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Coming to the Plains

Esthefany López Cruz, Interviewee
Dr. Michelle Warren, Interviewer
Jacob Rosdail, Videographer

Santa Rosa de Copán, Honduras

Interview date: 5/25/2018

ROSDAIL: What's this a photo of? Just tell me, since I don't know the story.

[0:01:02]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Oh. This is in Honduras, just a little bit before my parents came to the U.S. So, this is the last picture they took in Honduras before they came to the U.S. I was barely a year-old right there. I'm barely standing up, because I was barely a few months old.

[0:03:18]

WARREN: Okay. First, you could tell me your complete name and tell me where you are originally from?

LÓPEZ CRUZ: My name is Esthefany Jaqueline López Cruz and I'm from Santa Rosa de Copán, Honduras.

WARREN: Tell me what your parents have told you about the life that they had there.

LÓPEZ CRUZ: My parents say that, growing up, they were very poor; they didn't have a lot of things, especially clothes and shoes. My mother actually had her first pair of shoes when she was sixteen so her whole life, or the first half of her life, she spent barefoot, walking around barefoot, working barefoot, and she only had about two sets of clothes and she'd have to wash them, wash one of them, one day, and then wear the other, the other day. And my dad was the same way, he wasn't able to go to school. He dropped out of school in third grade and after that he started to have to work at the age of eight. They had a very hard life, and they knew that they didn't want me to go through that and that's why they decided to bring me to the U.S., so that I could have a better life and I could have the things that I needed that they never had when they were children.

WARREN: Tell me then, you said that they both worked when they were really young. Tell me, what kind of work did they do?

[0:05:07]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: My parents worked. My dad worked in a tire shop. He learned mechanical things. I think it was an uncle of his or someone in the family who taught him. So, he was changing tires for cars or cleaning them, sometimes washing. My mother, her job was housework; she had a bunch of little brothers that she had to take care of, and then cook, and

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clean, and wash the clothes. And over there they don't have washers or dryers, so they have to go to the river and wash them by hand and she had to do that for the first half of her life, pretty much, until she met my dad. My mom ended up running away from home because she was tired of being mistreated because over there, parents don't really care about their children. My parents have explained it to me. Children are treated as if they are slaves. That's the only thing they're good for. Just to do the things that the parents don't want to do. My parents grew up living pretty harsh, you know. And I'm thankful that they didn't let me grow up in a situation like that, because I'm guessing I'd probably have had a really hard life too, because living over there is not easy. There's so many... sicknesses, first of all, there's a lot of deaths. I feel like that's one of the major things. Violence is another thing, too, and prostitution is huge in our country. A lot of women who can't find a husband to take care of them, because the majority of the jobs over there are taken by men. Women are mainly told to stay home, be a mother, and take care of the house or whatever and a lot of women might have a child, but the guy left them. After that, they're looked down upon, and then they can't find anyone to take care of them or the child, so then a lot of these women end up prostituting themselves. Thankfully my mom never had to go into that. When my parents first met, they were able to stay together until now; they're still together, twenty-three years later.

[0:07:44]

WARREN: Tell me about the family that you guys have left in Honduras because you mentioned brothers on your mom's side and then I wonder about your dad's parents, as well as your mom's parents.

LÓPEZ CRUZ: So, the people that we left in Honduras would be the majority part of my dad's family, which I don't even know because his side of the family is really big; he doesn't even know all his family. They're huge, sometimes my dad will just tell me, "Oh, this is your cousin," and I'm like, "Which one? Out of all the cousins that I have," or "Your aunt." His father died when he was very young. He actually found him dead. He was caught in a bunch of wires and the wire was around his neck, and so it suffocated him. Now they believe that someone must've murdered him, but made it seem like an accident, like he just tripped into those wires. And my dad had been waiting for him the night before, didn't find him, went out looking for him and found him tangled up and already cold and everything. My mother had to get him ready for his funeral. She had to dress him and everything and that was pretty shocking for her. His mom, my grandmother lives here now. She actually lives in the same town as we do, just a few blocks away. She came to the U.S. first, so that's why my dad was left alone at such a young age. He lived with his older brothers, his older brother and his older sister. They both also live here in the U.S., of his close family, nobody really lives in Honduras right now. It's more just cousins, and uncles, and aunts that live over there. On my mother's side, she has her mom over there still, and she has two brothers that are still over there. And then she has a sister and a brother that are here in the U.S., so her family is split up between Honduras and here.

