

Nara Floriani interviewed by Sunny Almeida
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Queens, NY

Sunny Almeida: Hi, my name is Sunny. Would you please state your name, and do you give me permission for me to conduct this interview?

Nara Floriani: My name is Nara Nubia Floriani, I'm 50 years old, permission granted.

SA: What do you do?

NF: I am a medical assistant.

SA: What do you racial identify as?

NF: I am a White Latina-American.

SA: Why did you leave your country of origin?

NF: I thought I had an opportunity of gaining a degree in massage therapy for women with disability with motor functions. I only left because I wanted to further my career and gain some more knowledge and have outside knowledge with some outside experience. I wanted to also be having a higher education, but I wanted to come back after two years so then I can further my business.

SA: Why did you decide to come to the United States instead of another country?

NF: It came to me as an opportunity because my brother lived here already. His best friend was also coming to the United States. I wanted to accomplish my dream.

SA: What do you miss about your country of origin?

NF: My family, my dad. Living with my dad. Spending more time with my mother. The humid heat, spending quality time with friends and family.

SA: What don't you miss about your country of origin?

NF: The lack of opportunity. It shows in my country, that if your social life doesn't have riches or if you're not rich. You hardly get any opportunities there.

SA: What did your friends and family say when you told them you were leaving?

NF: Nothing. They thought that I wouldn't be able to handle it. Only one person said something, "You will be back in a month! you can't handle the pressure".

SA: What were your expectations of the United States?

NF: They were to actually get back to studying. It's funny that I've been in this country for 24 years and I never stopped dreaming about going back to school.

SA: Tell me about your journey to New York. What did it entail? Did it go according to plan?

NF: No, first of all I came here legally. I had a car and everything since I was part of a legitimate business. In my head I thought that the money I had was a lot of money. I sold my car so I could head over there legally with a visa and everything. At the time, the money was used for documentation. As time went on, that money I thought was a lot, wasn't in fact. I thought I was able to study with the money left over. I saw that I couldn't right then and there go to a school and pay it and start studying just like that. It wasn't an easy process. I have always been a person who perseveres and keeps an open mind. I think that what led me to keep hope alive within me was believing that tomorrow will come. My plan was to always keep focus on what I wanted.

SA: When and with whom did you come to NYC?

NF: I came alone and with one bag. I told my father "I am so sorry, but I won't be able to look back because if I do, I will lose my courage and won't board the plane"

SA: How did New York City meet, and fail to meet your expectations?

NF: In first place, I felt so marvelous with the city because I thought due the city being so big that I wouldn't take anyone's opportunity. With this city being so big, it gives opportunity for every person. That is what came into my head. I had a certain belief that God wanted me to be here. I didn't know where, but he prepared a place for me.

SA: How were you received upon arriving in your neighborhood specifically, and the United States more generally?

NF: Indifferent. I felt I was one more number. Everyone was too busy on their own problems.

SA: What do you mean?

NF: I mean that I was one more number on the immigration list, one more person trying to get an opportunity here in America.

SA: How did you adjust to a new language and/or culture in NYC?

NF: How did I feel with the culture. I am a person who loves diversity. I actually like New York City because of its diversity. In my own way, without discriminating against anyone as I adjusted, I did what was right and felt comfortable doing. It was hard in the beginning to adjust, but as life went on it felt great to get to know different people from different countries. I learned a lot like different customs and heard different experiences.

SA: What new opportunities were available to you upon your arrival in New York City?

NF: For me it was really hard because there wasn't much opportunity because I didn't speak English. I only spoke German, a little bit of Italian and Portuguese. Therefore, the way that I communicated with people was either in Portuguese or I wrote down on a piece of paper what I wanted to ask.

SA: Were any opportunities denied to you because you were an immigrant?

NF: The discrimination is very big here in the United States especially if you have an accent. Even now you can speak in English but with an accent you will have less opportunity. If you have a lot of an accent the less chances you have of getting a job or an opportunity. I have had the chances of speaking with Americans and they were speaking openly without any arguments really trying to get a grasp of what is going on. They consider you not as intelligent as the Americans because you have an accent. So, the language is a true barrier between the immigrants. The discrimination is huge because Americans want you to talk to them 100% and understand them and act like them. It's Frustrating!

SA: What in your life keeps you connected to your nation of origin?

NF: My family. My dad who gave me everything and taught me everything. He did a lot of things for me. I am so thankful with Facetime and the technology that keeps me going with everything. I have a nearby restaurant that cooks the foods of Brazil. The smell of the food, the way it's cooked. Sometimes I cook at home and I recreate dinner plates or lunch plates that my mother used to do for me, and I'll cook them for my family.

SA: How do you remain connected to the people still living in your home country?

