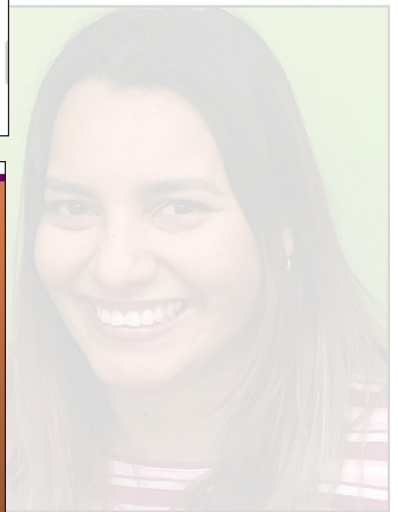
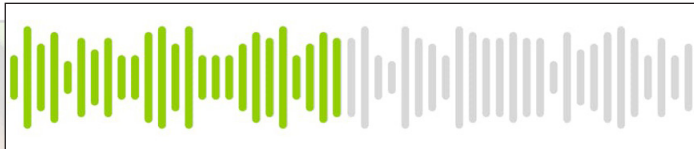
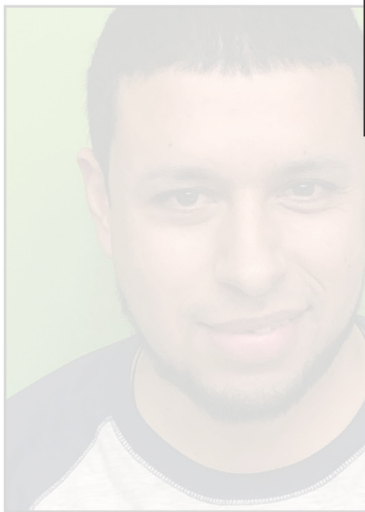




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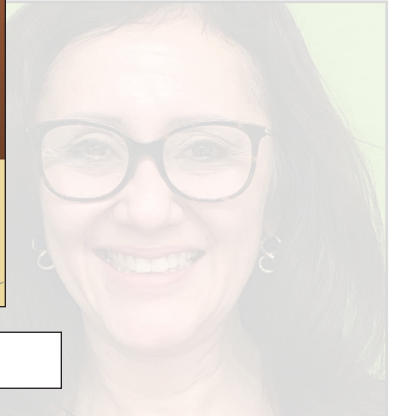


IMMIGRANT VOICES

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



VOLUME TEN: EPISODES 28-30 • FALL 2022



IMMIGRANT VOICES

Episode 28
RUDI from
Guatemala



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES

IMMIGRANT VOICES

Episode 29
MILSY from
Dominican
Republic



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES

IMMIGRANT VOICES

Episode 30
GEORGE
from
LEBANON



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES



**EPISODE #28 — RUDI
FROM GUATEMALA**

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**EPISODE #29 — MILSY
FROM DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

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**EPISODE #30 — GEORGE
FROM LEBANON**

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 #28—RUDI FROM GUATEMALA

don't pay a lot because it's not part of the government.

DEBORAH:

Are you saying that you went to school to become a math teacher?

RUDI:

In my country the teacher they teach all classes science and math include all classes there.

DEBORAH:

Was there a particular day or a particular thing that happened that made you decide, "I'm gonna leave"?

RUDI:

Yes, because when I started to teaching in class I wanna help to my parents not pay back the money that they invest in me, but the pay it wasn't enough for me in mind to if I give to my parents. That's why probably I decide to come or at this country because I hear from my friend, they already here. They work hard, but they pay weekly and they do many things over there, not like a house, and they can send money to his parents. Okay. I would like to do the same thing, no? That's why I took the decision to come.

DEBORAH:

Did you get a visa or how did you actually come into the country?

RUDI:

It was hard because I just come from the border. Yeah. It take me 20, 28 days to arrive here to USA. I have to sleep in the mountains and I have to walk the desert for two days and three nights. Yeah. It was hard. But thanks God, I'm here and I'm happy now. But I'm happy because my family is small. Just only have two sisters. My youngest sister is here and my parents they have a visa. They come they visit me every year. I don't miss much my country. And all my friends they are here. They are in different states, but I had contact with them.

FINDING WORK & LOVE/04:58

DEBORAH:

So when you crossed the border, how long did it take you to come to Boston? Did that

take weeks or months?

RUDI:

First, I came to Virginia. One of my friends, he offered me a house and food. I lived in Virginia for four years. I was working in a plumbing company, but the company lost a lot of jobs and they give a kinda layoff, not because I was new in that time, no. And they only say, "I will call you. I will call you." Then passed two weeks, three weeks, one month, two months. Imagine if you over here, if you don't have a job, you can't survive. Yeah. The family can help you for a few days, but not for long time. Yeah. And that's why my sister, one of my sister was living here in Boston and I asked her if he can, "How is the things going over there if they are jobs?" And, she told me, "Yeah, you can come if you want, because if you don't want, you don't have a job over there. How you can gonna survive or how you can help to my parents, no?" Yeah. That's why I decide to after four years living in Virginia I came from Boston.

DEBORAH:

Were you married at that time?

RUDI:

No. I was single. It is more easy to move and stay to a different place when you are single.

DEBORAH:

When did that change?

RUDI:

Well, I was living in Boston, and I found the love then I got married and now I have a child at two years and a half.

DEBORAH:

That's wonderful. So when you got to Boston, what kind of work did you do?

RUDI:

A painter, a paint company. Was different. I didn't know anything about paint. No. I never even got a brush and nothing. No. I have to start from the beginning. No because I don't know anything in Boston. I don't know nothing about Boston. Was hard. Was hard for me.

GUEST INTRO/00:38

Pay for teaching at a private school in Guatemala barely brought in enough money for Rudy to support himself. And certainly not enough to repay his parents for the sacrifices they had made for him. Instead, he decided to join his sister in the States to better his circumstances and be able to send money to his parents. Once here, he learned the plumbing and construction trades with dreams of starting his own construction business. Rudy is determined to find the best balance between career and family while improving his English. A devoted father and husband, Rudy is looking forward to using his recently earned U.S. passport to travel with his small family.

COMING TO THE U.S./01:35

DEBORAH:

So my guest today is Rudy from Guatemala. Hi Rudy. Can you tell me why did you come to this country? Why did you leave Guatemala? And also, what was the year that you left Guatemala?

RUDI:

Was in 2002, 20 years. First of all, I grew up in a poor family in the valley, not the city, you know. And my parents, they had a hard time to give to me the opportunity to study in my country for a profession. And thanks God, they do a good job. They give the opportunity and I graduated for teacher. I'm a teacher in my country. Yeah. But, it is hard in my country to get a job because many, many student graduate every, every years, every day. Is not they the government they don't give enough opportunity for all the students that got graduated. And I just started to give classes in my country. Like a private school. But the private school

ADJUSTING TO LIFE/07:29

DEBORAH:

How long did it take for you to feel comfortable in Boston and also comfortable as a painter?

RUDI:

I think it took me not much time because first of all I was with my sister and two nieces. And in Boston it's easy to move to different places because we have the MBTA more easy. I had to learn fast how to take the bus, how to take the train. Was good.

DEBORAH:

What was the biggest culture shock when you got to the States? Was there anything that was really surprising to you and difficult to adjust to when you came?

RUDI:

The more difficult was the language. I don't understand. It was hard. And I was in Virginia, I was working a landscaping company, most person who work in that company they only speak English not Spanish.

ACQUIRING ENGLISH/08:28

DEBORAH:

When did you start to learn English?

