



City of Alexandria  
Office of Historic Alexandria  
*Immigrant Alexandria: Past, Present and Future*  
**Oral History Program**



Project Name: *Immigrant Alexandria: Past, Present and Future*

Title: *Interview with Evelin Urrutia*

Date of Interview: *4/13/2015*

Location of Interview: *Alexandria, VA, Tenants and Workers Union Headquarters*

Interviewer: *Sue Kovack Shuman*

Transcriber: *Sandy Carpenter*

**Abstract:** Evelin Urrutia was born in 1977 in El Salvador. Her mother immigrated to the U.S. in 1988 during the Civil War. Evelin and her sisters stayed in El Salvador until her mother was able to bring her to Alexandria. Her mother worked cleaning hotel rooms, and while Evelin recognizes how hard her mother worked, she decided that working as a cleaner wasn't for her. So she concentrated on school. At the time Alexandria schools didn't provide an environment for high achievers who spoke Spanish as their first language. Evelin and others organized to demand a bilingual guidance counselor. While in high school, Evelin began working at Popeye's restaurant, where she worked for seven years, eventually becoming manager. Now she works for Tenants and Workers United, a grassroots organization. Evelin insists on a better life for her children.

This transcript has been edited by the interviewee and may not reflect the audio-recording exactly.

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| <b>Introductions: 00:13</b>                                 |   |
| Sue Shuman:   | Today is April 13 2015, I'm Sue Kovack Shuman and I'm interviewing Evelin Urrutia and we are in Arlandria, at the Tenants and Workers Union Headquarters. The purpose of this oral history interview is to help understand Alexandria's immigrant history. Thank you for being here with us today. I'd like to start at the beginning. Where were you born and when?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | I was born on February 20, 1977 in San Miguel, El Salvador.   |
| <b>Reason behind moving to the United States: 01:01</b>     |   |
| S.S.:   | And how did you come to the United States?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | It was during the [19]90s, 1991, that my mother immigrate many years before, in the [19]80s, 1988 I believe. It was during the civil war in my country. My mother was looking for a place where she can start work and try to—we were six girls. Six in the family, plus my mother was seven. It was during the civil war my dad got killed. So, my mom felt like she had to immigrate to the United States just to be sure that we would be able to have at least food on the table. And, then that's how she came. And, then four years later, she decided to bring me in because things were getting not too good in our home town. That's how I ended up here, coming into Alexandria [Virginia.] |
| <b>Separation from mother – Youth in El Salvador: 02:08</b> |   |
| S.S.:   | Did you live with relatives? While your mother lived here in Alexandria and you stayed back in El Salvador, who did you live with?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | I lived with two of my sisters. The youngest one—they are all older than me, but the ones that I, yeah, they were older than me, but the three last siblings, we stayed together. So, I was living with my other two sisters.   |
| S.S.:   | Okay, and can you tell me what your mother did when she came here? What kind of work she had?   |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | For her, she was doing housekeeping in a hotel for many years. I believe she was doing that like, for thirteen years during the day, and she was doing office cleaning in the night. So, she was having a full time and a part time during that time.   |
| S.S.:   | Did that continue when you came here to live pretty much?   |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | Pretty much it was the same thing. She was working two jobs, full time and part time. She's still doing cleaning so, I had an opportunity to experience that with her; going and helping her on the weekends. And, she's still doing cleaning at night too. So, she couldn't survive without doing the two jobs.  |
| <b>Coming to the United States: 03:28</b>                   |   |

