybe in Istanbul one of these days. Thank you so much.

REMZI:

You're welcome. I hope one day Obama or you, or some people will be my guest and I would like to share my language with them and show these places. It is an unbelievable country also in one summer. And nice to see again, Deborah.

DEBORAH:

Thank you so much.

WRAPPING UP/27:18

Not only does Remzi bring his guests to all the significant spots in Turkey—from caves to castles to mosques, but he also continues to explore the cultural heritage of his adopted country. Loving his ability to live in two different worlds, it's clear that Remzi's interaction with people from other countries and cultures has made him a great unifier. Over the years, all three of his children have been educated in the States. Remzi and his wife are eagerly studying for U.S. citizenship.



EPISODE #27—IRANI FROM BRAZIL

GUEST INTRO/00:39

With poor prospects for college or broadening her horizons, Irani left her family farm in a remote part of Brazil in 1994 to join her brother and sister in the States. Her initial plan was to earn money and return to Brazil to buy a home there. Plans changed when she met her husband and settled into a busy life in Boston, eventually starting her own cleaning company. Caring for three children and running a full-time business left her little time to learn English, but she persevered. Her homeowner dreams have changed continents, especially after becoming a naturalized U.S. Citizen, an accomplishment she and her family are proud of.

COMING TO THE U.S./01:38

DEBORAH:

My guest tonight is Irani from Brazil. Welcome, Irani. Can you tell me a little bit about what brought you to the United States? Why did you decide to come here?

IRANI:

I came here in 1994. Before I came here I have one sister and one brother here, and they encouraged me to come here because I was in Brazil with my 24 years-old. And they said to come here because they can help me to get more opportunity. Was hard to leave my parents because I just have me and my younger brother and I said it is hard to leave them because they need me. And I was just start to help them with the farm. But I just finished my high school. I couldn't have opportunity to go to college because when you live in the farm and you live in the interior so the parent is saying to you it's hard to send you to different city because

they didn't have a college there. And I was so younger to be by myself to go to college and then my brother and sister here said, "I think it's time to try some different life."

DEBORAH:

What was the reason again why you couldn't go to college?

IRANI:

Because my parents was saying prepared me to get married and not go to the college. They think I was not ready to be by myself or be with the other friends. Very different from here because in seventeen or eighteen years old they just going to college and be with friends and share the room and go to different city. For us, the culture for my parents especially because we used to live in farm, so that's gonna be hard because I was so young I was not ready and to go. So that's the reasons they said, "Oh, I think it's not easy. You stay, you know, just with friends."

DEBORAH:

So did you actually work on the farm with your parents?

IRANI:

Yes. I was just helping mom and my daddy—he actually passed away two years ago—and my mom is still doing the same thing. So we just grow vegetables and sell the milk and we have everything at the farm. But between that I was teaching and not in the city on the farm they just help the poor kids learn little bit. So just I was helping because I like work with the kids. I used to work about church, teach them about God not about, you know, writing and but she said, "I think you good to help me with the kids." And then I start to help them with the kids, but not professional like it became teacher. So I just was not ready to be teacher. I didn't have my degree to be teacher. I just was helping her because I love kids. So that's the point.

DEBORAH:

At that age did you have a dream about what you wanted to do in the future?

IRANI:

Yes. If I had opportunity to go to college, I was, you know, just think something about

to be dentist or something like that. I used to like that. But now if I say to me, Irani, do you want to be there? Do like that? I don't wanna do that. I just had when I was younger. Not now.

DEBORAH:

So when was the moment that you decided to come to the United States? You said you had some relatives that were already here. What made you say, "I'm gonna do it!"?

IRANI:

Yes, because I was thinking the life just with think about my parents, but I say, "I need to think about me, too" because I was like 20, close to 24 so I couldn't go to college. I need to think about my future. So I need to work and have my own money. So I think I said, "Oh, wait a minute. Why I not try?" So that's the reason. So yes, they said, "Yes, please come and try it."

DEBORAH:

Was it easy to get the visa?

IRANI:

Well, in '94 was so much easier than now. I can tell you. So very, you know, was not a now so easy. But I got the visa so that's the good things because I didn't have a hard time to come to the border, so that's make my life easy because if I do that I don't know if I can get here. I was so scared with they said with their experience to come here.

FIRST JOBS/06:38

DEBORAH:

What was your experience when you arrived? Was it culture shock for you?