RUDI:

Well I used to start to learn English in my job just hearing always I like to hear. Or when I take the bus, I like to hear watching the signs what they say. Probably I don't understand but I like to repeat or I like to try to say the words or the sentence or on the signs. And after maybe like three years, I hear about the Gardner Pilot Academy and they teach English for free. Is the more important for free. I went with those day to apply, and they told me they gonna call me because they have a list, no. They called me and I was very happy because one of my goals is learn or understanding speak and write a hundred percent in English, no. Now most because I have I told you I have a boy and the future, imagine if I can't understand why I can't understand or write English, when my boy came from the school and he has a homework, how it's gonna help him? My wife she can help, no. She can help him. But me, imagine if he asked me, "Hey Dad or can you help?" I gonna feel bad. That's why I wanna learn English. That's why I have three years, taking a English class in the Gardner school. And I think it's helped

me a lot because I receive many accomplishment. "Oh, now you understand. Now more Rudi. Oh, why? Wow. You, you can read." Sometimes I send message in English and the person said, "Oh, this is nice." That's why I'm still assisting to the English class.

DEBORAH:

Your son is still pretty young. By the time he's in school, your English— you'll be able to help him with his homework.

RUDI:

Yeah. Hopefully.

DEBORAH:

So did you bring anything from Guatemala with you that you still have? Something you carry with you, maybe even in your pocket, some little thing that has always been with you?

RUDI:

No, no. When we come to this country, we cross the border. The person they don't let us bring anything big or something. Walking or running in the mountains or the desert, you know, we cannot. I don't have anything.

CITIZENSHIP/11:14

DEBORAH:

You've told me when we spoke on the phone that you've recently become a US citizen. Can you tell me about how long it took you and what it was like to become a citizen?

RUDI:

Well, after I get married, I become a resident. And after three years, I become a citizen. That's why I decide to take the English class, no. Because one of my goal was be a citizen. If you don't, you don't understand. If you don't speak, you cannot pass the citizenship test, no. That's why I'm very glad with the teachers that are teaching English class at the Gardner Pilot Academy. I always be glad with Michelle. She help me a lot and she contact me with the person who give a citizenship class. And that helped me a lot because I think you learn more when someone is teaching you. Those classes helped me a lot to become a citizen, thanks God. Yeah, I'm very happy when I got my passport and say, "Oh wow, this is true. That's true. I'm a citizen!"

DEBORAH:

So where are you gonna take yourself or your family now that you have the passport? Do you have plans for traveling?

RUDI:

Last year we went to my country in Guatemala.

DEBORAH:

How was that?

RUDI:

It was good. Was exciting. Yeah. See many different things, no.

MISSING GUATEMALA/12:56

DEBORAH:

What do you miss most about Guatemala?

RUDI:

I miss the life over there. Probably you don't have to have a job. You can survive over there no in the country because we cultivate corn, we vegetable. Yeah. Different things. No, It's good. Over here the life I think is more rushing. You always was running, Oh, I gotta go to my other job or I gotta wake up early.

DEBORAH:

More stress.

RUDI:

This is the word more stressful.

DEBORAH:

Are you saying that in Guatemala you don't need to have a job, that just growing your own food is enough?

RUDI:

Sometimes yes. Because the thing is when you get sick, this is the problem. You have to take the person, your children to the hospital and the hospital or the clinic is very expensive. You couldn't pay the appointments or the medicine. But if you're not got sick, probably you can survive because we cultivate many different vegetable, different fruits.

DEBORAH:

It sounds like your lifestyle has become Americanized in that you're rushing around a lot and you feel stressful. What do you do to deal with the stress? What do you do to relax? What are some of your hobbies? Do you have any hobbies?

RUDI:

I don't have any hobbies. But things I could be I have a hard time, a hard day on my job, but when I come to my home and see my child running and seeing me with a smile, that saves me from the stress completely.

ENTREPRENEURIAL DREAMS/14:46

DEBORAH:

What kind of work are you doing now, Rudi?

RUDI:

I do construction work. We renovate apartments or house, all interior renovations.

DEBORAH:

Is that something you had to learn from scratch from the beginning when you came to the States? Or did you understand how to do that when you were in Guatemala?

RUDI:

No. Everything in here was new for me. I have to learn everything. Because all the construction over here, the steps, all the material are different compared to my country.

DEBORAH:

And also we don't have the metric system.

RUDI:

Yeah. That's true.

DEBORAH:

So do you like the construction business enough to even go into business for yourself? Is that a dream that you have?

RUDI:

Yeah. Yeah. This is my dream.

DEBORAH:

Tell me a little bit about that dream. Where do you see it going in five years from now?

RUDI:

First of all, I like my job because I can do different things—different thing like a painter, like installing floor, installing many things now I can do. That's what I like my job. Yeah because always we are in different place. I'm not like be working in the same place every day, every day in the same room. No, no, I don't like that. That's why I like my job. I already started taking a small job on my side. After my day work, I work in the afternoons and the nights.

DEBORAH:

Moonlighting.

RUDI:

Yeah, moonlighting. Yeah. It's hard. It is hard, but I have to do it if in the future have my own company.

DEBORAH:

Being a citizen is probably gonna be a real asset for you. It'll help you form your own company. Looking into the future, are you gonna have a lot of people working for you or are you just gonna be on your own? How would you like your business to be?

RUDI:

Well, I think it's good when you have a big company because probably you can win more money or something, but I think it's more stressful and I don't wanna live with the stress all my life, no. I think the money is good. But you have to balance with the work and the family. Now I have a family. But if you have a big company, you have to probably work a lot. Spend more time with the work, no. But the work is important. But the family too. That's why I have to balance. I don't like to be a big company, probably like four or five workers.

DEBORAH:

Sounds doable. Sounds good.

RUDI:

The family is important for me.

DEBORAH:

It's the right balance between personal and professional. Now, all those years ago, you were going to be a teacher and you were a teacher for a while. Has that interest in teaching been any part of your life or is that any part of your future dreams at all?

RUDI:

Now no, because I have my dream already. Be a construction company. Probably if I decide to give a teacher or here gonna take me a long time. And my goal in construction company I already start to that process.

DEBORAH:

That's great. You're on your way with that.

RUDI:

Yeah, exactly.



PLAYING DAD WINS OVER PLAYING SOCCER/18:22

DEBORAH:

Do you have any hobbies or did you have any hobbies in Guatemala? Sports or interests that you had? That you are pursuing here or that you're not able to pursue here?

RUDI:

Yes, because in Guatemala when I was teaching it's only half day from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Every day I was practicing soccer. Every day, every afternoon.

DEBORAH:

Are you playing soccer here?

RUDI:

When I came here, yes because they have the opportunity they have many fields close to me. But now no, I don't have that free time. I prefer spend time with my child, this is my hobby. Yeah. Playing with him.

ADVICE/19:09

DEBORAH:

What advice would you give to somebody coming to this country based on what you've learned? Your whole experience of leaving Guatemala, going through the border, coming here, starting your life over again. If you could talk to somebody, let's say from Guatemala and they're asking your advice. What should they do? What would you say are important things for them to do that maybe you didn't know about or that you didn't think about, or that maybe you did think about that you think are important?

RUDI:

I think the more important is learn English. This is the first, learn English. Try to learn more fast you can. Because it's gonna help a

lot. The communication is very important over here. And it is the advice I can give to someone. Yeah learn English.

PRACTICING ENGLISH/20:11

DEBORAH:

Do you have American friends who don't speak any Spanish that you speak to that you have to use English?

RUDI:

Yeah. Almost every day because we work with Harvard University. My company have a contracts with the university. We paint and renovate the apartments where the students live. And all property managers they are white people they only speak English and I think this help me, too, because I was practice words and not have a big conversation but little by little I was learning more words, more words that they talking to me that's why I think it helped me to learn English. And I receive encouragement for they now they, "Oh now Rudi you understand more. Oh, wow, Rudi. It's a big different compared to two years ago, three years ago. Now I can understand more."

DEBORAH:

So they give you compliments in your English? And is your wife Spanish speaking?

RUDI:

Was funny because when I start talking with her, her Spanish was terrible. Yeah. She don't like to speak Spanish because sometimes I laugh at her about how she say the Spanish word. And now she is speak Spanish perfectly.

DEBORAH:

Ah, so she's a native speaker. She speaks English. So you have a live-in English teacher.