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| S.S.:   | And, how old were you when you came here?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | I was sixteen years old when I arrived here.   |
| S.S.:   | How many brothers and sisters came here when you came here in Alexandria?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | I was the second one that arrived here in Alexandria. Before, it was my mother, and was my sister. And, a year later after my sister arrived, she decided to bring me in. So, it was just only me and my other sister.   |
| S.S.:   | And, the number of children you have in your family is—.   |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | My mother has six girls. We're all girls. We're all women in the family. So, we were six.  |
| <b>Adjusting to a new life in Alexandria, Virginia: 04:11</b> |  |
| S.S.:   | So, when you came, tell me a little bit about the time when you arrived here at age sixteen. Where did you go to school? Where did you live? What was your life like?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | I was living really close from here. I was living on Russell Road, which is just blocks away from here by Saint Rita Church. I used to go to T.C. Williams High School. I graduated from T.C. Williams High School back in 1995. It was a really hard situation when I got here. I thought after missing my mom for like, four or five years, I thought it was going to be like a family reunion, but it was more like—it was really tough. It was really tough and she had to work day and night. Not being able to see her and being here in this country, I didn't really know anyone. It was really difficult.   |
| <b>Challenges with school: 05:06</b>                          |  |
| S.S.:   | What kind of challenges were there at the school for you?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | Uhm, it was really challenging because during that time, Alexandria, I think it was not so used to immigrant community so, the school system—especially the school system—was not really open to the immigrant community. There were ESL [English as a Second Language] classes, but we were not being challenged. During that time it was really hard to get a good education. I think because the system was not in place to really deal with immigrant community. So, it was a really tough time. Get adapted to a new county, to a new language, and not having the resources that you need. You didn't know how, like, in my case I didn't know how to navigate through the system. So, it was really-really hard. I think one of the biggest challenges that I faced was for me to get adapted to a new school system and get that education that I was dreaming for. When I was young, I remember I didn't like school at all, but when I came here and looked at my mom, the way she was working, I just thought that was the way for me, to really get a job that was not cleaning. |

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|                   | I didn't really have anything against it, but it was to really get educated and that was not in place. The school system was not really pointing me to that. It was challenging to go to school every day knowing that, most of your classes were taught in Spanish, instead of English. And, most of your classmates were Spanish speakers. No opportunity to practice and most of my classes—I was really good at math I remember, but most of my classes that I took for three years were for second grade level because I didn't speak the language. So, I was not being challenged.  |
| S.S.:             | How did you make that change to learn English and to challenge yourself? Did you have a counselor or someone who mentored you?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | Well, the system was not in place so, definitely we—I remember I started being a volunteer at Tenants and Workers United during that time and I was one of the students who was in the front line demanding bi-lingual counselors so that we could have support in place. And, years later it did happen. We ended up getting a bilingual counselor, but for me it was kind of late already in the process because I was almost out of the school already. It was senior year, I think so. Excuse me. So, I didn't take advantage of that opportunity because it was too late in the process for me. But, I was so excited that I was doing something that was going to be beneficial to other students that were coming along. I think the way I practiced the little bit of English that I know, was because I was trying to help my mother. I was looking for a part-time job. So, when I was sixteen and a half, almost seventeen, finally I got a job. And, that's when I was forced to speak English. |
| <b>First Job:</b> | <b>08:23</b>  |
| S.S.:             | What kind of job?   |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | I worked for this fast food restaurant that is really close from here called Popeye's. So, I was hired to do dishes in the back, basically. So, I spent like a week in the back and then I said I have to learn the menu because I want to be up front. [Laughs] I don't want to be working in the back doing dishes every day. I started being a cashier like two weeks later. I stayed with the company for seven years. I was able to become a manager after I graduated from high school. I was able to help my mom during that time. A little bit, but I was able to do it.  |
| S.S.:             | Where any of the other workers there with the same background bilingual, like you trying to learn English?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | Yeah, all of them. There were a couple African American cashiers. The manager, I remember, was from Ethiopia. But, then the rest were working, frying the chicken, working in the back, were people just like me. I said, I'm young, I can't be here for the rest of my life. So, I better learn it, get over it, do something, you know, so yeah.  |
| S.S.:             | It sounds as if they were very supportive of you because they must have   |

