

## **NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

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<http://oralhistory.nypl.org/neighborhoods/trans-history>

### **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

#### **BIANEY GARCIA**

**Interviewer:** Michelle Esther O'Brien

**Date of Interview:** July 13, 2017

**Location of Interview:** Make the Road NY Office, Queens, New York

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**Transcribed by** Colette Arrand (professional)

**NYC TOHP Interview Transcript #004**

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**Michelle O'Brien:** Hello, my name is Michelle O'Brien, and I will be having a conversation with Bianey Garcia for the New York City Trans Oral History Project, in collaboration with the New York Public Library's Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experience of trans identified people. It is July 13, 2017, and this is being recorded at the Make the Road New York office in Queens. Hello.

**Bianey Garcia:** Hi.

**O'Brien:** Tell me about your childhood. Where did you grow up?

**Garcia:** Well. I'm Bianey Garcia, I'm a transgender from Mexico, and the most I know from my childhood is being happy and being just a child.

**O'Brien:** Where in Mexico are you from?

**Garcia:** Veracruz, Mexico. I was born in Veracruz, Mexico.

**O'Brien:** And what was your family like?

**Garcia:** With my mom it's very religious. She used to go to church and bring some flowers and give them to church. My father is a little bit, a little bit machismo. Machismo. But I feel comfortable with that. I've been dealing with that for a long time, and then changed, didn't I?

**O'Brien:** What kind of work did they do when you were growing up?

**Garcia:** They are teachers. My father is a math teacher and my mom is a social studies—or social teacher.

**O'Brien:** Of high school or children?

**Garcia:** High school.

**O'Brien:** And how long did you live in Veracruz?

**Garcia:** I lived in Veracruz—well I was born in Veracruz, and after, I moved to Chilapas when I was seven or eight years, I moved to Chilapas.

**O'Brien:** San Cristobal?

**Garcia:** No, it's, um, Chilapas has different places to live, and we moved to Comitán de Domínguez. That is a beautiful place to live.

**O'Brien:** Why did your family move?

**Garcia:** Because work. You know, they are teachers and they decided to go to Chilapas to work, you know? A new life. To start a new life.

**O'Brien:** Did you have brothers and sisters?

**Garcia:** I have—I have a sister that is older than me. I have a brother, than me, and then my younger brother that is here in New York, and my little brother [inaudible].

**O'Brien:** What were you like as a teenager?

**Garcia:** Oh! I was a shy person. I was a person that doesn't like to go out, I was a person that I don't like to talk to no one or play soccer, games, or play with other kids. I was so shy.

**O'Brien:** So what would you do?

**Garcia:** I stayed in my room, like, drawing. Sometimes writing or reading, my bicycle.

**O'Brien:** What did you like to read?

**Garcia:** Some books. You know, cuentos, Mexican cuentos. A little of that.

**O'Brien:** Do you remember any of your favorite books?

**Garcia:** I don't. I really don't.

Michelle O'Brien  
How long were you in Chilapas?

**Garcia:** Oh my god, I went there when I was eight, so I moved to Tijuana when I was 14, so that means like five years.

**O'Brien:** Did your family move, or did you move alone?

**Garcia:** No, just—I moved alone.

**O'Brien:** What led you to move to Tijuana?

**Garcia:** That is where my life starts. It was a (inaudible 04:16) when my friend—my transgender friend and my two other friends, they was gays, and I, we were outside of our house.

**O'Brien:** This was in Chilapas?

**Garcia:** Yes. So, two men came out from a car, and then they started being my friend, my trans friend, and they killed her. That simple reason, because she was a trans.

**O'Brien:** And this was when you were 14?

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm. I was 14. After that, I was so scared, I cried a lot. But they tell us, if you go to the police or do a report or testify, you're going to be killed. So we run, and after two days I find out that my two other friends were killed. So they was looking for me. But they didn't know that that incident was in front of my house. After that, they found out that I live in front of where the incident happen, and they went to my house and they was looking for me. And after that, it was like 4:00pm, my mom told me you have to go, you have to go, because if you stay they're going to kill you. I cried. I gave a big hug to my mom, she gave me some documents and gave me some money, and I told her that I was gay at that time. And she told me it's fine, I know that already. But my father was like, hmm, you know, he has a different perspective over being a gay boy. I moved to Tijuana. It was hard because I didn't know anyone.

**O'Brien:** Can I ask a little bit more about Chilapas?

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm.