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[0:10:02]

WARREN: Have you, or do your parents, and your little brother, have you been able to travel back to Honduras during the twenty-three years?

LÓPEZ CRUZ: No... My family has not been able to travel back because of our status here in the U.S. It won't allow us to leave the U.S. My little brother has said that he'd like to visit, and I would like to visit, too, because I would like to get to see the country that I was born in. But sadly, because I was brought here at a very young age, I don't remember anything from over there, you know. My grandmother will send me pictures or videos of around the towns that they live, or certain places they go all the time and it's the only way that I am able to see how my country is, and, in my perspective, it's beautiful. There are a lot of really beautiful places that you can visit and see. But also, there's a lot of poverty and you can just tell the huge difference between people living in Honduras and people living here. It's quite a big difference.

WARREN: How is your parents' work life different here than it would've been? What do they do here for professions?

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Well, my parents, since they first came to the U.S., they started working right away. The majority of their lives they've spent working in companies, together, which was a lot better than over there, because they get paid a lot better here than they did over there. I believe they would only get paid about twenty dollars a day. Which, compared to here, that's, like in what? Four, or maybe even two hours of work, that's the amount they get paid. My dad worked also as a taxi driver in Honduras, but it came with a lot of risks, because it was very dangerous. He could get assaulted or even robbed. There are a lot of things that were complicated... that would complicate getting jobs over there. My mom couldn't get jobs over there because being a woman, you can't technically work unless you have an education. If you have an education, then you're able to get some type of job but, other than that, you can't. And so, when she came here, she was able to get a job and was treated equally, instead of over there, where women are looked down upon.

[0:12:49]

WARREN: When they talk about what they left behind, do they ever talk about things that they miss from Honduras?

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Mainly it's just their family. For example, my mom, it's been hard for her not to see her own mother for twenty-one years. Because, since I came here when I was one, technically, it's been twenty-one years since they have seen her. And sometimes, for example on Mother's Day, it's hard for her, to tell her mom, "Happy Mother's Day," but not be able to be there, or when she's sad, not be able to have that hug of a mother, the love of her mother. For her, it's that part that's harder. My dad misses the people who were close to him, who helped him. I do know they miss a lot of the food because they don't really find the type of food that you eat over there here. There might be something similar or something they might want to say,

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“Oh, it’s kind of the same thing,” but the taste is different, obviously, because over there, it’s fresher than what you get here. They say they also miss the smell of the trees, because a lot of the trees, they’re mango trees, apple trees... I mean, there’s a lot of variety of trees. My mom said that she used to climb up the trees all the time and just eat mangoes because she loved eating mangoes. I feel like that was a thing that when they were children, they did a lot; they climbed up trees a lot to pick out fruit and eat it and it was just fresh, instead of now, where you just buy it at the supermarket when it’s not really as fresh.

WARREN: I don’t know much about Honduran food; can you tell me what would be a traditional Honduran dish?

[0:15:04]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: The most common Honduran food is pollo con tajadas, which is pretty much a banana but it’s a very well-done banana. But it’s fried and then they have the chicken that you normally cook and then there’s this special sauce. I don’t exactly remember what they call it, that they pour over it, and then they have lettuce, and they have cheese, I believe. I haven’t eaten it in a while, because we don’t really find many Honduran restaurants around here. We have to travel to other states to find one, because it’s not very common. Another dish would be empanadas, which are small little tortillas that are stuffed with different stuff. For example, my parents like to make it with meat, with beef in it, and with potatoes, and bell pepper, and all type of vegetables in there, which are pretty good. But I feel the culture has changed since we’ve been here, because we’ve gotten used to eating mostly Mexican food, or American food, or... but not as much what they used to eat in Honduras. Then again, they weren’t able to eat those delicious dishes in our country because they were so poor. So, normally, what they would eat was a tortilla with salt. And that would be lunch, and sometimes even dinner, for them. If they were lucky, they probably had beans or rice, but it wasn’t a daily thing or a very often thing. Sometimes they wouldn’t even eat because they were too poor to have food. I know that my mom had to share with her brothers and her sister, and a lot of the time, it was maybe just a little portion of it that she was able to eat. I feel like that’s also why everyone over there is so skinny. They pretty much starve, because they don’t have the food. And then, once they come here, they gain the weight, it happened to my parents as well.