NF: As I said before the technology, Facetime, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp. These new technological advances have changed the course of my life for the better. I can send my dad little memes and good morning messages and so can they. They feel a lot closer now than they had before.

SA: How do you navigate a bilingual life?

NF: It's amazing because you have the opportunity to navigate different people and different cultures. Although I speak English and Portuguese, I also speak Spanish and that is something that I picked up just talking to people on the street. You can meet new people. It's like a new form of communicating. I had the opportunity to work at a hospital which then gave me the opportunity to see the world in the way that I have wanted to see it. So, it's three languages and the opportunity that I had as a volunteer. I was able to participate in conversations with others and actually understand them. Not to sound stupid or anything.

SA: Where have you lived in NYC and why?

NF: I live in Astoria, Queens. When I met my husband, he had already lived here so when we got married, I moved with him. I didn't know this about Astoria specifically but there is a lot of culture here and it just kept growing.

SA: What was the hardest part about your move to NYC?

NF: The hard part was not knowing anyone. Going out of your way and saying, "I am going to start fresh and new, and I am going to start new and meet people". It was hard to be alone in such a grand city like New York City. It is very easy to get lost if you know what I mean. Not having your mom or dad to help you out. If you're in a tight spot, you don't have mom and dad to cover for you in those situations. In those circumstances that is where I learned to connect with God more and more.

SA: What's your favorite part about living in New York?

NF: The diversity, knowing that as soon as I leave my house I will either bump into someone or meet someone with a different ethnic background and a beautiful story and with a different culture and I'll get to learn more about them. I get to understand what they eat or how they have managed through hardships.

SA: How has your neighborhood changed since your arrival?

NF: It has changed a lot unfortunately due to the large number of immigrants and due the difficulty financially for so many people. Things began to have more inflation. America has brought more difficulties for other immigrants to pay rent or water or lights, you know the basics. The area started to have more violence in the streets. One thing I have never heard of in where I live is gunshots being heard from my bedroom window. My area is a safe neighborhood. Today it was 2:00 pm, the cops on the streets told us to stay inside and that there was a shooting right outside my apartment. These things wouldn't happen. Key some cars that are parked.

SA: How has your reception in your neighborhood, and in the United States more generally changed overtime?

NF: Well first off, I am a person who likes to say hello and good morning to other people but in reality I don't know how they see me or how my reception changed. I never really stopped to think about that. Everything here is so rushed; everyone is thinking to go work and come back home and work on something else they have going on after work. They are just focused on their busy schedule. As for the United States, I believe that we are still just a number for them and that's all.

SA: What would you change about the current U.S. immigration system?

NF: What would I change, that is a very good question. I would change the way the immigrants receive help. They don't receive help. Trump wants to kick them out of the country. This country was made on the backs of immigrants. Usually, immigrants take the jobs nobody wants to take. It is mostly always hard labor in some way, shape or form. I was a housekeeper for 15 years. I know people who are still doing that kind of work at my age. See we are getting old, and we can't keep up with the lifting and climbing stairs and cleaning high windows. I would give immigrants help if they need schooling and such for some type of jobs, take and use it for good.

SA: Do you regret the decision you made?

NF: No, I have a very big sense of gratitude and it makes me want to cry. This country gave me my son's life. Every day I will be able to give thanks to this country. If I wasn't here, I don't believe that my son would have lived. Logically everything was through the grace and the power of God. I believe that God has a plan in the lives of everyone. The technology and advancement in the medicine we have today. I am very thankful, very thankful. God has a plan for everyone. I am thankful because God gave me the opportunity to be here and because he gave me my son's life. He can take life away and he gave life. My son was born here and here he will live.

SA: What would you change about the way the United States handles immigrants?

NF: I would give them more opportunity. I had the pleasure to have the opportunity to see how much the professionals who are immigrants find work. I would have the United States give them more opportunity so they can find work and become better versions of themselves and make something of their name.

SA: What do you think about ICE?

NF: What do I think about them? They are not good people. People come into this country to find work and better themselves. They work irregular hours to make enough to either support their families and pay rent or sometimes they make enough to send money to their home country. Immigrants try to help anyone and their families as much as they can. The United States has a program that “captures” these people and sends them back. What if their country has an ongoing civil war or famine or something else? ICE robs people of their dreams and sends back to their home country.

SA: How hard is it to find work?

NF: It’s extremely hard to find work. Some places ask you for a social security number or ask to see your credit score so it’s really hard.

SA: What is your plan for the future here?

NF: My future is for me to complete my education and work in the hospital, and I see that a lot of people have difficulties with the language and a lot of people needing help. I want to do that, and it gives me a sense of gratification. I want to help. I feel relieved. I love helping people and I want that for myself.

SA: Thank you so much for your time

NF: Thank you and God bless you.

SA: As well as you too.