**O'Brien:** So you had a trans friend, and you said to your mom that you were gay. Were you in a community of other—did you know other gay and trans people in Chilapas?

**Garcia:** No. Actually, as I told you the first time, I was so shy. So my only two or three friends, they was (inaudible 07:03).

**O'Brien:** So you just had a small number of friends.

**Garcia:** Yeah. So I went to school, and I don't like to talk to anyone or some of them, (inaudible 07:13) are gay, and sometimes I'd talk to them. But not, like, many friends.

**O'Brien:** So you made a very small circle—

**Garcia:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Of other gay and trans friends.

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm.

**O'Brien:** And the men who killed your friends, were they—do you know anything about what their scene was? Were they the kind of people you'd see around, or were they from your area?

**Garcia:** I think they, um, they met my friend, my trans friend, at a party. And then one of them, she was dancing and one of them came and, you know, take her out to dance and everything. And after, like, when she was dancing, she told him that she was a trans. And then he was so angry of that, because all their friends was laughing. And they tell her that I'm going to kill you. That is how (inaudible 08:22) that she remember. And after two days or three days she was, you know, she was killed.

**O'Brien:** Your mom was supportive and concerned about you?

**Garcia:** Yeah. Yeah. All the time, yes. Every single moment, they are super supportive, they love their sons and daughters, and they are supporters.

**O'Brien:** So you move to Tijuana.

**Garcia:** Yeah, I moved to Tijuana when I was 14, so I don't know anyone. I just decided to call and not tell my mom where I was. It was difficult at first, you just have to sleep on the streets and church. But there's no other place to go. And then I found out, a gay boy came, and he was super gay. He was very nice and everything.

**O'Brien:** He was what?

**Garcia:** He was gay. I found him, he told me what are you doing here? Do you have family? And I explained what happened. And he told me okay, so go to my apartment. He take me to his apartment and I saw a new life. Not as a partner, but as a friend with him. And he told me, you want to work? What do you want to do? School? And I was like, I want to work. At that time, at the age of 14, it was difficult to get a job. So he was 18, 19 I think, and he gave me his documents, a copy of his documents, and I don't know (inaudible 10:30) on his documents, and I started working with his documents. For about eight months, I started working, paying the rent, you know, hanging out with him.

**O'Brien:** What kind of work were you doing?

**Garcia:** In a factory. It was a factory. This was (inaudible 10:54), JVC factory, and it was good, I mean...

**O'Brien:** What were you doing in the factory?

**Garcia:** There's, um, TV, and I was, you know, I did some work with (inaudible 11:11).

**O'Brien:** So electronics assembling.

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm, electronic systems. Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Why do you think your friend helped you?

**Garcia:** Because I shared my history or my testimony or my story with him, and he was like, tell me. But his dream is to come to New York. I was—I was talking to him one day and he said, my dream is to go to New York. I have a sister there and I want to go. And I'm working so hard to get money and, you know, cross the border. Pay a coyote and go over there. I was like, New York sounds good.

**O'Brien:** What was New York to you at that time? What did you imagine New York was like?

**Garcia:** What I had seen on TV shows, Spider-Man, I think that New York was a great city, a great opportunity to start a new life because I know from that time that I want to become a trans woman, but I wasn't available to do it in Mexico because machismo, and I was scared. I was a kid. So after working so hard, eight, nine months, I don't remember, I decided to cross the border with him. We pay a coyote, (inaudible 12:51) six nights in the desert. It was a difficult experience. I don't—I just feel like no one deserves (inaudible 13:12) because it is so difficult.

**O'Brien:** How much did the coyote cost?

**Garcia:** I don't remember. It was like, um, like \$4,000.

**O'Brien:** And how much were you making at the factory?

**Garcia:** They pay me, like, *mil Dolores*, like *mil pesos*. It's (inaudible 13:37) now.

**O'Brien:** Per...month?

**Garcia:** Per week.

**O'Brien:** Per week. Okay. So that's—how long would you have to work to—

**Garcia:** Oh my god. A lot.

**O'Brien:** Yeah, because that's almost a year's pay.

**Garcia:** I guess I have—yeah, because I had to work extra hours, and then another job. It was difficult.

**O'Brien:** And the six days in the desert, so many, many people die in the desert.

**Garcia:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** It's very dangerous.

**Garcia:** It is dangerous. I was 14 and I was so scared. But you know, I had my friend there, and he was older than me, and he always, like, he had my back and everything.