WARREN: What kinds of words of advice do your parents give you, as far as being able to grow up here, and how you can make the best of your life, and have things that they didn’t have as they were growing up?

[0:17:56]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: What my parents have always told me, since I was a little girl, was to study, to get an education, to become someone in life because they weren’t able to do it; they didn’t get the education that they wished to have. My mother did go until eleventh grade, technically, so she only had about a year left of school to be able to graduate, and she couldn’t because she got

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pregnant with me, and then it was just too hard to be able to consistently go to school. She would have to walk miles to school. She'd have to get up really, really early and then walk to school, and then it was all dirt, so she'd get dirty on the way there, and when she got there, she'd get punished for having dirty feet, or having dirty hands, or whatever. Actually, that's also how she got a back injury because one of her teachers hit her with a ruler. Over there, the rulers are a lot thicker and longer, and he ended up smacking her with it, and it caused her back injury, since she was young, and she had to grow up living with that. She told me to be thankful that I don't have professors that do that. So, a lot of the times she'd tell me, "Be good to your professors. If they're telling you something, it's for your own good." She'd always tell me to pay attention in class. I am the first person in my whole entire family to go to college, so my parents have always been pushing me, telling me, "Keep going, just, work hard, and, eventually, that hard work is going to pay off, and eventually, you'll graduate, and you'll accomplish something; you'll be someone. Don't end up working in companies, breaking your back, for nothing." Because at the end of the day, they worked so hard, at these companies, and they got nothing back. Instead, the companies turned their backs on them; they left them injured. And now, their life's a little bit harder because, when they were younger, they weren't able to do what they wanted to do, and even more, with a child, they couldn't do as much.

[0:20:25]

Over the years, they were able to learn English, but they didn't really get to do very well on it. Even for me, it was hard growing up to do my homework, and understand in school, because they would only talk to me in Spanish. And in school I would only learn English. So, it was very hard for me to understand in school what was going on and how to do my homework; they couldn't help me because they didn't know. For me, it was also very hard, but thanks to them, I've pushed myself to this point, and still being in college, and then just to be about a year away from graduating.

WARREN: I just have one quick question to clarify. Was your dad's back injured on the job? You said he had back surgery about six months ago?

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Yeah.

WARREN: How is he now? Is he still able to work, or...?

LÓPEZ CRUZ: No. They technically got him considered disabled.

WARREN: [whispers] Wow.

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Mm-hmm. Unemployed.

[0:21:36]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: My dad can't work now because he was injured in one of his jobs. He was a truck driver and ended up having an accident that wasn't even his fault, but they blamed him,

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fired him for it. Now he's been fighting them on it, but it has completely changed his life. He can't do as much as he could do back then. He's constantly having to either lay down, or stand up, or sit. He's never comfortable. He's always in pain. Just seeing him like that, it really makes me sad because I can't do anything for it, and he tells me, "You know what? Keep studying, so you don't have to end up like me at a young age." I consider him very young; he's honestly not that old. He's barely turning forty-one this year, and for him to already be considered unemployed and disabled, I mean, that's half of your life gone. It's nothing there, and so, I feel like the hard jobs that my parents have done, even though they feel it's been for nothing, I feel like it has. Because, thanks to them, me and my brother have been able to have a better life, have been able to live well, have been able to study, and go to school, and have enough clothes, enough shoes, have food on the table all the time. I know that their hard work means something, to me. But sadly, for them, it's their whole entire life. It's been pretty hard and even to this day, it still is pretty hard.

WARREN: To back up a little bit, could you talk a little bit about what it was like when you first had to go to school here, without being an English-speaker. What was your experience when you first started school, and how was that progress of figuring out how to get by, and learning English, finally becoming fluent, and successful in school?

[0:23:40]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: When I first started going to school, it was in Head Start, so it was pre-school; I didn't communicate with other kids because they all spoke English, and especially in the town where we live, there're not that many Hispanics. The majority are Americans. So, it was very hard. My mom would tell me that, when I'd come home, I'd come home crying because I would try to communicate with the kids, and I couldn't. They would make fun of me because, to them, I spoke weird, since I was speaking in Spanish. It was very hard growing up; I was very quiet, very shy, didn't really say much. I don't even feel like the school system actually even helped me. I never took classes to help me. I feel like I learned English just by picking up what they said in class. I never actually had any extra help where they would sit down and teach me English. Which now, thinking back, I feel like it was pretty sad, that they never actually helped me that way, especially as a child.