RUDI:

Her family is from Guatemala, but her native language is English.

DEBORAH:

Oh, so she was born here?

RUDI:

Yeah she was born here.

DEBORAH:

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about what it's like being an immigrant? What's the hardest part after—I know you said your learning the language—but what's

the most challenging thing on a day-to-day basis?

RUDI:

I think it was a little hard for me because it took me 15 years to go back to my original country. After 15 years I can come back to visit my family over there.

DEBORAH:

So the separation and that you weren't able to go back legally, is that what you meant, until you became a citizen or maybe you got your residence, what enabled you to return?

RUDI:

When I got my resident. My resident card.

CHERISHING THE VOTE/22:46

DEBORAH:

Is the resident card the same as the green card?

RUDI:

Yeah, they call green card. It's the same. I'm very happy because now after I have anything now I have a family. I have become a citizen. Now I can vote. Now I can decide to give a vote to the person who I think will be elected.

DEBORAH:

That's wonderful. That's a good reason to become a citizen so that you can vote.

RUDI:

And I'm glad. I'm very grateful with the Gardner Academy because they are giving me the opportunity to learn English. So now it probably is more hard for me because I moved to another state two months ago. Over here is new for me.

A COMMUTE BECOMES PART OF THE PLAN/23:38

DEBORAH:

What brought you to Rhode Island?

RUDI:

The thing is one of my goal is buy a house. And over here the rent is more cheap. Everything is more cheap. And I wanna save money, more money for can we buy a house. And over there in Boston everything is too expensive. And over here my wife her mom she's gonna take care my boy. I think it's more convenient. So my job in Boston I work in my Boston.

DEBORAH:

You have a big commute?

RUDI:

One hour every day.

DEBORAH:

Wow. Yeah that's a lot.

RUDI:

I'm still assisting to the English class and now after work.

DEBORAH:

Anything else you want to say? You want to tell anybody listening, any immigrant listening or non-immigrant or anybody. The purpose of the podcast series is so that other immigrants can be inspired, but also people who have no concept of how hard it is to be an immigrant. I want them to get a sense of how resilient and hardworking the immigrants are that I talk to.

RUDI:

Yeah, the only advice I can use is don't give up. Don't give up. If you have goals, if you have dreams, yeah, you can do it. Don't give up. Nothing is impossible.

DEBORAH:

Good advice. Good advice. Thank you so much, Rudi. It's been great talking to you.

RUDI:

Thank you.

WRAPPING UP/25:19

Rudi is an example of a patient, hard-working immigrant whose goals and dreams revolve around his family and his work. He balances the stresses of a long commute and juggling multiple jobs with a happy family reunion at the end of each day. His commitment to improving his English is evident as he enters his fourth year of ESOL classes at the Gardner. Rudi is a vital member of the Gardner Pilot Academy Adult Education extended community, and we are grateful for his involvement.

IMMIGRANT VOICES



EPISODE #29—MILSY FROM DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

GUEST INTRO/00:39

Open to adventure and romance, at the age of 21, Milsy decided to leave the Dominican Republic to join her boyfriend in the United States. “Why not?” she said, and got her passport and visa. Within a year of her arrival, they married.

When the relationship fell apart, Milsy was left to support herself and her daughter to start her life over again. Even though she had volunteered to help her Spanish-speaking community, she soon realized she needed paying work. And a better command of the English language. From house cleaner to floral arranger, to restaurant worker to teacher’s helper, her fluency grew as she balanced work, parenting, and her continued commitment as a volunteer.

Now enrolled in college, Milsy is pursuing her dream of becoming a paraprofessional/teacher’s assistant. She’s gaining experience managing the childcare program for children of parents attending the adult ESOL program at the Gardner.

COMING TO THE STATES/02:02

DEBORAH:

So my guest tonight is Milsy from the Dominican Republic. Welcome Milsy.

MILSY:

Thank you for having me here today.

DEBORAH:

Can you tell us a little bit about what brought you to the United States back in 1997?

MILSY:

I come to the United States because I met this man in my country, my ex-husband. I was in love with him. He told me one

day, “How about if you come to live with me here in the United States?” And I say, “Sure!” I don’t have nothing to lose. So, and then I come to United States to live with him and his mom. Then I was married with him for about three years and then something happened. I decide it wasn’t the best for me and I said no, I deserve more. Then I start to work with the Latin community. I start to work with them like do volunteer. And I love it and I start to say, “Hmm, maybe I can do this” because at that time I can’t work because I don’t have documentation. And was really I feel like really a struggle at the same time because I can work, I can do like that much. And with the English that was really tough for me because I tried to communicate. I want people to know what I can do to help the community and how I can help a little bit more. But at that time was difficult. I tried to start helping my community at the same time try to go to the English class. So that was really difficult because then I had to start to work to make some money to pay my rent and all this stuff we had to do. Everyone has to do, pay bills and rent and all of that.

SERVING THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY/03:45

DEBORAH:

What sort of things did you do for your community? What kinds of work did you do when you were volunteering?

MILSY:

I remember this person she was from Spain. I start working with her. She was working with the single mom. So when they go back home we go and visit them. Welcome the baby and welcome the new member of the family. She start taking notes about what did they need and she provided resource. Sometime we bring some food from the food pantry for that family who need it and some clothes and stuff like that. Mark my life forever. So for me that was a really work in my community around where I live, because from that day it’s something like that. Mark my life forever. I want to do something for my community because I received so much from my community. Then they close that program for some reasons, and from there they start to help

me with my immigration status. At the same time, I tried to continue at a school to learn English. Was really difficult because then I have my daughter when I have 26 years old. I have my daughter and I was a single mom was a little bit difficult. I think I’m not the first one or the last one with that difficult situation. But I try to pushing myself. I was in three different school, they have English class at nighttime. Summer school around the neighborhood. I was living at that time and I try but all of the time when I start, I still in the program for about three months, four months, and then I have to get out the program because I have something else to do or situation with my daughter or I found a job in the nighttime, so when I have to provide and I have to go to work in order to get the money. Pay what I have to pay that I always when I found the opportunity, subscribe myself in some English class and try to learn more. And I remember when I came to this country, one American man, he was friends with my ex-husband, a really good friend. He tell me, “Let me tell you something. If you wanna learn English in this country, please don’t spend that much time with your people. Spend more time talking and listen to the American people.” And I said, “Hmm, why?” He said, “Because that way you will learn more.” And he said, “Don’t watch the news in your language. Watch the news in English. That was helping you a lot.” And I really appreciate what he tell me that day. I always remember him and what did he tell me that day.

LEARNING ENGLISH/06:47

DEBORAH:

I was thinking that you said you started out helping your community, so you were speaking Spanish the whole time you were doing that. So that was good advice from him. How did you balance? Did you still do a little bit of volunteer work in your community while you were learning English more aggressively?

MILSY:

Right now I don’t take the English class, but I try to go back to take more English class because I need it in order to communicate and express in myself and help another in my community. I have to learn more and

it is never late to learn. So, I'm in college at the same time, try to be a teacher assistant. I like to work with kids. I like to help them. I like to help the family. And yes, I still in my community, helping my community around where I live and where I work. I try always to help the one who need it.

ODD JOBS TO MAKE ENDS MEET/07:46

DEBORAH:

So what's your work history from the time you started working in the United States before your English was as good as it is now?

MILSY:

Well, I was working in a part-time cleaning, cleaning office at that time. I remember my ex-husband found that job for me. I work in that place for about two years. Then I started working in this factory. They work with flowers making nice, beautiful bouquet. So I work in that factory too. I was loving that job because for me I like to create. That was like amazing for me. Every single day was different and I do something different every day in that job. From there I start to work I remember in this company, I work with them in the Fenway Park. From there I jump to work in in a restaurant for about a year. And then from there I stopped working for a little bit because I was in a difficult situation with my daughter. She was needing me a lot of my time. And they had to call me from another school she was first. They had to call me almost every single day. And I had to stop working for a little bit and pay attention to her and work with her and make sure she was okay. Make sure she get the support she need at that time. And then I wasn't working for three years or two years and a half something like that. And then I found the last one, the one I continue in that same school.