**O'Brien:** Were you with a group?

**Garcia:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** A large group?

**Garcia:** It was like 20 people, um, that was trying to cross the border. And I don't remember when the person that was leading us come to us, we're almost there, and like, two hours we were in a place where someone is coming to pick us up. So, after two hours, we arrived to the place, and then two vans came to the place and pick us up. And we was lucky, because The other van that came first was stopped by the migras, so we just passed.

**O'Brien:** So another van was stopped.

**Garcia:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Of the people you had gone with.

**Garcia:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** And they were—do you know, you heard that they had been stopped by?

**Garcia:** Yeah, they was stopped, and we don't, and they get deported. It was difficult. But we—I'm sorry, I had to make sure. When we was in the desert, there was people that robbed us, that was like *ladrones*, I don't know how to say *ladrones* in English. But they stole our water, our clothes, money, everything.

**O'Brien:** So thieves or bandits.

**Garcia:** Yes. And we lost everything. We just had two bottles of water for 20 people, and we have to—one night, when the water is gone, we have to drink water from place where cows and horses drink water. And it was so difficult. I was like, how do people do this? But it was hard position to make. But now I'm here. After we arrived to New York—

**O'Brien:** Where did the vans take you first?

**Garcia:** I don't remember. It was in a hotel where we was for a day, and then they split us to every single person, where we wanted to go.

**O'Brien:** And do you go directly to New York?

**Garcia:** Yeah, they take us to New York. My friend and I went to this—they take us to New York, and they leave us at Times Square, because we have nowhere to go. Because we lose everything. We lose my friend's contact information, so I said—we don't know how to get in touch with your sister because we lost everything. So it was on January. It was so cold, but we didn't have, like, any jacket or anything.

**O'Brien:** This is like 2004, 2005?

**Garcia:** 2005. Yeah, so cold.

**O'Brien:** I moved to New York that year too, yeah.

**Garcia:** So we started out, you know, I'm sleeping or on the train station, like homeless for about three days, and then we found a lady that take us to a church that was on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, I think. And we was there for two days. And then after that my friend remember his sister phone number. He call her, and his sister went to pick us up. We (inaudible 18:44) for two hours, one hour, I don't remember. And she bring us to Queens. I think that it was a good experience of being undocumented, of, you know, crossing the border and experience every bad things that happen to us. And we start a new life. I started working in a restaurant that is called HK. It's on 39 and 9 Avenue, as a dishwasher.

**O'Brien:** As a what?

**Garcia:** As a dishwasher.

**O'Brien:** Where was—did you live with his sister?

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm, I lived with her.

**O'Brien:** Where did she live?

**Garcia:** She lived on 103<sup>rd</sup> Street.

**O'Brien:** Is that Jackson Heights?

**Garcia:** Corona.

**O'Brien:** Okay, Corona.

**Garcia:** But after one month, or less than one month, she was super homophobic. And she told me that I was trying to, um, to—I don't know how I say (Spanish 20:06) gay. I mean, he was gay, but she didn't know that he was gay. She was saying that I was his boyfriend, and I was like no, we are friends. And then she tell me you have to go. And I was like—

**O'Brien:** It was easier to throw you out than admit her brother was gay.

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm. So I was like, I need to talk to Eduardo, and she was like no, you should go now. (Inaudible 20:43). I packed my stuff and I left. I started living outside again, I guess that's homeless. But I was working.

**O'Brien:** So you were a dishwasher at HK?

**Garcia:** So I decided to do, you know, double turn of work, from morning to night, because they closed like at 4:00am. So from 9:00 to 8:00 so I had, you know, time to be inside places. Because it was all cold. After that, because I really was—my English is like, not too well. By that time it



was a little bit less than now. And the manager of the restaurant told me, you want to do like the busboy work on the floor? I was like, yeah, I want to do that. And I started doing different work as a busboy. So I decided to do that, and I met a man, a Columbian man, he was like 40 years old. I was almost 16. He was in love with me, he bring me flowers, chocolates, and I tell him that I was homeless, and he told me, you want to come to my apartment? I live alone. I was like no, I'm okay. I'm going to try to find some other place. But after being outside in the cold weather, I decided to move to there, because I didn't want to live outside.