[0:24:52]

I grew up being bullied a lot. Not just because I couldn't speak English very well, but also because I wouldn't say things, or I would say things wrong, or I meant something else. They'd make fun of me for it. It was a lot of difficulties for me... I felt like every year, I was almost failing, because I would have to do extra work every single year. I would have to do extra work just to be able to pass. It made me sad... I do remember, by the time I was in fourth grade, I didn't want to go to school anymore because I just felt like all I went there to do was to get made fun of. I never learned anything because I couldn't understand. Slowly I started to talk to more of my cousins or other family that I had that spoke English. They were able to help me to learn

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more and know how to speak it, and then, slowly, I started learning, little by little. I did, at one point, have a very good teacher who helped me learn. Her name was Mrs. Jennings. She would take the time to actually explain things for me. Sometimes I'd stay after class, and she'd sit down, and she'd explain things that I didn't understand. She would have someone there who spoke Spanish, to help me out. And then, eventually, I caught on and started learning more and more. And even now, I still struggle a little bit because there are certain words I still don't know how to say, but I can keep up a conversation with someone.

WARREN: You can't just keep up a conversation; you're a successful college student. And then that's my next question is, tell us about your university experience, and what your professional hopes and dreams are as you finish your degree.

[0:27:03]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Now that I'm in college, it is a lot easier, but there are still classes that I still struggle in, especially in English class. It's always been one of my weaknesses, because of all the grammar and everything. Sometimes I don't get it, but thankfully I have help. School helps me a lot, especially now in the college that I am assisting in has helped me to understand. My professors have helped me understand and have made me successful to this point. I'm hoping to be able to help others as well. Because of how much I struggled as a child, I know that there's a lot of other people out there that are struggling as well, adults that struggle to communicate. And, a lot of the times, they don't get the medical attention they need, or they don't get the help that they need because of that language barrier, and that's the reason I decided to study as a Spanish translator and interpreter, so I could help these people out as well. Because I know how the struggle and the feeling of not being able to communicate, or tell that person, "This hurts," or, "This is what I feel, this is what's going on." So, I hope that, in the future, I can make a difference for a lot of people, and they know that they are not alone, that they have someone there to help them. Instead of just feeling like nobody cares, and not having anything be solved because they can't find the help. So, hopefully, with my major, I'll be able to help people in the future.

[0:28:55]

WARREN: Tell us about the situation in Honduras, and what's happened between the U.S. government and the people who have come here from Honduras? And what's the status - we've discussed a little bit, but I don't know exactly how to put it - the immigration status and the amnesty that was offered before and what's happened over the past few weeks regarding what's going to happen long-term?

ROSDAIL: And maybe when you do that, start with describing what your status currently is.

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Okay. So, my current status right now in the U.S. is TPS, which is abbreviated for Temporary Protected Status. I am legal here in the U.S., but it's only temporary because, when my parents and I came to the U.S., our country had been destroyed by a hurricane. So, our

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country got even poorer than it originally was. Coming to the U.S. was a refuge, in a way, but they put us under a different status. Instead of being a refugee, it was just a temporary protected status. At that time, a lot of people were accepted. If they entered the U.S. at a certain time period, they would accept it. Now, it's not. Actually, they're trying to get rid of it. Our country has done better since we've been here, but not so much as to have so many people go back, like the U.S. is trying to do currently.

[0:30:35]

They actually have extended our time period to solve things and then moved the process a little bit more smoothly, rather than just quickly trying to get every Honduran out of the U.S. and back to Honduras. Our government has spoken for us and has told the government of the U.S. that our country's not stable enough to allow so many people to come back. The rate of poorness and poverty would probably be even lower than what it used to be, because now, the majority of people do have cars. Back then, people always had to walk. The majority now do have cars, mobile phones... that's something that wasn't in the time that my parents were there, didn't exist. In certain areas there's internet, there's TV's, there's dryers and washers, but I feel like mostly it's the people who are wealthy over there that have these advantages, rather than the ones that are poor, and that still have to do it by hand. My parents actually own a house in Honduras, and they're currently building more apartments to rent out and help certain people over there who can't afford a place. They get these apartments a little bit cheaper, that they can live in, helping their own family or even just friends or neighbors or whatever, whoever needs the help.