DEBORAH:

Are you a teacher's assistant?

MILSY:

Right now I work like a lunch monitor, recess monitor, and I do bus monitor for that school too. But in my free time I was doing volunteer in the class working with the teacher because I like to do volunteer. For me when you receive so much for many people around you, you have to give something back. And for me, that's the way I give something back to them from how

much they helping me and how much they doing for me, and how much they helping me with everything around me or with my daughter and all of other stuff.

FAMILY COMES FIRST/10:06

DEBORAH:

How did you make ends meet when you had to stop working to care for your daughter?

MILSY:

So at that time I remember I had to apply for some help from the system. And then I said, no, this is not me. I don't like this. My father teach me and my brothers to work really hard every single day. We start working with my father when we have nine years old. Because he have business. He want everyone to learn how to take care of the business. We have the family. So, I remember taking administration classes in my country because I was working with him in his office in his business. And I remember my father always say, "You don't have to wait for nobody to give it to you what do you need. You have to work for that. You have to do something about it." And I started to sell. I know how to cook. I love to cook. So I started to make food and sell that food and make some extra money so that way I can help my family and do a little bit more for me and my child.

DEBORAH:

Were you cooking professionally in the Dominican Republic or is that something you did here in the States?

MILSY:

Something that I did here in the States because in my country I don't have to do nothing. In my country, when I come to this country. It's not because I don't have nothing over there or I have this difficult situation. At that time when I met my ex-husband, I was independent. I have my 20, 21 years old. I wasn't living with my father anymore. I remember I have a job at that time when I met my ex-husband and I have a really good job over there. But that's what I say. I don't have nothing to lose when he asked me to come over here and live here with him, and I said, "Yes, but we have to get married in one year because I don't like to live like that because my father always tell me, you have to be married. You have to be married to live with that guy."

DEBORAH:

When we were talking earlier, you said something about a farm. Was your father's business a farm?

MILSY:

No, my father have a business in the city. He sell trucks, big, huge trucks. So out the city, he have a farm, is a really huge farm because he love that. He have some animals. He have fruits, vegetables, and everything because he don't like nothing from the city. He bring everything from the farm every week to the country, or two times a week to our house so that way he makes sure we eat something healthy all the time.

PAIN OF LEAVING FAMILY BEHIND IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC/12:44

DEBORAH:

What was the hardest thing about coming here at the age of 21? And it sounds like that's when you came and you had your first child at 26.

MILSY:

My first and my last one. The hard part about to come to the United States is to leave my family. I was really close with my family. We are really close with my family, my brothers and sister. This is a really huge family, so that was really hard. Don't have my mom talk to her every single day or my father. I continued talking to him and not that much because different. It's difficult now, and the most difficult time is when I be with no documentation here and I can't go to visit my family. That was devastating for me. Don't be available to go back and visit them and say, "Hi I am here." Be there to say "Happy Father's Day" or "Happy Mother's Day" to my mom. That was really difficult for me.

DEBORAH:

And when did that start to change?

MILSY:

I think when we come to the United States, we change a lot. Situation, everything change. I don't wanna tell them all this stuff. I'm going in this country. I was going through a lot of difficult time. I don't wanna tell them everything because at that time, I feel like if I tell them, they would be concerned about me, they would be "Oh, how can I help her? What can I do now?"

They were thinking that way. And I don't want them to feel pain for me. And at the same time, I feel like okay, I need to grow up. I need to be a real woman. And I have to figure it out how to live, how to continue my life and be successful in what I want to do or where I want to go.

FINALLY GETTING A RESIDENT CARD/14:35

DEBORAH:

How did the status change over the years? You said at that time you couldn't visit your family, but that's changed now, right?

MILSY:

Yeah, yeah. Thanks God that changed long time ago.

DEBORAH:

What were the steps from not being documented to finally being able to travel and visit them?

MILSY:

That time was really difficult for me. That was the most difficult time in my life. I tried really hard. You remember I say before I was working with this organization like helping the community. So when they close that place someone from the people who pay them like to help in the community. They say, "Who needs some help here with immigration?" And I say, "Me!" I raised my hands and I say, "Me!" And I remember this man, oh my God, he is a teacher in Harvard University. He teaching in the immigration area. So, oh my God, he was the best. He's helped me in all this. He's working with me for two years and a half. That was so difficult for me, and I asking him every single day "When can I have my documentation, when tell me?" he say, "We don't know but we have to present all of the information they asking for." And I say, "Okay." So I remember going to my therapy and take all of the information he want from them and for the people. I was living at that time and I was so happy when one day he called me, he say, "We have your resident card here. Come and get it!"

DEBORAH:

Must have been a day to celebrate.

MILSY:

Mm-hmm. Yep. Definitely.

DEBORAH:

That enabled you to go back to the Dominican Republic. Did you travel back there?

MILSY:

Yes, but not right away. It's taken me like three, no four years later. I go for my daughter, visit my family. My father met my daughter when she was three years old. He come to visit us in Boston and yes he was the first one met my daughter and then when I bring her over there everyone was so happy. Yes. And she was so happy. Me too.

DEBORAH:

How old is your daughter now?

MILSY:

She's 20 years old.

DEBORAH:

Whoa!

MILSY:

And I have a grandchild already, two years old.

GETTING CLOSE TO THE DREAM JOB/17:02

DEBORAH:

That's wonderful. That's wonderful. Wow. So can you describe a little bit what you do for work now?

MILSY:

Right now I work in the school system. I work in the office. That school for now. I'm waiting for another position, but I love what I'm doing. I work with Michelle too. I am supporting in the nighttime for ESL class for the parents who take the class. I take care of the children for the parents so they can go and take the class and all of that. So that's what I'm doing right now. And at the same time, I'm in college and I'm trying to take another class.

DEBORAH:

When did you decide to go to college?

MILSY:

I decide to go to college when I see my daughter is getting big enough and she don't have that situation anymore. She have all of the support she needs, and as soon I feel like she's ready, she can walk by herself, I said, "This is my time now." And I remember my father saying never is late.

DEBORAH:

Never too late.

MILSY:

Never too late. Yeah, never too late.

LIVING WITH PLANTS/18:08

DEBORAH:

Tell me about your passion for plants. I can see that gorgeous aloe plant behind you. Talk a little bit about that and any other hobbies that you have.

MILSY:

I love plants because when I say my father have a farm we growing like around a lot of plants in my country and the city we have plants everywhere. Like it's something typical in the Caribbean to have plants and learn how to take care of them. But for me, the plant I have in my house, all of them have to be like medicine plant or help me with something. Like I have plantain plant. I have lemon plant in my house. I have oregano plant and that's the plant I have in my house. And I learned how to make soap because my daughter her skin is really sensitive, and I learned how to make soap with no chemical. So I learned how to make my own body scrub. How to make some lip balm.

DEBORAH:

Have you thought about turning that into a business?

MILSY:

That's what I'm doing.

DEBORAH:

In addition to working, you're thinking about being an entrepreneur?

MILSY:

Yes. One step at a time.

DEBORAH:

Well, you're learning how to do all those things like making soap and lip balm and the aloe plant. How do you use that?

MILSY:

Aloe plant is really good for your skin. I use it in the soap. It depend what do you need, what type of skin you have because when I make my soap for my friends when they ask me, "Oh, can you make this soap?" So I tell to them and I say, "Okay. Exactly why do you need that soap? Is it for your face? Do

you have some skin condition?” So when they tell me what it they need? So I make this soap and base what they need that’s how I make my soap. Everything have to be organic with fresh plant or with everything I use is organic and fresh. I don’t like product with chemicals because that is not good for the skin. It’s not good for your health, and that’s how I do it.

DEBORAH:

Looking at your beautiful hair I just wonder if you use any of the products you make on your hair.