**O'Brien:** Where were you sleeping when you were outside?

**Garcia:** On the trains.

**O'Brien:** On the trains?

**Garcia:** Yeah. I think—

**O'Brien:** Did you know anyone else in New York at this point?

**Garcia:** No.

**O'Brien:** You had been around for a month or so, or two months.

**Garcia:** Yeah, almost a month.

**O'Brien:** So you were very isolated.

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm. I was by myself. I don't know anyone. And I think the decision that I made, it was my bad decision. Because I went to live with him. From now to one month, he was super nice, he was super sweet. But after that, he changed a lot. He started calling me (inaudible 23:39). He started saying mijo, take me pictures, and putting them on media, social media. Or pages where people are looking for sex. (Inaudible 23:58), stuff like that. And I was like, I don't want pictures like that. I don't feel comfortable. And he take me to his home, and when I put my feet inside there, I never come out after seven months. I was there the whole time, where I was seven months, was in that house. Never, never went out.

**O'Brien:** You were not able to leave?

**Garcia:** No, because he always was telling me, if you go out, the police is going to take you because you are undocumented.

**O'Brien:** So he would frighten you?

**Garcia:** Yeah. So I was like, but that is not New York. New York is different. And (inaudible 24:51), yeah, New York is different, this is New Year's. I was like, okay. So I explained to him that I want to work, and he said no, you're not going to do, you're not going to work. After one more

month, he tell me that something happened in Columbia and he needs a lot of money, and I was like okay, let me work, and he was like no, you're undocumented, you don't have documents, and if you go out the police or ICE is going to take you. I was like okay, so what can I do? And then he starts telling me that I need to do sex work. I was like, I don't want to do that. And he told me, I need a lot of money, and he told me, do you love me? I was like yeah, I love you, but I'm not going to do that. and I told him okay, if you love me, you have to do it. I was like no. He beat me many times, he pushed my face on the wall. And he treated me super bad. He always told me, you are nothing, you are a little undocumented, you are a (inaudible 26:27) person. And he told me if you don't do sex work, I'm going to call the police, and ICE is going to take you back to your country because you are a fucking (inaudible 26:42) person. I was scared of going back to Mexico, and I shared my whole life with him, what had happened in Mexico, and I ended up doing sex work for him. He doesn't give me anything. No money. Even he gave me like three condoms as pay, and I had to do work with different men, like 10 men every day, so I have to decide where I'm going to use the condom.

**O'Brien:** Would he set up the clients?

**Garcia:** Yeah. That was he was doing. And then I found many pictures of others, other guys or—same like me. Like, with my body and, I don't know what happened to them. I don't know if they escaped, I don't know if they—something else. I do sex work for about seven months, but after seven months I get so tired of doing that. Some of the clients told me I'm going to do sex with you without condoms, so I told them if you're going to do that you have to give me more money. You have to give me a little bit more money, but you don't give it to (inaudible 28:27) you give it to me. So they gave me some extra money. I worked for two months doing without condoms. I don't care about AIDS or HIV, I don't care about that, I just wanted to go out. It was one night when he was drunk, he gets so drunk, and I was like thinking of trying. He was wait, and he doesn't wake up. So I decided to take my documents, to take a key, and pack some clothes that I have. And I took cab and I went back to Queens.

**O'Brien:** Where was he living?

**Garcia:** I don't know. Because that's why I tell you that the first day when I put my feet inside of his house I never—

**O'Brien:** So you didn't—but you managed to make it back to Queens.

**Garcia:** Yeah. I tell to the driver, take me back to Queens, New York. And he told me, it's like two hours.

**O'Brien:** Oh wow.

**Garcia:** And he told me, you have money to pay that? And I was like quanto mas acora, how much are you going to charge me for that? And he told me \$300. I was like here, now take me. I was so tired. I was scared. I go to sleep in the car. So he wake me up when he was on Junction Boulevard and Roosevelt (30:12) Avenue. And he tell me, (inaudible 30:16), wake up, we're here.

And it was two hours of driving. And then I start a new life being here, New York, again. But I had some money, so I can do rent an apartment or rent a room or whatever. I was walking on Roosevelt Avenue the day I found a little document that you can find there saying 7<sup>th</sup> and Quarto (30:58), we rent a room. So I called the number and a lady told me how much is—you have to come and see the room. I was like okay, where is the room? So I went to that room, it was like, this little, and she was like \$400. I was like, here! I gave the money to her, and I started my new life. I don't want to go out, I was so scared, because I was so panicked that he was outside or—you know.