ROSDAIL: So, talk about coming over, and when we can, use specific years. Was coming over related to the hurricane, was it just in that hurricane period, or what was the actual...?

WARREN: Timeline.

ROSDAIL: Yeah, timeline of coming over? And use years and your age when possible.

WARREN: So, the year that your parents would've brought you, and how old you were, the year approximately? You know, of the hurricane, and then maybe also mention, what you told me a couple weeks back that the American government was going to cut off the TPS...

ROSDAIL: And we'll come back to that.

WARREN: Oh, okay, we can come back to that, okay. Okay, so, timeline.

[0:33:04]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Okay. So, my parents decided to come to the U.S. when that hurricane destroyed our country completely. And it was only during that time period, which was around in the 1990s, no, sorry, 199...8, I believe was when we had that hurricane Mitch. And that was only for about a three-year expansion, I believe that the U.S. said, "Okay, if you enter the U.S., from 1998 to 2001, that you'd be granted this temporary status." My parents heard it from a family

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friend, I believe, or someone in the family that told them about this. Also, other factors that were happening in their lives also made them make the decision. My father tried coming to the U.S. by himself first, but he got caught at the Mexican border and was sent back. So then, the second time, she wasn't going to come with him, but then, she was like, "You know what? If you're going to try to go again, I'm just going to go with you as well." And, around that time, I was already a year old. My mom was eight months pregnant when my dad decided to come by himself. And then, by the time we all went, I was already a year and a half. And then we ended up coming over. And I was here in the U.S. a little bit before I turned two. It was wintertime. So, it was October or November, I believe, because I was born in January. I was about to turn two when they came to the U.S.

ROSDAIL: And, as Michelle was transitioning, you said in your previous answer that the news has gotten better regarding deportation.

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Mm-hmm.

ROSDAIL: But let's just turn it back to a couple of weeks ago. What did you think was going to happen?

[0:35:21]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Okay. A little bit ago, we had heard that our status wasn't going to be able to get renewed. They were going to just cancel it and pretty much tell us to go back to our country. And I honestly freaked out. I was very scared because, one, I don't know my country very well since I grew up here and the only thing that I know is what I saw growing up here. So, knowing that I was going to have to go back to a country that I didn't know anything about really scared me. Not only that, I was worried that I wouldn't be able to finish my education. So many things started going through my head, "What am I going to do? What type of job would I even be able to find? Would I even be able to continue my education? Would I end up having to work just at home?" I was freaking out, honestly. I also had thought about dropping out of college and working so I could save up money if I did end up going over there. I was getting letters from my job saying that a certain date was my last day of work unless I could present documentation that I was going to be able to stay longer. It was really stressful. And it was hard, too, because it was around finals at school that I was getting all this news, and then I was going through personal stuff as well. It all just came downpouring, and even my parents were worried. Because they're like, "Oh, my gosh. What are we going to go back to?" So that's what motivated them to buy a place as well, and then build something that they could have in case they ended up having to go back. I mean, they are more used to it so they had an idea what they could do if they went back. They had family and everything, but at the same time, I had no idea, you know? I actually sat down and was talking to them like, "Okay, if we did go back, where are we going to live? What are we going to do? Would I still be able to go to school? What type of job could I get?" We were having those types of conversations.

[0:37:50]

And the more we talked about it, the more scared I got. And I was praying to God, “Please, something.” Honestly, I don’t think I could make it and live in situations like that where I wouldn’t even be able to take everything I have with me. It would only be a few selections of clothes and shoes. I wouldn’t be able to take everything I have. And I know that it’s dangerous because at this moment Honduras is having a lot of troubles with gangs and violence. I had heard that a specific gang that is taking over certain parts of my town is in control of the main airport that connects the U.S. to Honduras. They’re in control of that main airport. So, I was freaking out, because I was like, “What about if we land then we get kidnapped, or robbed? And everything taken away?” Because obviously we’re going to have a lot nicer clothes than those who actually live there, so they’re going to know that we come from the U.S. And then the first thing that they’re going to try to do is take away everything we have and leave us with nothing. Not only that, but there’re families that just because we’re here, they think that we live a rich life, and that we’re just being greedy, and we don’t want to share it. And even though we try to help family from back there, I know that there’s still some family we have that would turn their backs on us. And so, there’s a lot of that stuff, and also because I don’t know anyone in person. I’ve seen my grandmother through video chat, through pictures, but I don’t know her; I don’t know my uncle, I don’t know my cousins. So, having to move somewhere completely different and meet people that I’ve never met before, all of it was very stressful for me. I was freaking out a lot about it.