MILSY:

Once a week I use the aloe plant in my hair. That is really good for your hair. Your hair is more shiny. It’s more soft most of the time when you use the aloe plant. You just have to peel, blend it, and use it in your hair, and leave it in your hair for about maybe 20 minutes or maybe 10, 15 minutes.

DEBORAH:

And then you just rinse it out.

MILSY:

And wash my hair normally with my shampoo and conditioner.

DEBORAH:

So, Milsy, do you have anything that you brought with you from the Dominican Republic that you’ll always keep with you? Maybe some little thing that you keep in your pocketbook or just you’ve always kept with you?

MILSY:

I remember the only thing I keep it with me is my family pictures—my brothers, my sisters, my father, my mom. That’s the only thing because I start to remember what I bring with me then I still have him with me and it’s my family pictures.

OBSTACLE OF THE MISSING DOCUMENTS/21:19

DEBORAH:

Your trip from the Dominican Republic to cross the border since you weren’t documented when you came, was that difficult to join your boyfriend? What was that like?

MILSY:

When I come to United States, I have my passport, my visa. So I came to United States legally. The thing is when I come to

United States, I lose my visa and my passport, I lose my documentation and I have to stay here because my ex-husband and me we talk about to do everything legal. I come to United States, visit him, leaving him with him here, but I have to go back to Dominican Republic and come back like every three or four months to be like that, and then to get married and then to leave with him here when he submit all of the petition and all of that. But everything disappeared one day. I don’t know how. And that’s why I have to stay here with no documentation and I can do nothing. I can’t go back. I can absolute nothing.

DEBORAH:

You mean everything was lost, your passport, everything, it just disappeared?

MILSY:

I don’t know how. I continue asking that question, how that happened?

DEBORAH:

That must have been a big setback, but you overcame it.

MILSY:

That was really difficult. Very difficult.

FUTURE DREAMS/22:43

DEBORAH:

What are some of your dreams about the future Milsy?

MILSY:

To be a teacher assistant, to work in the class. Take care the kids. Helping the family, and to buy my house, one day to buy my house.

ADVICE/22:57

DEBORAH:

If somebody came to you, another immigrant asking for advice about something, maybe that you wish you had done and you could say to them, “Learn from my experience, I wish I had done X,” what kind of advice would you give to them about based on your experience and also your observation of your whole adjustment to your new life in the United States and becoming a single parent and succeeding the way you have to make a life for yourself and your daughter?

MILSY:

First of all, I would tell them to never, never

stop learning English. Never think they can do nothing because they don’t know English. Never stop dreaming, because if you have dream, you can go really far. But if you don’t have dream, if you don’t have that is your motivation your dreams, and you have to believe on them and believe you can do it. Believe on yourself. Something that is really helping me a lot is the advice that man gave it to me that day when he met me. Like when he saying, “Never, never watch TV in your language. Watch the TV in English including when you don’t understand you were learning little by little.”

SUCCESSES/24:20

DEBORAH:

What do you feel is your biggest success since you’ve been here?

MILSY:

Be working in the school system. Be able doing what I’m doing right now with my community. Helping others not only at a school I work in all my community in Allston/Brighton. Working with them, see what the families needs, and helping that families, or give it to them the resource they need for the family.

DEBORAH:

When is your college going to be finished?

MILSY:

In two more years.

DEBORAH:

What kind of degree will you have at the end of the two years?

MILSY:

In two years I will be a teacher assistant or a paraprofessional.

DEBORAH:

What does it mean to be a paraprofessional?

MILSY:

Paraprofessional—what they do is to work with the teacher to work inside the class. Helping the teacher. All the time we have to work with the kids. Go with them to recess and stay there with them in the class, learning with them, teaching them with the teachers, and helping the teacher with everything they need to helping the kids to learning.

ROAD TO CITIZENSHIP/25:23

DEBORAH:

Sounds good. Have you become a citizen yet?

MILSY:

This is my next step. Little by little. Right now I taking the class with a wonderful woman. She's helping me in the process of learning with her every week I have to go with her learning. Oh my gosh. That is amazing. And to be ready for next year.

DEBORAH:

There'll be an exam in 2023?

MILSY:

In two more months.

DEBORAH:

Okay.

MILSY:

Yes.

DEBORAH:

You'll be ready. Thank you so much, Milsy for this interview. It's been great talking to you.

MILSY:

Thank you for inviting me.

WRAPPING UP/26:00

Fiercely independent and inner-directed, Milsy has pursued her dreams with great determination and patience. Once she obtained her resident card, she was able to reconnect with her family in her native Dominican Republic and is now studying for her citizenship exam in 2023.

Ever grateful to the people who helped her adjust to her life in the United States, Milsy wants to give back to her community. The childcare services for the evening classes at the ESOL program for adult learners enable students to bring their children to school while Milsy cares for them. The Gardner Pilot Academy is so happy to have this education professional on board as an essential staff member.

IMMIGRANT VOICES

Episode 30 GEORGE from LEBANON



OUR JOURNEYS • OUR VOICES • OUR STRUGGLES • OUR SUCCESSES

EPISODE #30—GEORGE FROM LEBANON

GUEST INTRO/00:39

George dreamed of coming to the U.S. to further his education as a young man, but Lebanese politics got in the way of a student visa. When he was married with children, a family health crisis brought him to the U.S. for 5 months in 2018. The catastrophic explosion in Beirut in the summer of 2020 caused him to leave his life in Lebanon behind and resettle his family permanently in Boston. They arrived at the height of the pandemic. Their first apartment was one-quarter the size of their Beirut house. Starting with no furnishings save a mattress on the floor, George slowly made a new home and a new life for himself and his family.

AN EARLY DESIRE TO VISIT THE U.S./01:38

DEBORAH:

My guest tonight is George from Lebanon. Hi George. Welcome.

GEORGE:

Hi. How are you?

DEBORAH:

Why don't you tell me how you happened to come to the United States?

GEORGE:

So when I was younger you know I was dream to come to United States before for study but it was a war in Lebanon. We are talking about 1989, 1990. I didn't take a student visa. First I applied for a student visa, but some reasons I cannot get this visa and later I was married in 2000. They give me the immigrant visa because my brother was here from 1988. He was here before me and he was coming also first time to study here. When he finished his studying

he was married and he is a citizen and he was applied for me to immigrant paper and I get first time 2000. I was married in 1999. I have one son. I told them I cannot come now because I didn't need it now. I was married. I started my life, you know, my own life and my own business in Lebanon because I'm Lebanese first. And finally in 2018 something happened. It was with my family. Some medical reason. I have a medical reason and I take the decision to come and to get the immigrant paper, and I apply and I get my green card in 2018 and was coming here first time. And I will stay here around six months first time to take the treatment and to finish the treatment. And later I was come back to Lebanon. And every six months I come to United States just for the immigrant papers, just for the immigration. And later in 2020 there was explosion in Lebanon and in Beirut, and it was the third explosion in the world. And I take the decision this time with my family to move to U.S., to the United States and we are moving on October 2nd, 2020 in the pandemic time, in the bad time, you know, but we are taking this decision to come here and to live here.

BEIRUT'S EXPLOSION SPARKS THE DECISION TO EMIGRATE/03:54

DEBORAH:

That was right after the explosion that was in August, right?

GEORGE:

In August four 2020.

DEBORAH:

Did you hear it?

GEORGE:

I hear it because I live in Beirut.

DEBORAH:

Can you talk a little bit about what that was like?