**O'Brien:** The fear—

**Garcia:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** And pain was in you.

**Garcia:** But after paying the rent two months, three months, (inaudible 31:48). So I decide to work again in a restaurant. I was there. It was good. I was the kind of person that goes to work, come home, go into work, and no talk to no one. It was one day when I was in a—I was borrowing some stuff for my hair, because I always love my hair to be like, you know, beautiful. And if I met a trans person there, and she was my friend, and she told me, how are you? Como estas? I was like, bien, gracias. Fine, thank you. And she was like, oh, you're so cute, you're so—you have a beautiful body, all that. And I was like, thank you. And here's my number, you can call me or whatever you want. I was like okay, thank you. But she knows that I was gay. But I called her because I was boring in my room, and she told me, I'm going out to a party, you want to go? I was like, no, I'm scared. And she told me no, let's go, vamonos. I decided to go. She took me to Atlantis. It was Atlantis at that time, now it's called Revolution. I went there for the first time, to a gay bar, and I was like, what is this place? But I start a new life, meeting new people and talking to new people and I fell in love with someone else, but he didn't know that I was—everything that happened to me. I decide to do my transition because my friend was super beautiful, and I knew that my transition was, she told me you are so beautiful, you want to become a woman, right? I was like yeah, I want to do that, but I'm scared. And she told me no, don't. Don't be scared. And she find me the first hormones, but not from the doctor. From the street.

**O'Brien:** You were 17?

**Garcia:** 17, no, it was more—it was like almost 18 to 19. I bought my hormone, I buy my hormones, and after I buy them, every single (inaudible 34:56). I was working in the restaurant at the time, and then after one month and a half, they tell me there is no work for you here, you know? I was like, why? Because the place is too slow. Yeah, but—I was like yeah, but how, almost two years working here. And they told me yeah, but there was nothing else to do. But the main reason why they throw me out is because I was taking hormones, and I was trying to do my transition. So I live, and after one month, two months, I was looking for a job, another job. I found a job. It was so difficult to get a job. But at that time, my brother came from Mexico to here. He was here already. And, oh my god, I was in my transition, and there was no work for

me, and I decide to do sex work again. (Inaudible 36:29) because that was what my friend was doing. I didn't want to do it, but there is no other way to, you know, have money to pay for rent, pay your food, pay bills. And I do it. For at least a month—I mean, a year. I was arrested doing that, so that's for carrying condoms. It was a night when I was walking with my boyfriend from my house, and the police arrest me because they think that I was doing sex work. It was a bad experience. Yeah. When I was 19, it was on October 9—no, October 21 I think. 21 of 29—I mean, 2009. It was my friend, me, we was in a corner of 94<sup>th</sup> street, it was like 2:00pm—or 2:00am in the morning. And a homophobic man came, he was walking by, and he started yelling fag slurs and started beating my friend and I. And she defended herself, and I decided to help her. I push him and he went to the floor, and he was parandose, standing up.

**O'Brien:** He was what?

**Garcia:** Um, parandose, I don't know how to—when you fall, you stand up again.

**O'Brien:** He got back up.

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm. And I didn't hear when my friend was, you know, fighting with him, and my friend took her high heel and went up his head. So I didn't see that. That was (inaudible 39:02). I told my friend let's go, just stop a cab and let's go. So we take a cab, and he stops the car, the taxi car. And he tells us, you're not coming anymore. So we get out of the car and then we walk through 94<sup>th</sup>, 95<sup>th</sup>, and 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue. We were just walking. He was following us, but he found a broomstick. You know, if you do this to a broomstick, it's going to like—you can use that as a weapon. So we stop a cab, and then from 100, 115 police department, and we was trying to explain to him that we was a survivor of a hate crime, but after he saw that we stopped the police, he threw out the broomstick and he walked to us. My English was bad, and the police started talking to him, and I saw him—he was bleeding and I was like, what do you think? And the only thing I said to the police officer, his name was Rivella, I was like, we was defending ourself. And he was like, we was speaking English—or no, Spanish, and he told us, I don't speak your Spanish. I speak English. So he arrests us, and for that reason, for defending ourself, we went to Rikers for 19 months. I went to Rikers for 19 months. It was the most bad experience in my life, too. It was super difficult. But after 19 months of that and being like, almost being deported, I found an immigration lawyer that take my case, and she rented me a visa set for me.

**O'Brien:** She what?

**Garcia:** She got me a visa for for me. Visas for trafficking survivors. I talked to her and I tell her my whole, you know, what happened to me with the arrest system, and she brought me down and she told me you're going out, after days you're going out. You're going to start a new life here.