WARREN: I wonder if you can go back a little bit and talk about... these are stories that you shared with me, and they’re not your memories, per se, but they’re memories of your parents telling you about some of the experiences they had, because they came all the way from Honduras, all the way up through Central America and Mexico to get here. Can you tell us some of the stories that they’ve shared with you? I’m specifically thinking about your dad in the Iron Beast. Remember? The Bestia de Hierro? No? In that train?

LÓPEZ CRUZ: No, my parents didn’t go by train.

WARREN: No? But then, what about your mom holding you? She had to hold you the whole time because you wouldn’t go with anybody else.

[0:40:45]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Mm-hmm. When my parents first came to the U.S., their journey to the U.S. was very hard, very traumatizing. Not just because they had to carry a very fat baby, because I was very, very fat as a baby, but also because of all the dangers that they had to go through. Just having to walk so much... they would tell me stories of what happened along the way. They had to cross Guatemala first, and then cross Mexico to finally get to the U.S. In Guatemala, nothing really serious happened. They suffered more once they got to Mexico. My dad being a little bit darker-skinned was very discriminated against because the majority of Mexicans and even my

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mom were very light-skinned. My dad, being a little more dark-skinned, was very discriminated against. He'd be pulled off buses. Certain taxi drivers or people driving wouldn't let him get inside the car because he was darker-skinned. And my dad would always tell my mom, "You go on, I'll catch up." And my mom would get down from the bus or get out of the car or whatever. She didn't want to ever separate herself from my father. And I think that I also made it harder on my mom, because my mom was very, very skinny when we first came, and me being such a chubby baby became very tiring for her, and I didn't want to go with my dad at all. I only wanted to be with her, and it got to the point that she told me that she felt like she had no more strength. When they were very close to the U.S. border, her arms felt like she didn't have arms anymore. Her arms were completely dead from having to carry me. My dad had to tie me with a blanket - he tied it around her, and she carried me in the back, like a little sack, because my mom could not carry me anymore. And, even on the way there, the only way my mom would feed me was by breast milk, which kind of explains why I was so chubby and why she was so skinny.

[0:43:13]

They would tell me stories of almost being caught by U.S. immigration police. I also asked her if I ever had a favorite blanket, or a favorite toy, or stuffed animal. I never got to see anything that was mine, because they lost it along the way. My mom said that one of my favorite blankets was taken by the river between Mexico and the U.S. They had to cross the river, and in that river, I must've let it go, or somehow it slipped out from where I had it, and my mom says that she could remember exactly how my blanket started floating away in the river and seeing that upset me really badly. I started crying in the middle of them crossing the river, and all of a sudden, they heard police officers, with the key jingles, the dogs barking. And they had to rush out because of me, and they said that there was a kind of little cliff where they ended up jumping into, and then, there was a hole in that cliff. They ended up hiding inside of there. And my mom says that at that point, she would just look down at me and tell me to be quiet, and she said that with my big eyes I just stared at her and knew that we were in danger. And she said that in front of them, they could see how the police officers were shining their light, trying to look where they were at. Stories like that were very shocking to me because I was like, "Wow. You went through that?" Another story they told me that was very shocking that happened was that they were walking with a huge group. There were three different groups. They were in the middle group. And all of a sudden, a bunch of vans pulled up in front and behind them, and it took the group that was in front of them and took the group behind them, and they didn't have anywhere to run. So, my dad was like, "You know what, let's just sit here on the curb and just wait for them to pick us up," because they were separated by quite a distance, and they were like, "We have nowhere to run. This is where we made it. There's no point in going on. Let's just stay here and wait for them to pick us up."