IRANI:

Well, the first moment about you know I just came here in June, I got here in June 12. I got impressed because the weather was good because in Brazil the weather always is very nice. We can have like fall and winter for us because I live in southwest. So in the south they have more cold weather but where I used to live is not. I like it because I time I said, "Oh, it's not possible here's gonna be very cold like my relative complain about it." And I said, "Oh wait a minute, it's not too bad." And then after this

summer everything, you know, was not like I thought. I know I have a lot of help from them because I got to know the room. So they help me with the job. I help my sister while she had her business with the same I doing now—cleaning services. And my brother he was working at the restaurant, so he got one open for me but that has to be, can you believe, I worked in Italian restaurant—they don't have that anymore— with dishwasher. I can tell you the first moment I start to work—it's a job is a job. But I said, "Oh my God, there's so many things I have to be." I know I have, you know, my washing helping mommy with couple of dishes, not like a lot. I have to, you know, be ready for them. I cried like a couple hours. I said, "Oh my God, this is the job you have to meet?" "Yes," my brother said, "I'm sorry, because, just came, you don't speak English, so that's the way to start."

DEBORAH:

So did you know any words in English?

IRANI:

When I started this job, no, I couldn't say anything. Actually, I can say "hi" and "oh." And then it is very funny because he was cooking this person and said you need to get more money so you working with my sister with cleaning and she didn't have a big business, so she just share with the little business she had with me we pay my help. I said, "Oh, wait a minute. I need more money to pay the room, everything, I need you know, survive."

ROMANCE AND MARRIAGE ON THE HORIZON/09:19

DEBORAH:

So were you married at this point?

IRANI:

No, I was not married this time.

DEBORAH:

How did you meet your husband?

IRANI:

Yes, but in the same year I got here in '94, my parents got the visa too. I got here in June 12. My parents came here in December to Christmas. And my husband was in my cousin's. And we prepare the Christmas party to my parents. And my cousin said, "Oh, I have one guy here. He came to visit me. Can I bring him?" I said, "Why not?"

So he, yes, he was to live in Hyannis in Cape Cod.

DEBORAH:

So you didn't know him when you were in Brazil?

IRANI:

No, no, no. Yes, he's from Brazil. His family is very close to mine. He, like I can say 30 minutes, but I didn't know him until here.

DEBORAH:

Was it love at first sight?

IRANI:

For him not for me. I gave him a hard time later to discover I was falling in love into him. But it is unbelievable. I couldn't have opportunity to talk with the other person Spanish to America or anyone. He get my heart. So the following year '95 we just start to you know to be in romance.

BECOMING A BUSINESS OWNER/10:44

DEBORAH:

How long did you do the dishwasher job?

IRANI:

I did, I believe, like one year. I can tell you I was so sad because I just got home so late. I worked the whole day with my sister. She just, in the end, the day she just me drop there like at five. I was five to 10 or on Saturday I was like at 11. And I was talked with my other friend, the one I met here, and she helped me one part-time job in downtown Boston to clean one building. So and then I quit the restaurant and they start to work six to nine-thirty over there to big job, but was easier than dishwasher. And I think in '96 to '97 I start to think about my business and my husband said that he's gonna help me because he know he's in the time in '95, '96 that he speaks better English than me because I didn't know nothing. And he said, "Oh, I'm gonna try help." He just put in a newspaper announcement about cleaning and then I start to with my business.

DEBORAH:

Ninety-six to '97 you started your own business.

IRANI:

Yes, but was very little job. So like I can just start to like one and I was keeping my work

with my sister and she's saying, "When you have the you whole schedule full, you can, you know, start to do, but I'm gonna help you when you find one house and the second one." And then it was like that I can clean one house for myself, two house for myself. It was not easy to faster grow my business it slowly and slowly.

DEBORAH:

When did you start to learn English?

IRANI:

Yes. I think that's the point in '96 to '97 because I was busy. That's the things I made my big mistake, because I was thinking if I came here for like five years, I'm done with have my money and buy one house in Brazil and back to there. But the things that change years by years because I met my husband and then I was thinking the life was not easy like I thought. And I was working during the day in the nighttime. No time to go to school that's a problem because in '97, when he was thinking to help me, we just, we didn't marry, we married in 2001, so we have like 21 years in October. We cannot turn to when we got married. He's saying, I think it's better you go to school because the life gonna make more easy for your job. He encouraged me to go, but I can tell you why I was tired because when mornings whole day in afternoon and part-time and then I start to pay some extra for person helping me with English. I got some couple words and then, I said, "Oh, wait a minute, I need to get out from the part-time." I got my schedule like one in two house per day and after that I said, "It is better I can quit the job night time. I can just have my job and go to school."