**O'Brien:** How did you get in touch with her?

**Garcia:** There is a person that is also—she does a lot of work for the trans community. Her name is Lorena Borjas. And she got in touch with her.

**O'Brien:** Lorena Borjas, we have an interview with her.

**Garcia:** She helped me a lot.

**O'Brien:** And where did you meet Lorena?

**Garcia:** Actually, I didn't have the opportunity to talk to Lorena, but my other friends, she went to her groups.

**O'Brien:** So were you at Rikers when you were first in touch with the lawyer?

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm. I was at Rikers. And I went out, I was so happy of being in here again. By this time with documents. I went to court, everything. I went to the interview with police, the visa police, I think. I don't know what they call them. And he had proved it, he had proved the visa. I just got my green card three months ago.

**O'Brien:** Congratulations.

**Garcia:** Thank you. And I feel so happy.

**O'Brien:** How long was it ago that you got out of Rikers?

**Garcia:** Mm—it was 17 or 18 months, but after we went to court, my birthday it's March 5. We went to court March 7. And then the lawyer, the judge said your time is over. So that's me, (inaudible 44:38).

**O'Brien:** So you were 20, 21—

**Garcia:** Yeah, I was 21. Almost 22.

**O'Brien:** So three, two years ago? Three years ago?

**Garcia:** No, it was more than—I'm 27.

**O'Brien:** 27! Okay, yeah. Five years ago.

**Garcia:** So it was like five years ago. And it was my gift. And after two days, ICE went to pick us up, they bring us through (inaudible 45:13) street, they take us fingerprints, and he tells us that was the bus, you're leaving in 15 minutes, we're going out. I felt so happy. By now, when my lawyer told me your green card was approved, I was crying. Because after everything that happened to me, I just feel like I want to do something new in my life. I want to fight against this, against that. That is the main reason why I'm doing my work. I'm trying to do my best to

help others, to help the future generations of trans females of colors, because we live in a world that if you are trans women of color, you can be killed. And that's too bad. And I think, I do a lot of work here in Make the Road New York. I've been working here since I came out from jail.

**O'Brien:** Tell me about how you first got involved with Make the Road.

**Garcia:** Um, they helped me a lot. They always went to my court days, and the organizer that is Donal Portolese was always was there, and when—the first time, when we was at (inaudible 47:01) they take a train, the first stop was here. I was like, thank you so much for all of your help and support. She was like yeah, of course.

**O'Brien:** So you were working with Donal Portolese (reasonably sure this is the best guess looking at the website, 47:19)?

**Garcia:** Yeah. So it was—I don't remember the date. It was Saturday—I mean, Friday, and then (inaudible 47:29) tell me, you have to come next week. We're have a weekend meeting here (inaudible 47:40). I was like, okay, we will. My lawyer came also, she was here, and she brung a little cake, and she celebrated my birthday with me, and I was so happy.

**O'Brien:** That was at the Queens office here?

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm, it was here. And I start as a member here in Make the Road. And then as a leader. And then I had the opportunity to have a leadership that (inaudible 48:19) like 15 hours that I have to work. It was (inaudible 48:24). It wasn't a lot of money, but you know, I want to do something. And after that, I became an organizer for this community. And I am so happy, I'm so proud of that.

**O'Brien:** What's your job title right now?

**Garcia:** LGBT organizer.

**O'Brien:** How long have you had this job?

**Garcia:** Five years.

**O'Brien:** Five years, yeah. And for people who might never have heard of Make the Road, could you describe it overall as an organization?

**Garcia:** Make the Road New York, it's a non-profit organization, it's (inaudible 49:04) my house. Because we always have coffee, we always have people cooking, and we'll see you as a person. We'll give you a hug, and we see (inaudible 49:21) you need it. You're not alone.

**O'Brien:** And what's the range, the general type of work and community that Make the Road is—

**Garcia:** Well, actually we have different kinds of committee meetings. We have the LGBT committee meetings on Mondays. Also we have housing committee. We have workers committee. We have innovation committee. Also we have a youth community for homes for youth, and that's amazing. And that's why I love Make the Road New York. And also because I love scream. And they have a lot of protest marches. I love scream. I just love.