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And they said that they sat there with me and that the police officers inside the cars passed by, and even flashed the light in their faces, and it's like they didn't see them. And then they just drove off. At that time, my parents didn't understand what had just happened, because they're like, "They literally saw us because they flashed that light in our faces, but just drove away." So, for them, it was like, "What happened?" And them telling me, I couldn't believe it, either. I'm like, "No, you're making it up," but they're like, "No, it seriously happened." And they were telling me how they believe that God made them invisible because how can a police officer miss that? It wasn't like he pretended not to see them, because his facial expression was like he was still looking for something and there was nothing there. Along the way, they had people who helped them, gave them food and water, or a place to rest. They told me that they'd always lay me in the middle of them, so that I wouldn't get hurt, or I wouldn't get stolen because that was one of my mom's fears that someone would steal me or rape me or rape her. It was a constant fear that they went through, along with the fear of being robbed, having everything taken. My mom said that she'd make holes in my diaper to hide things. The diapers over there are not made of cotton; they're made of fabric. So, you have to wash them and then re-use them; they're not disposable diapers.

[0:47:24]

She would sew them and make little pockets in my diapers, and she would keep the money on me. I'd be wearing the Pamper or whatever, and the money would be hidden in my Pamper. She said that at one point, they tried robbing them. But they didn't find anything in their stuff. They were able to save that money because they had hidden it in me, and obviously, those people weren't going to check a baby. So, there's a lot of stories that my parents told me, that I... I'm just surprised that they went through that, and that's the reason why I thank them for what they went through. Because thanks to them, I'm here now.

WARREN: I want to clarify something: so, it probably took them about a year.

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Hm-hmm.

WARREN: No.

LÓPEZ CRUZ: It actually...

WARREN: So, you were like eleven months when you left, and you were two when you got here?

LÓPEZ CRUZ: No; when we left, I was almost two. So, I believe they told me...

WARREN: Maybe start your answer by saying, "All in all, our trip must've taken about...?"

LÓPEZ CRUZ: I don't even remember how much they told me. I don't know if it was a month, or three months. I think it was three months.

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ROSDAIL: Okay, yeah.

LÓPEZ CRUZ: I think, in total, our whole trip from Honduras to the U.S. took about a month to three months. I'm not very sure. I don't remember how long they told me, but around there, like a month or three months, it took them.

WARREN: Having the experiences that you've had as a first-generation immigrant, first-generation university student, what sorts of words of advice would you give to other people who face the same challenges that you had growing up? And how would you encourage people and help them succeed?

[0:49:40]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: The way that I would encourage first-generation or first-time college students, growing up is to keep fighting, to keep moving forward. Not to get stuck in one place but to find a solution, not wait for someone to give you something, but instead to work for it; to do something about it, not just sit around waiting for it. Also, if they have parents that went through the same thing, to always thank them. Because you were able to experience it, but not to remember it, and you don't really know what they went through. So, you not thanking them for what they did is disrespectful in a way. Because they did it for you. The same way my parents did everything for me. They decided to come to the U.S. for me, because they wanted me to have a better future. To show them how thankful I am is why I work harder every day. And it's why I push myself, even to the point that I feel like I can't go on, or I feel like I can't do it anymore. I push myself and say, "No, I have a purpose in life. My parents believed that I had a purpose in life, and I'm going to push myself for it." So, anyone else who has also gone through the same thing I did, or even now is going through the same thing I did, just keep going, moving forward, working hard, never giving up, giving it your all. And above all, I believe that also believing in God and having that trust in God helps a lot. Because having faith has kept me strong enough to believe that I can do anything that I decide to do.

ROSDAIL: I just had a couple questions. Do you know how you ended up in Hastings specifically? Or central Nebraska, more generally?

[0:52:04]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: The way that I ended up in Hastings, Nebraska, was.... we first got to Texas when we came to the U.S. and from there, my mom actually separated from my dad for a while, and she went to California to live with her sister. And, so, at that time, my parents were separated for a few months, until it got to the point that my dad just couldn't stand being away from us. So, he traveled all the way to California to pick us up and make up with my mom and get back together with her. And once they did, they ended up moving to Grand Island, where my grandmother lived. Because she was here in the U.S. before we were. So, we were in Grand Island for a while, but my parents didn't like it up there; they were having too much trouble up there, so they looked for something a lot closer, and Hastings being only thirty minutes away

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from Grand Island is how they decided to move down here. And then they ended up liking this town, and they liked their neighborhoods, and they liked the schools and everything, so I ended up growing up here pretty much my whole life.