JUGGLING WORK AND FAMILY/14:25

DEBORAH:

And how soon did you have kids to juggle?

IRANI:

After five years when I got married. So I have child when I have my 35 years old. And after that was very hard to go to school. So that's the reason. If I had done before I was more ready for everything because I had Thiago after three years, I have the other one Raphael, and then the other one, Pedro, then I go and work the whole day. So I said, "Oh my God, it's no time."

DEBORAH:

How did you manage to work and who took care of the children?

IRANI:

Oh I had you know I spent three months which every time one born, I spent three times, and then I paid the babysitter. Because it was hard to leave my job because it was not easy to get my own business job. And it is very hard to leave my kids too. So I need provide, I need put food on the table. And the other point is hard to leave the kids with babysitter but I have to do it. So that's the reason after three months I pay the babysitter and then I back to work the whole day. But not time enough to go to school. A hard time.

DEBORAH:

It's so hard for women to juggle a career, your own business, and take care of your children. Your heart is always torn in half, don't you think?

IRANI:

Very hard because you wanna spend more time with the kids, but you need to provide food and the education, everything you know kids you need to money to grow they up, is not easy. But one time, like every time I can every time when I have a meeting at the school, I have the kids grow up and said encourage me, "Mom, you need to learn English. Because you know, it's very hard to have a meeting, you socialize with the community. It's too much easy." So they encourage me to go to school where I found Michelle and I back to school.

LEARNING ENGLISH AND BECOMING A CITIZEN/16:39

DEBORAH:

How many years have you been going to the Gardner?

IRANI:

Oh, that's gonna be my second year. And I can tell you my good news, I just became a citizen yesterday.

DEBORAH:

Fantastic. That's great.

IRANI:

I'm so happy.

DEBORAH:

Congratulations. That's wonderful.

IRANI:

Thank you.

DEBORAH:

How long did it take you to become a citizen? How long were you studying and working towards your citizenship?

IRANI:

Oh, that's close to I can say the one and a half years because the pandemic everything was behind. But Sister Pat helped me a lot. And the Sister Pat introduced me to Michelle. I met Sister Pat. My son Thiago is going to St. Joseph, the place she lives next to and yes, Eloisa connect me to Sister Pat and Sister Pat connect me to Michelle and Michelle connect me to you.

DEBORAH:

So you're going to be in the English for Immigrant Entrepreneurs class then in January. That's great.

IRANI:

I hope I be ready.

DEBORAH:

Sure. Absolutely. You're trying to build up your business, right?

IRANI:

Yes, I do. That's the reason I need you to help me.

DEBORAH:

How many clients do you have now?

IRANI:

Well, I used to have more. I used to have two helpers, but after pandemic everything getting so bad. I have many customers they back. I can tell you close to 10 customers, like very good customers for they schedule for week. They didn't back to me yet. So I just have one helper right now.

MISSING BRAZIL/18:25

DEBORAH:

It's hard to do that job—house cleaning during the pandemic. You have to wear mask all the time and a lot of people didn't probably want you to go into their homes at that point. So what do you miss the most about Brazil?

IRANI:

Well, I miss more I can tell you. Was not easy to be far from my parents. And

unfortunately, I don't have my daddy. I just have my mom. Lucky me she can come to visit us, but I miss the life I used to have when I was child because, you know, when I brought my kids over there. So it's kind of very different like my kids grow here. So I have opportunity to be with the natural. So with animals with the plants. Chance we need to, you know, fresh air. And I built all my toys. I don't have, you know, the Google everything. You go to the Google, the internet. That's I miss for, you know, my life and for my kids. So they don't have this opportunity to have this life. So that's the reason I miss, and I miss my friends too. The friends I had when I was child, but the most to connect to the natural. So that's I love that. So my kids they don't have this here.

DEBORAH:

You don't take trips in nature with your family here in the States?