**O'Brien:** You love to scream.

**Garcia:** Yeah. So that's in 2012 when I come out from Rikers, we decide to do the first trans Latina march. That was an idea that came from Calena Claudio that was my supervisor at that time. And we decide to, you know, do something new. Something that we can show up for our community where we can create community, we can create visibility, and it resonate. So we came out for the first trans Latina march in 2012. It was like 50 people walking down Roosevelt Avenue, and you know that—second year there was a little bit more people, third year was a little bit more people, and this year we have 500 people marching with us.

**O'Brien:** That was this week?

**Garcia:** I was—yeah.

**O'Brien:** Monday.

**Garcia:** It was amazing. I was crying when the march end. I came to my office and my supervisor was like come, just give me a hug. Because it was hard work to mobilize a lot of people. Last year we had 300 people. And now I was expecting like 350. But 500, yes. Amazing turnout.

**O'Brien:** What are the politics or political goals of the trans Latina march?

**Garcia:** Demand equality, justice, visual (inaudible 52:01) focuses on hate crimes because we—last year and this year I would say 20 attacks on trans women, or against trans women. You know this year we have been losing 15 lives of trans women of color across the country, and that's too bad. And also, we have a President that's saying that we're nothing for him. That's why we want to, you know—be free. Be who we are. We want to create visibility. Not for the president, but also because we want to—that community and the way that we live here despite that. And that's why I'm so happy because in one month, I'm going back to Mexico after 12 years of not seeing my family.

**O'Brien:** Now that you have your green card you can travel?

**Garcia:** Yeah. I feel so happy. I feel so excited. I'm always, like, nervous, and I'm always like, oh my god I can't!

**O'Brien:** How long did you get in touch with them, when you got out of Rikers? Or how long have you been in touch with your family?

**Garcia:** After I did my transition, it was difficult to tell my mom and my father that I was on hormones, so I just couldn't talk with them for about seven years. But now I call them like, three months ago, and the first thing that I told my mom was mommy, vol para Mexico, I was like, mom, I'm going back to Mexico. And she was like no, you're kidding me. I was like no. And she's so happy. She's happy, I'm happy too.

**O'Brien:** Are they in Chilapas?

**Garcia:** Yeah, they still live there.

**O'Brien:** And tell me about, besides the trans Latina march, the other organizing that you're involved with here at Make the Road.

**Garcia:** I help out with meetings every Monday where we discuss topics on, you know, the trans Latinas issues.

**O'Brien:** Is that TRIP?

**Garcia:** TRIP.

**O'Brien:** What does TRIP stand for?

**Garcia:** TRIP is the Trans Immigrant Project, and it's a place where if you are an LGBTQ Ally person, you can join us to our weekly meetings. We talk about housing issues, employment discrimination, hate crimes, etc., etc., etc.

**O'Brien:** How many people go to the meetings?

**Garcia:** Sometimes 20, sometimes 15, sometimes 30. Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Are they, outside of the meetings do they all know each other in a community?

**Garcia:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Or are they from different communities?

**Garcia:** Actually, yeah. Actually, Jackson Heights has the most population of trans women, especially I think some of them are from Mexico. The majority is from Mexico. So we're doing a lot of work here.

**O'Brien:** You talked about being a dishwasher and then getting fired because of your transition, and then doing sex work. How do the women in TRIP survive? How do people manage to have a home and pay rent?



**Garcia:** Yeah. Actually, that is a big issue for my trans community, because we didn't have a place to work, some of them have to do sex work to survive. And also there's a lot of housing discrimination against us. Because if you're renting an apartment, they think that you are going to do sex work inside of it. So they have to change their minds. You have to be more humanity. Because we are people. Because many people think that if you're a trans woman, you're a sex worker. But we can do something else.

**O'Brien:** Are there other kinds of jobs that people do besides sex work?

**Garcia:** Some of them. But there's like 70% do sex work and the other percent do something else.

**O'Brien:** What sorts of things?

**Garcia:** Sometimes restaurants, hair salon, nails.

**O'Brien:** And there was a Make the Road project around a cooperative hair salon. Is this—what is it?

**Garcia:** Yeah, we start seeing a lot of discrimination on the job place. So Make the Road New York, we decided to do the first cooperative for the trans community. But we're still working on it. We want to create ways to prevent discrimination, to have tools to combat discrimination.

**O'Brien:** Has it opened? Or is it a plan?

**Garcia:** To what?

**O'Brien:** The cooperative, the trans cooperative.

**Garcia:** It was the first trans cooperative. But after we seen a lot of problems, you know trans women sometimes, they get so angry with—because, you know. I don't know, we're always like that. And as Make the Road New York, we decided to not continue with the cooperative.