GEORGE:

It was crazy. We are so afraid first and the glasses all my house was broken and comes down and I have lost a lot of my friends was

died because it's a glass come and some it was crazy. And you cannot imagine what it was this explosion and what you see before and after how it was Beirut before and how it'll be later. And about the people, you know, around 220 persons was died. And around five persons not done, but it's not in good health. Still until now, and I have two, three people from my family was died. They have like a gas station. One of them also he was in coma around two three weeks and later he died. And so many people, you know, it was a crazy, crazy explosion in this time when I see this happens to Lebanon and you don't have nothing to do with later, you know, and just bad situations, months after months. I told my wife should be come and live here and this is this mistake when I do it should be come here before maybe in 2000 first time it was the best time, but I forget this occasionally. And I was coming even later, but it's good not to coming. But I was coming in 2020 and I am like an old man now. I am a younger but I bring my family because it is to safe and you can find work. And you have also some medications, and medications what disappeared in Lebanon. You don't have anything. Sometimes you don't have gas, sometimes you don't have food, sometimes you don't have electricity. Lots of problems. And we have immigration for here, and a hundred or thousand of Lebanese people dreams to come to the United States, and we have it and we don't come for what? First of all my family all, and my son was started as University of Beirut, American University of Beirut. They don't agree with me to come all. I don't know. I want to come, if you want to come with me. Okay. If you don't want stay in Lebanon, me, I want to go to the United States. That's why it takes with us around two months to take decision to finish everything in Lebanon from August to October second or third.

DEBORAH:

That's still pretty fast. That explosion was a big catalyst for you and all the previous trips, the work, the immigration work that you had already done probably helped you. Did it help you?

GEORGE:

Yeah, for sure. It helped me if I didn't have it how I want to come? I'm illegal. But when I have it, and I can get a lot of benefit here. You know why? Because it was a pandemic and here's the government the president give money to the people and me. I stay in Lebanon I lost all this benefit. So when I come back and apply to the IRS and everything and apply for my taxes because I am legal I have the permanent. That's why I can get everything. And thanks God for everything and thanks God, thanks to United States, and about these rules and we start in this time. About find work and about my daughter's school, my son's university, but my wife also search for a job. And we are a French-educated, not English-educated and it was so hard for us to go from the French to the English, you know. We speak lots of English, not too much.

DEBORAH:

How many languages do you speak?

GEORGE:

Three languages now— French, Arabic, and English.

COMING TO BOSTON AND FINDING WORK/07:56

DEBORAH:

Wow. And what brought you to Boston? Was it the educational institutions where your children were enrolled?

GEORGE:

Yeah, especially in Boston and our immigration. It was here in Boston because I make a treatment before when I let you know. Not here in Memphis, Tennessee, but our immigration here and my brother lives here. That's why we choose Boston and especially in Boston my first son applied to UMass Boston. He was accepted, and my second son also he has a high school. He finish it here. And my daughter in Gardner Pilot Academy, she was applied first to Winship school and grade five. And now she's in grade seven, but second year in Gardner Pilot Academy and that our school. Language school for me and my wife because we takes a courses, English courses.

DEBORAH:

That's great. So how old are your children now?

GEORGE:

My older son, he was graduated last year, 21, and my second son 18, and my daughter is now 12 years old.

DEBORAH:

What kind of work were you able to find, George, when you got here?

GEORGE:

My friend has a restaurant here in Commonwealth. I start with him to work in this restaurant, and I have some ideas from Lebanon, and this is Lebanese food. I was here on third October. I start my work on ten. After one week I start, it was always, thanks God about everything. And also I bring my sons to work with me, not a full-time, part-time when they have time. I was still working in that restaurant around seven months and later we are going into vacations in Lebanon in summer especially. And when I come back last year, I was starting running shift manager in a restaurant, another one Mediterranean restaurant, but American owner people. But they are so nice as I am so happy with them and they desire me too much. From October, 2021 and until now, I'm still in this job.

DEBORAH:

That's my favorite kind of food Mediterranean. You started to say something about your wife.

GEORGE:

She is finding a French school in Cambridge. And like assistant teacher. And she still work from last year and this year. And she takes like a certificate from a year and now she's a teacher in Cambridge in French school, and she speak English and she learn English with me in the same school in Gardner Pilot Academy.

DEBORAH:

When you were in Lebanon, what kind of work did you do?

GEORGE:

in Lebanon I have my own work. My dad have a truck, a big truck between Lebanon to the Arab countries. And I make a business accounting and I take all this business and transportation and later also I was working in a company like a manager in construction around 13 years still in this company.

DEBORAH:

In Lebanon construction?

GEORGE:

Yeah. In Lebanon. Yeah. Construction with our business, we have also transportations and materials for construction. Construction and everything. I was boss in two works. And later I move here to 2018. I still in this company, but not too much, because I still here six months or seven months. And the first time in the United States, when I come back, I come back to my work, but not too much. And the bad situation in Lebanon everything, especially in construction, stopped and in 2020 we are moved here.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES/12:02

DEBORAH:

What's been the hardest thing, George, about coming to this country for you?

GEORGE:

You know, it was too much hard because I start from A. I have everything in Lebanon and I prepare everything for the future. I have everything. And I was coming here. I don't have not home. I don't have anything. I don't have furniture. I don't have nothing, not car, nothing at all. I want to start from zero and okay, my brother help me. But you want lots of things and you do need lots of money and I take an apartment. And I was surprised because my house in Lebanon was four times that apartment. This apartment was like my salon in Lebanon. But here what can I do? And I live in Allston. And in Allston it's so expensive and the rent so expensive. But I like this place and we start first week we didn't have anything. I bring the mattress, just sets it and later we start to put the furniture or something, something after something. And it was too much hard because about the weather here too much cold. In Lebanon, where I live no snowing, nothing. I live in Beirut, you know like California, whether over there or sometimes like Florida, we don't have snow. The snow at the mountains. But here, and especially I don't have a car first of all. I want to go walking or take Uber. After six, seven months, I buy first car and I want to take the driver license. I didn't have it. And later, once, one month, after one month, everything will be good. And okay. And now I have the special reason when I find it about the rent, I need to buy a home or a house. I

don't know. But because they increased my rent from 2020 until now, it's three times. I started in \$1700. Now \$2400 and the smaller apartment, not a big two bedrooms, one rest room. That's it. Not nothing special.

DEBORAH:

And what was your house like in Lebanon in comparison?

GEORGE:

I have yeah, in comparison. Crazy. I can't compare.

DEBORAH:

You said it was three times the size.

GEORGE:

Yeah. I can't compare. That's why I have my own building. I live alone. I don't have any neighbors like here from the top boom, boom, boom all the time from down. You smell sometimes not a good smell. You have a lot of neighbors around you. But thanks God, it's okay. What we can do, you know, for now. Maybe next year if I can I want to try to apply to buy I don't know a home, an apartment. I want to see how much can I spend from the withdrawal from the bank about the mortgage and everything.

DEBORAH:

They have programs for first time home buyers.

GEORGE:

I applied it for the, but it was expiring. I can get \$50,000 here from Allston, but it was for November, end of November. But there's maybe later it'll be another program, I want to apply and I take online also this course around 10 times for this program. And now I take the certificate also and now I'm still waiting because here my rent to end of September 2023. So I don't want now to see or to buy something at the interest. I am not lucky. It was three percent last year. Now six point five, around seven.

DEBORAH:

Yes, it's gone up. So do you have furniture and are you all set up in your apartment now?

GEORGE:

Yeah, now, yeah. I have, thanks, God, everything. But it was not easy, first of all for me and especially first week. I didn't have anything I need to have just a mattress to

sleep and only bed I didn't have, you know, just the mattress.

MAKING LEBANESE FOOD/16:29

DEBORAH:

You got the mattress off the floor, finally. So do you love to cook. Do you cook in that restaurant?

GEORGE:

Yeah. I make everything. Yeah.

DEBORAH:

What do you make?

GEORGE:

I make falafel, we make hummus, we make babaganoosh, about the chicken, about the mushrooms, about steak, about what we have euro also shawarma here. Yeah. Rice everything. And the pita. We make special pita every day. Fresh pita, we do it. We have the oven and we have there's a mixer and everything.

DEBORAH:

Where is the restaurant located?

GEORGE:

In Watertown, Bond Street near Marshalls. In good place. Not too far from here.