IRANI:

No. I didn't because every time. Actually, is not easy to travel to Brazil because everything is just kinda expensive. Especially for we are five. The ticket to Brazil is very expensive, but when I have choice to travel, I like, you know, bring they to background to see how my life and how they can connect with what. I like show what my life was. Very simple but it's very full with many things good. And, they don't have here when they grow up because you know, the weather and with this and big city. So I used to grow in the farm very opposite from them.

CHILDREN AS TEACHERS/20:39

DEBORAH:

Do your children teach you English?

IRANI:

Actually they try do it, but they get impatient with me. When I ask you one question the second time, "Mommy, I said one time," I said, "Excuse me, can you repeat?" "Mommy! Mommy, you forget so easy." I said, "Yes, of course. I have a lot of bills to pay a lot of reasons. Just I got—ah!" That's the reason they sent me to school. All the time they just encourage me to go, "Mommy, you need English. Please go to school. Go to school every time." I encourage them to learn Portuguese. That's the reason they

just start tomorrow. They have a class in Portuguese once a week because I wanted to connect with my relatives in Brazil and my friends too, and make friends. And I tell them how nice you can speak more than one language. That's very good opportunity for your life in everything. Not because I'm from Brazil, but it's good for your life and for your future, for your job. So, and they encouraged them and they every day said to me the same thing. Because when I said, "Oh my God" when I got home it's close to six o'clock. I need to, you know get ready. And I said, "Oh my God." They go, they said, "Yes, please. You go, Mommy, you don't stay, you go." So now they change, you know, with me. It's very nice.

DEBORAH:

Oh, that's good to get that kind of encouragement from them.

IRANI:

Yes. That's great.

DEBORAH:

So do you speak Portuguese at home? Do they understand Portuguese?

IRANI:

Yes, they do, but it's very hard when I have Thiago, the first one, we just talking in Portuguese home. He speaks better than the brothers. But when the second arrived, so he start to just connect in English. We talk me and my husband with them in Portuguese, but they keep an answer in English. It's very hard. We just please say in Portuguese, they said, "No, I wanna, it's more easy say English" because they just afraid about the accent. Like I have, you know, I think I have a terrible accent for my English. So they think, I think the same way they have with not good Portuguese, but they understand. They understand. They can read.

A MEMENTO FROM BRAZIL/23:05

DEBORAH:

Oh, that's good. That's great. It's good for the brain. It's good to be bilingual. Did you bring anything from Brazil that you maybe had as a young woman that you still have with you? Some object or some piece of jewelry or some book or something that you always keep with you that you brought from Brazil?

IRANI:

Yes. It is a very funny thing because I can tell you I have my mommy's towel. When she was making my luggage to come here, she got like something in her hand. I said, "Wait a minute, Mama, what is that?" She said, "Oh, that's my towel I brought when I married your daddy, you gonna have this one with you so you can take you back until you know, think about mommy." So I cried a lot but every time she came here I just open and look, look like it's, you know, was white. Now it's no more white, it's a dark color. But I have with me, look like something I never gonna give up.

DEBORAH:

So it's like a hand towel, just a small towel.

IRANI:

Bath towel. Yes. It's a big towel.

DEBORAH:

A bath towel.

IRANI:

Yes, very fun because she said that she would, she brought when she married my daddy and she said something I really love. I will keep forever. Yes, you can have that. I say I was making my clothes and get ready. She suggest putting, and when she bring the towel to me, I can take my shower when I came to airport and she had in her hands and said that to me. It was very, very, very, very sweet moment and very sad too because I cried a lot. And this fun every time she asked, "Do you still have?" I said "Yes for 28 years I have," because now towel I can have like, I don't know, 55 years, 50 I don't know. Probably like that.

FUTURE DREAMS/25:07

DEBORAH:

Tell me about what you're hoping in the future for your business, for your family.

IRANI:

Yes. You know, I had this dream came true. My kids they so happy about, you know, I became American citizen. That's very good. I was thinking about that. I'm so happy. And I wanna grow my business because my dream is have my own house. I'm so tired to pay the rent like for 28 years and I have my three kids. I can tell you I have very hard time because I just moved to Belmont. I

used to live in Allston/Brighton since I got here for 28 years, but in the place I moved to now I used to live there for 17 years since my boy arrived, gonna be 18, and now was very tough to find, you know place to move. Especially because Allston/Brighton school is very expensive private school. The public school in Brighton/Allston is not very good school when they have good school. So the waiting list is a terrible. And I moved to Belmont and this time it's crazy to find place to move and everything's high. My plan is try save some money. Gonna be hard because the rent here is more expensive, but my plan is to grow my business and get my own house to my kids. That's my plan.