**O'Brien:** So there was interpersonal conflict—

**Garcia:** Yeah, we have another org that is working with that cooperative.

**O'Brien:** What's the other organization?

**Garcia:** I don't remember the name. But they are working with the cooperative, yeah.

**O'Brien:** What other trans organizations in the city do you work with most, or LGBT organizations?

**Garcia:** I work with AVP—

**O'Brien:** The Anti-violence Project.

**Garcia:** Yeah, the Anti-violence project. I work with the Center, the LGBT Center in the trans Latina (inaudible 59:13) and I work ACQC, Community Health Care Network, and some other orgs that we are close to them. It's a very (inaudible 59:23) project too.

**O'Brien:** Where do you imagine your organizing and trans politics and trans communities going in the future?

**Garcia:** I want to run for office.

**O'Brien:** You'd like to be a politician?

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm. I want to because I want to be the first trans woman running for office. Because we've seen a lot of gay people there, lesbian people. But where are the trans community? We don't get the opportunity to let trans people to change everything from there, from the chair, you know, from outside. We do a lot of work outside, but we have to do it from the table. And that is one of them, and I always put everything in here, and I put everything here. That's me, like, (inaudible 1:00:27).

**O'Brien:** Have you seen in your five years of doing this job—have you, what have you seen change for trans Latina people in Queens? What has gotten better? You mentioned Trump as something getting worse.

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm. Something that is getting better, it's I think when I start doing work here at Make the Road New York, we was seeing a lot of police brutality or police abuse. Many people, trans women, have been arrested because you know, false arrests. But after our work, because we have a meeting with 115—110, they don't open the door to have some meetings with them, but 115, we always have meeting, we have trainings, sensitivity trainings.

**O'Brien:** So this is the 115<sup>th</sup> precinct of the New York Police Department?

**Garcia:** Yeah. That is 115, and we always do trainings and we talk about what is a trans person, how a trans person survives. And we have seen that there is not many arrests.

**O'Brien:** But at 110<sup>th</sup> they're less open? Is that what you said?

**Garcia:** Um, no. I'm saying that they don't want to—they don't want us to go there to do the same that we do on 115. I don't know. Yeah.

**O'Brien:** And are there other organizing goals or projects that TRIP has been working on?

**Garcia:** Oh, stop hate crimes. Because 20 attacks in 2016 to now, it's bad. And most of them has been in 110. And then they say, because I have the opportunity to go with my members to do a report, and they refuse to do the report. Why? Because they are trans. They laugh at us.

**O'Brien:** At the police station.

**Garcia:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** So I—TRIP is, I don't know of another project like this, where Make the Road is mostly Latinos, Latina immigrants, and 21,000 members working on many different issues, and then TRIP is a trans Latina project within that.

**Garcia:** Mm-hmm.

**O'Brien:** Within a bigger, multi-issue organization. And most other organizations I know in New York are either gay organizations or they're trans organizations or they organize some community of color or a neighborhood, but I don't know another example of like a trans group within a much bigger community organization.

**Garcia:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** How do you get—what's the relationship between TRIP and the rest of Make the Road like?

**Garcia:** I think it's a good relationship, because at the trans Latina march, not only trans marched with us.

**O'Brien:** I saw many Make the Road members, yeah.

**Garcia:** We had a lot of members that support us. I do a lot of presentations about homophobia and transphobia, and you know, sensitivity trainings to them. And it has been working, because there was a lot of people, gay or straight people, marching with us, having signs saying, I'm a trans person and I'm here to resist. And it's amazing. Yeah.

**O'Brien:** I saw a lot of old straight Mexican people in the march.

**Garcia:** Yes. It was amazing.

**O'Brien:** A couple holding hands.

**Garcia:** It was amazing.

**O'Brien:** Interesting. It seems like a very powerful organizing model.

**Garcia:** Yeah.

**O'Brien:** Anything else you'd like to talk about or include?

**Garcia:** No, I think we covered everything.

**O'Brien:** Thank you so much.

**Garcia:** No, thanks to you. I was saying this (inaudible 1:05:02), and I really love it.

**O'Brien:** So it's a photo of a child in his stroller and it said, no one should do bad things to people who are different. Trans Latina march, Hake, age 4. Wow. That's great.

**Garcia:** Right? That was amazing. So that's it. Thank you!