DEBORAH:

Did you cook when you were in Lebanon?

GEORGE:

No. In Lebanon, I have two girls, one from Ethiopia and the other one from Sri Lanka, and one time from Bangladesh. One for make the food from Ethiopia and the other one to just clean the house and take care of everything on the house.

DEBORAH:

That was when you were in Lebanon.

GEORGE:

Yeah, when I am in Lebanon here. That's why it was too hard for us here. In Lebanon you cannot work in Lebanon. You work sometimes six hours and five days per week. That's it. Especially on the weekends. Everything closed on Friday at eleven/noon. Everything done and closed. You cannot something to do it, you have all your weekend for you, for your family. You can make activity. You can go everywhere and you can do what you want to do. Here you all the

days is the same. Sunday like Monday just working.

MAKING TIME FOR FAMILY/18:19

DEBORAH:

Do you not have enough time with your family now?

GEORGE:

Here I have time because I told them from the beginning, I don't want to work especially on Sunday because I'm Christian Catholic. I go to the church every Sunday with my family and later we go to the lunch. Some restaurant every Sunday, and I have this time I have the Sunday all the time they offer me and I work six days per week.

DEBORAH:

Are they long days?

GEORGE:

Not long days. 40 hours per week—42, 43 is the maximum. And especially now after Thanksgiving the maximum and not too much. Not 40 or now 30, 33, 35. Because now it's too slow. The business too slow.

RIDING OUT THE PANDEMIC/19:06

DEBORAH:

So you came here right in the height of the pandemic.

GEORGE:

Yeah, I take this decision; it was dangerous.

DEBORAH:

What was that like?

GEORGE:

First of all, I was surprised because here everything pandemic you just at the house. But when I was working in that restaurant, I don't know, maybe not too much restaurant was opened. That's why I spent my time here by working. I don't have a lot place to do it or lot of place to go and I need to put the furniture in my house and I need money. That's why I spend my time, first of all, working, working, working. And later I'm happy now because I have everything here. I don't need anything. Thanks God.

CITIZENSHIP/19:54

DEBORAH:

Do you have plans to become a citizen?

GEORGE:

Yeah, for sure. Maybe next year I will a citizen, because my green card from 2018 and I need five years after to stay here in the United States to get the passport citizen. I want to apply maybe next year.

LEARNING ENGLISH/20:12

DEBORAH:

Is that true of your children as well?

GEORGE:

Yeah, for all my family. Because we have the green card all in the same time, same date, and you are moving here first time all together. And when I stay here for this medical reason, my other children come back to continue her school in Lebanon. But we are still here. Just he was coming for his immigration. And we have it all at the same time. And same day especially. And same year.

DEBORAH:

Talk to me a little bit about your English. Did you know some English when you got here?

GEORGE:

I know a little English, not too much English, but I start, first of all, last year. I didn't know before where I want to take English and how I want to take English, but later when my daughter was in the school, I know there is some programs, English classes. And I know Miss Michelle and we are talking with her for me and to my wife and we have meeting her like a Zoom meeting the same, not in person. And we started take English classes last year and this year and we increase our language too much, you know, now I'm not so perfect, but I can speak. You understand me I think.

DEBORAH:

You're doing great. Do you speak Arabic at home or French?

GEORGE:

At home, honestly, Arabic and French. And when we are going to shopping, some shopping and here, because not all the people know French. That's why you speak French with my wife, but my daughter doesn't speak any word in French. She doesn't

speak French. She speaks just English and Arabic because in Lebanon I put all my childrens in English school. That's why I know before I want to come one day to live here. That's why I put all my childrens from the KG one, KG two, and they start at school in Lebanon. We have a English school. I put them in the English school.

DEBORAH:

That was the American school in Beirut is it?

GEORGE:

Yes, there is not too much. There is around three. And we have two university when we start my son in Beirut, American University of Beirut. And we are moving here. All he was thinking in Lebanon. It was here the same, he makes first year in Lebanon. He continue here the second year, and especially UMass Boston, all the semesters before he has taken around three semesters. It was here the same, and they continue here about the four and the fifth, sixth to finish.

DEBORAH:

So you wanted to come to the States a long time ago if you put your children into English school.

GEORGE:

Yes. That's why I put an English school. I know before I want to come one day here to live here. That's why I put it from the first beginning in English school. It was a reason, and if I not coming, maybe my children wants to come.

POWER OF POLITICS/23:24

DEBORAH:

What was it about coming to America that was so compelling for you that you wanted to do that? What made you know that you want to come one day?

GEORGE:

Because, you know, I applied before and later when I needed first of all when I was children, I needed to come here to complete my education. I cannot because it was war as I told you before in Lebanon and it was not easy to get the visa.

DEBORAH:

And that was before you were married?

GEORGE:

Yeah, before I was married. I have—we

are talking in 1998 from long time. I have around 17 years. But it is a problem is not from U.S. you know. We don't have an embassy in Beirut. I was going to Cyprus and to apply from Cyprus to the American Embassy in Cyprus, in Nicosia. But the problem it was from the Lebanese government. It was some political reasons. That's why they don't need the Christian people like to immigrate to other country. They needed to stay in Lebanon. It was from the patriarch of Lebanon. That is the and especially as a Christian, because all the time like now all the Christians Lebanese people around the world, and especially every one bad situation has come. I take the visa first of all when I apply. I just remember at the morning and I went to get my passport at two afternoon. And when I was going to bring my posters, the council over there, he told me, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry" three times, "Mr. George, we cannot give you a visa. This is a decision from your country, not from us. We are so sorry."

DEBORAH:

And are you saying it was because you were Christian?

GEORGE:

Yeah, it was some political reason. Because it was a war and all the Christians, especially the younger when you can get some immigration, they are leaving, that was the reason. Yeah. And from this time I'm still thinking about the United States because my brother was here and I want to come here and we are just two, me and my brother. I don't have other brothers and him, and he doesn't also have, and we dream to open a business here from the last time before if we are coming. But the bad ways it was to coming not early. I was coming too much late in 2020. But it's better to come. Not to come, maybe not to come for later, but I was coming. Yeah. And that's it.

BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY NOW AND IN THE FUTURE/26:12

DEBORAH:

Is running your own business with your brother in the future, is that part of a plan for the future, do you think?

GEORGE:

Yeah, but not now. First of all, I want to buy a home. This is first my first planning. But

maybe later. But if we can find something, until now, if I can find like some convenience store, a small business, I can start it. Not a big business and especially not a restaurant, because the restaurant. I find that last week, one for rent, not for buy, but you need lots of people to work with you and you have a lot of money to pay for the food for something like this. I am not ready now for this.

DEBORAH:

That's a lot of work. Restaurant business, seven days a week business.

GEORGE:

Yeah. That's why I used to spend all your time in your business and it's not easy, really. It's a harder job.

DEBORAH:

So, looking to the future, I know you want to buy your own home, that's top of the list. Are there any other things that you're hoping to do in the future?

GEORGE:

Yeah, I dream if I can, like I told you now, when I finish my home, if I can open like small business. For me, I am the owner. You can take all the decision in your own, but we are dreaming now because like I told you before, everything is so expensive now. And if I can buy something in Lebanon, oh, you need too much money here. That's why maybe, but this is second plan, plan B, not plan A.

MISSING LEBANON/27:53

DEBORAH:

What do you miss the most about Lebanon?

GEORGE:

I miss about my family. My dad, my mom, they have also green card, but they don't like to live here. Because the living in Lebanon difference, than here, like I told you, can do everything. And especially because now my dad and my mom are old people, not younger, and also they not speak English. This is the reason. They are coming here, but all the time stay at home and they don't have nothing to do with and not working. They prefer to stay in Lebanon. And that why I miss especially, and this is a reason to go every summer on vacation to Lebanon to see him. And I have also one

sister in Lebanon. And some friends in Lebanon stay that's why maybe like nostalgia.