DEBORAH:

That's a good one. That's a good one.

IRANI:

Yes. What I hope it comes true.

PROUD MOMENTS/26:56

DEBORAH:

What do you feel is your greatest success since you've been to the States? What are you the most proud of?

IRANI:

Yes, I'm most proud because I came here. I said to my boys, I keep saying every day. I couldn't say any words in English. I know I have my relative help me, but I just not was waiting for the help. I try my best and I got my own business. So I feel proud because I think if I look for the, my background, I have many things done good. So survive and grow three kids. I have been paying private school since until now. I have Thiago is senior, he's going to college next year. I'm not ready for that. I think he is not ready either, but I'm happy what I have done. So I think the way it is. The only thing I think I should have buy my house before because it was more easy, but I didn't. That's something I got little sad when I think about it. I lost a good opportunity to have my own house. That's the only thing makes me question mark. Why not?

DEBORAH:

No, it's in the future for you.

IRANI:

Yes, the future. But if you think I'm proud what I have done, but I feel sad the way, I know, I make something my plan, so I

should think more about that. I think if you ask me what I should have done the best, I can say, “Oh, I should think more about my own house so I can be more relax and not all like I have been pouring out.” This I think.

ADVICE/28:49

DEBORAH:

What advice would you give to somebody else coming to this country?

IRANI:

Well, I can tell it's a lot of people coming out and keep it coming. I can tell them it's not easy. I think the life's not easy. That's make you more strong. When everything comes so easy I think you get so weak. You need to get ready and get stronger. Struggling for something you need and have to be done. I can give advice. Yes, come here is good opportunity, but be ready, you know, to be strong, you have to be strong. You can't stop. So it's very good. Encourage you to do things, get better. I think that's the point.

DEBORAH:

Is there anything else that you'd like to add from your experience? What was the very hardest thing that you have gone through as an immigrant coming to this country? What was the biggest challenge for you over the years?

IRANI:

Well, I think, the English I should get here and not look for just job. Job is important because you need survive. I can say everybody, if you come here, you have opportunity. Please, take some time free and go to school. Learn English is very, very important. I can tell you it's very important for your life, about your job, about your community, and get more friends and get, you know, engage with the community, you know, and say your words kinda, they can hear you. I said for you, English is very important. It's very important.

EXPANDING COMMUNITY TIES/30:32

DEBORAH:

So do you feel when you're working that your clients, your customers, that you can have a conversation with them in a way that you couldn't at the beginning? Do you feel

more confident speaking with the people you work for?

IRANI:

Yes, I do. But I can tell you I wish I can do better. Get more engaged, not just with my customer, but with the community. So I, you know, get more friends. That's a problem. I don't have American friends, I just have Brazilian friends married to American guys. I can tell you I just have, I have conversation just more with my customers just with more about the job. I wish if I can get more conversation when I go to the meetings for my kids, I can participate more, asking more, if that's the reason. That's the reason I'm saying English is very important. Was not easy with three kids and working back to school. That's the reason I back last year and I'm trying this year.

DEBORAH:

Well, I think you're doing great and every year, especially if you continue to come to classes, your English is going to improve. And get your kids to teach you more!

IRANI:

Yes.

DEBORAH:

You have three resident teachers there!

IRANI:

Yes, but it's not easy. I can tell you like experience for mom. They don't have the patience. They wanna say their own stuff, so I try to ask for help. They can come about quicker time. “Oh, okay, Mommy, you all set? Yes?” Yeah they encourage me to go to school, not to teach me.

DEBORAH:

Well, it's been wonderful talking with you. Thank you so much.

IRANI:

It's my pleasure to talk with you.

WRAPPING UP/32:36

After 28 years in this country, Irani fulfilled a dream of becoming a U.S. citizen. Her desire to improve her English has motivated her to continue classes. She hopes to make new friends, expand her business, and be a homeowner one of these days. With three sons who urge her on, she has fans rooting for her progress. From dishwasher fatigue in her early days here, she now considers herself among the legions of resilient and successful immigrant entrepreneurs.