ROSDAIL: So, going back to the current situation. You kind of gave us an update that things were looking better.

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Mm-hmm.

ROSDAIL: But what is the plan if things go bad?

[0:53:50]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Currently, things are looking a little bit better because we have a longer period to figure something out. In my case, I am married to a U.S. citizen, and my husband had convinced me because at first, I didn't want to, but he convinced me that I should try to apply as a resident to be able to stay here, so I don't end up going back. Which we did. We ended up applying. Right now, I'm still actually waiting for a response which will be in a few months. This extension of a year and a half that they've given us will be long enough for me to figure something out and be able to fix my papers. My parents don't really know what they can do. I believe that their only hope would be that they can say how much it would affect my little brother, since my little brother was born here, and he's only eight years old. That drastic change of moving to a place that's a lot poorer than what he's used to, or not being able to go to a good school that gives him the proper education or has the proper materials for it, you know... I feel like that's their only side that they could fight and say, "You know, this is how much it would affect our child if we ended up having to go back. There's nobody here in the U.S. that we could leave him with. So, he would end up having to be separated." My little brother's very attached to my mother, so, he probably wouldn't even be able to be away from her, so, for them, that's their only choice.

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For me, my husband is my only choice. I have spoken with my husband and told him that, if anything did happen that we would end up having to be separated. And he told me that, if we did, that he would end up going back with me, and that together we'd work it out, and we would find a way to live, and re-adjust to a different life. I'm hoping that we don't have to get to that point, that I can become a resident, and then continue my education and be able to graduate. Hopefully, by the time that they decide, "Okay, you know what, you guys are done," I'll be able to be out of school by then. So, at least I can take with me an education that will help me in my country, because, as long as I have a certificate, a diploma, of some type of education here, then it will help me a lot over there. But if I don't finish it, and I end up going over there with nothing, then technically I start all over. Because there's nothing that I can prove to them, like, "Oh, I did this," but they're like, "Okay, well where's your certificate for it?" Because to them, in

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Honduras, what counts is the certificate that you get once you complete a certain course or education or whatever.

ROSDAIL: What does Honduras mean to you? You kind of said you don't remember any of it, but is it still a part of your identity? You've referred to it as your country, over and over again, as we've been talking.

[0:57:32]

LÓPEZ CRUZ: I identify Honduras as my country, as my native place, as where I know eventually, I will have to go back, because that's where my life first started. And I believe that's where my life will end. Even though, I was raised here, I do not consider myself American. I don't feel like this is my natural place, like this is the place I really belong, even though I've lived here my entire life and I'm so used to this. But somewhere deep down inside of me, I don't feel like it is my place. And even though it scares me to know that I might have to go back, eventually I might have to. Because it is my country. It is the place where my whole life started. It is the place where my whole family is at. I've told my parents over and over, I would love to visit, but not to live, just because of the life there. But then again, if I'm able to have a good job with the education that I get, if I'm able to find a good job over there, where I could help people over there to learn English, that's something that people in Honduras don't really get to learn a different language; maybe if I'm able to make a difference over there if I'll end up going back, or if I'm going to make a change here, well then, I'll make the change here. But either way, I always will consider myself Honduran. I will always love my country, because I know that, even though the hard times, they've pushed through. They've tried to do better.

ROSDAIL: Thank you. That's all I have.

[0:59:44]

WARREN: The only thing we haven't talked about that you've mentioned to me, and I don't know how appropriate this is, you can stop me if you don't want to talk about it, but you've mentioned in passing that your grandma had a really horrible time coming.

LÓPEZ CRUZ: Mm-hmm.

WARREN: Do you want to share her, like...

LÓPEZ CRUZ: I don't really know much about hers, because I've never actually sat down and talked to her about it. It was just that one day, that she told me the way she was treated when she first got here. But I really don't know much about her way here.

WARREN: Okay. We don't even have to go there, that's okay.

LÓPEZ CRUZ: I mean, I know that...

WARREN: You're not super close to her, so...

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LÓPEZ CRUZ: I know that everyone from my family who has come over has suffered and has gone through really hard times throughout their whole journey here, but not details. I only know about my parents because they've told me about it.

[1:03:55]