CURRENT ENGLISH CLASSES/28:49

DEBORAH:

So you go to school now the classes are in person. Yeah. And you and your wife go, you go together. Are you in the same class?

GEORGE:

In the same class and every week, two times per week, two hours 30 minutes, every session.

DEBORAH:

Do you like it better in person or online?

GEORGE:

You know, sometimes like online better, but now no. I like better in person and we have a good teacher and he like me and I like him. I can ask him everything. I can do it everything. If I have some problems, something to ask him and, you know, especially there is lots of culture different, our culture and sometimes about the pronunciation also I need to help me. But if I have an online, and you have a lot of student with all online, you cannot take your time to ask you like these questions, especially these questions.

CULTURAL CLASHES/29:48

DEBORAH:

What, are the biggest differences culturally between here and there?

GEORGE:

About also the families. Here when your childrens be 18, he can go and live alone. In Lebanon you don't have this culture and you cannot like some reason like about girlfriend and boyfriend and if you can get baby without marriage, it's not legal in our country. You don't have that, should be married from him or from her. This is a special culture, about the families we are talking. And this is the most important. That's it. And here what is also like when the children still working he or she has money. They don't need the parent, I can spend my own money. But in Lebanon, no. All the time they need the parents to take money from him. That's why it is a reason to stay with them.

DEBORAH:

So they're more independent here.

GEORGE:

Yeah, more independent here, but too much!

DEBORAH:

Do you try to get them to be more the way it would be in Beirut?

GEORGE:

Yeah, I try as I can, you know.

DEBORAH:

What do they, what do they say to you?

GEORGE:

They don't say anything. Like my second son he has a girlfriend or something. He goes around two three days per week. But now he wants to still live with us not too much because we don't like me and my wife we speak with him. We don't like this way. We still one family and we makes all this family together not about the American way. You can do everything, but especially at night should come back and sleep with us in the same house. That's why I want to buy a house. Not for me because I want to everyone of my children be relaxing. He has their own room. Like in Lebanon, he can do everything I buy for him a car and he has his own car about like the Lebanese way, not just one car for all the family. He can do everything as we can. Me and my wife, we try to stay about the Lebanese culture and we don't know how long but until now.

DEBORAH:

That's a challenge.

GEORGE:

Yeah.

DEBORAH:

To hold onto the family values, but take advantage of the good things in our culture. Anything else that you'd like to share about your experience?

GEORGE:

I want to tell maybe somebody immigrant from here, here you have the safe, especially in this state. You know, I was in other state, like I told you before, in Memphis, it's not safe.

DEBORAH:

What was it like?

GEORGE:
It's not safe.

DEBORAH:
In Memphis, Tennessee.

GEORGE:
Especially in Memphis, not in Tennessee, all Tennessee, like you have Nashville, it's a good place. But when we are in Memphis.

DEBORAH:
What happens?

GEORGE:
All the times, the police around the security, around the building. At three, four after-noon you can't do walking you want to still at the building or at the hotel. And if you want to go somewhere you want to take the Uber you cannot go walking and all the time the gun and everything. Every man he can buy it over there and they can put a gun. I still remember like in Black Friday some boy was with her girlfriend and some other boy look about her girlfriend. How he was looking about her girlfriend he's take the gun and shoot him. I still remember this crime.

DEBORAH:
Did you see it happen?

GEORGE:
No. I was on the other street, but I see on the news later at night and I was surprised. And I was afraid. And in that time we don't go anywhere. Just during the day and with Uber nothing walking because I was walking every day like just to walk or to make some exercise. But later I still every day, every day at like a hotel, we are leaving over there. And when want to go is to make shopping or to make something, we take like a shuttle. He takes us, he waits us and he bring us to the hotel when we finish. But here you have all the time safe. And especially like here when I live in Allston, you five a.m., five p.m., three a.m., three p.m. is the same. The police around you nothing and no problem. You can do everything, especially walking, and why when I was working before I sometimes I still at 1:00 AM in my work and I go walking here from my house to my job around eight minutes walking. I didn't see anything special or something dangerous or some situation. Good or bad situation. No, everything is good. And I recommend every person he

want to come here to come to Massachu-setts, especially to Boston and to live here because I think third state in the United States, Massachusetts or second about everything, about the education, about the safety, about everything.

DEBORAH:
Have you experienced any kind of discrim-ination because you're an immigrant since you've been here?

GEORGE:
No. Nothing. No.

DEBORAH:
And what about when you were in Mem-phris, did you experience anything?

GEORGE:
No. No. All was the same, like here.

ADVICE/35:42

DEBORAH:
That's great. That's good to hear. What advice would you give beyond telling an immigrant that they should move to Mas-sachusetts? Somebody coming from your country or another country, what have you learned that you would give as advice?

GEORGE:
It's not easy, first of all to come. Should be count 200% before it should be take this decision. But if he wants to come, I recommend him to come here especially to Boston and Massachusetts. And you have here everything you may plan to get it, you can get it here. Especially if about some families you have the number one university in worldwide here. Like you have Harvard, Northeastern, BU. All the universities are good. And about medica-tions, about the hospitality also you have the first number one Boston Children Hospital here. Number one also and the Mass General also for the adult. And they can get everything about like the insurance, the MassHealth insurance they have with me. And like when I told him because me I just start from the zero. Maybe if somebody comes like me some people you can help him some if they don't know about English, like our school now, they can give him English lessons and every helps they can help him. And especially here Harvard also, they can help him too much and I advise him to come here and to see and everything

is good and excellent. And I think maybe if they come early not like my age, if they can come before is better. This is me. I was bad from these things should be come later.

DEBORAH:
You tried when you were younger, that's for sure.

GEORGE:
I tried, but I was especially if I was in 2018, should be stay here not coming back to Lebanon, but my son was start as university over there. That's why is the problem. But also before one month is better than next month, you know what I mean? This is a good reason to come.

DEBORAH:
I'm delighted that you're having such a positive experience.

GEORGE:
Yeah, I have a positive experience and that great because I have experience about me, about the job, about the work, about the insurance, about the social life, about the university, the school for my children, my daughter, about everything, the driver license, how I can get it now. How to search to buy a home, to make a business about the people. I find good people here. I am lucky maybe because I see these people when I was working with him. Three owners, two brothers and sister, and one third owners all from here and was born here. And so good people. They respect you. They have like all the time when she wants to take they take your decisions and everything. You know, you feel like you are like a family.

DEBORAH:
They ask your opinion.

GEORGE:
Yeah. Ask about opinion not like a manag-er or some owner or like, look about you. Who are you in this way? No. Anytime if they want to go to the restaurant they ask me, "We can go, you know?" So, so special people. That's why I think I didn't invite any people here not good until now. But that's why I recommend him to come here and to live here. This is a good place.

DEBORAH:
Thank you so much for chatting with me.

GEORGE:

Before I was afraid about this sharing, but now it's okay.

DEBORAH:

You did great. You did great.

WRAPPING UP/39:52

Even though George holds on to Lebanese family values, he is able to go with the flow as his children take on more and more of the American lifestyle. Currently pursuing citizenship, and working hard, he keeps a healthy balance between work and family and between both cultures by visiting his parents in Lebanon whenever he can. George's optimism and appreciation for his new country and new friends radiate in his enthusiasm and ability to navigate both worlds.

THANKS TO OUR GUESTS AND LISTENERS FOR 30 EPISODES

Thank you for staying with us right to the end of this episode—our thirtieth one. The Immigrant Voices Podcast Project has been the brainchild of Michelle Duval, Director of the Adult Education Program at the Gardner Pilot Academy in Allston, Massachusetts, and podcaster and ESOL instructor, Deborah Bluestein. You can learn more about English for Speakers of Other Languages courses 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 its executive director Jo-Ann Barbour, this project would never have been possible.

Last but not least, a big thank you to the thirty guests who have participated in this series of interviews over the last three years. And to our listeners, we say, "Thank you. Come back to revisit these episodes, and tell your friends about our immigrant stories told in their own voices."