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|   | understood, so—.  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | Yeah, I feel honestly I work for Popeye’s for seven years, of course I become, you know—like I said, I started doing dishes, I became a cashier, then I became a supervisor, then I became a manager. I worked my way up, but I feel like it was my family. Because, the people that I was working with were really supportive. One, because I was young and they [could] see I was struggling on my own. But, at the same time I felt welcome because they were speaking the language same as me. Even though my dream was to speak English one day and get out of the kitchen, it was interesting to have that support from adults. Most of them, I’m talking about people who were forty, fifty years old working with me. I was just only sixteen. I was not supposed to be working those hours, but still, I was begging for those hours. So, it was interesting. It was a great experience.   |
| <b>Pathway to current career with Tenants and Workers United: 10:40</b> |   |
| S.S.:   | So, during those seven years, it sounds as if you kind of put down some roots for your current job. Does that make sense? What you do now, can you tell me what your job is here and how that relates.  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | I think—yes, my years at Popeye’s were definitely a start for me. Right, an open eye for me. But, also seeing my mom in this country was an open eye for me, for the work that I do. Also, the opportunity that I found at Tenants and Workers United when I arrived here as being an immigrant new to that community also was fundamental. Because, meantime while I was going to school and I was working, I was also volunteering at our organization trying to get in-state tuition to NOVA, even though I knew I was not going to be able to make it at the Northern Virginia Community College. Trying to get a bilingual counselor, even though I knew that I was not going to be there with that counselor would be in place. But, all of those kinds of things really helped me you know, that was my beginning, my base, to see how the system really works. How many opportunities are out that that you have to be aware of. That sometimes you are not because you are too busy or because of the language or you come from a different county and you are afraid of many things. But, I had that opportunity to have that. The pieces in place. So, being part of the organization was a big part of my life. |
| <b>Tenants and Workers United: 12:16</b>                                |   |
| S.S.:   | Tenants and Workers United is a grassroots community organization and helps workers and low income people with various things, education, health care, immigration. What other kinds of things? What all do you do? Your job sounds so big, so encompassing. What kind if things on a daily basis do you do? Describe a day.  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | Well, to describe a day, we are all about educating our community. I get educated about the issues that are affecting you. You are not all alone in   |

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|                 | <p>this world. We are all facing different issues, but if you see, it's the same issues. It doesn't matter where you come from. You can be from Honduras. You can be from El Salvador. We're facing the same issues in here, right? The lack of jobs. The immigration issues. So, in my daily basis I would say is talking to people about the issues that are affecting them. Try to have them to understand that this is something that is going on, not only in Alexandria, but the whole United States. That is has an impact in our countries at the same time and it's more about educating them. Talking to them on a daily basis. Going door-to-door or having people in here, having meetings with them. Talk to them about the issues and what we can do to at least make it easy for us. Meantime, we are here for our kids who are coming along.</p>                   |
| S.S.:           | <p>Is the office located here in this area? Because that is where a large part of the population that you work with lives.</p>   |
| Evelin Urrutia: | <p>We have this office in here. In the past, we also have had an office in Baileys Crossroads, in Culmore [neighborhood.] We are here because when our organization started, which was probably twenty, thirty years ago. It was because there was a lot of eviction going on here in Alexandria. So, families get organized and they fight for a housing code that the City of Alexandria provides some funding for. So that's how the organization started.</p>  |
| S.S.:           | <p>And, what year was that approximately?</p>  |
| Evelin Urrutia: | <p>Oh, that was—I know that the organization started probably in 1986. We can check with the director, but I think so. Probably in the [19]90s is when they became legal.</p>  |
| S.S.:           | <p>Okay. So, initially it was to fight evictions. How was that done?</p>   |
| Evelin Urrutia: | <p>Grassroots organizing. I know that the director was kind of new on it, but his wish was to keep the families in here. So, I know that the rents were going up dramatically. He decided to organize the tenants. So, I know that the tenants did a lot of protests, a lot of meeting trying to negotiate with the City of Alexandria. It was a long process. But, as far as I know, I was not here at that time I come a little bit after. Oh, I think I was in the middle of everything, just I didn't realize how strong they were on the campaign because I was more focused on the education piece. But, I know that they did a lot of protest, a lot of housing meetings, community meetings, and they did take over another rental office, but I think they did not even pay the monthly. They went on boycott to make the owners of the building suffer a little bit.</p> |
| S.S.:           | <p>Who is the organizer that you mentioned?</p>  |
| Evelin Urrutia: | <p>John Liss.</p>  |
| S.S.:           | <p>John Liss?</p>  |

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| Evelin Urrutia:   | Director of the organization.  |
| <b>Pursuing a college education at Northern Virginia Community College: 16:23</b> |  |
| S.S.:   | Yes, I know. Tell me a little bit about your education at NOVA. You did go for some time to the community college, yes?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | Well, yes. I graduated from T.C. Williams. I dreamed to become someone. Like anyone else who just immigrates here, eager to learn anything and become someone. But, I was not able to because many reasons. So, I worked Popeye's for seven years and after that I said, oh, I want to go back to school. By that time I was, I think it was in 2002. Yeah, 2002 I was able to go back to NOVA. Because by that time I was able to pay in-state tuition. So, I went back to NOVA. But, since I didn't have strong English when I was in high school for me it was like, an ESL student at NOVA. So, I spent probably like, a year taking English classes at NOVA and then I say, this is not for me. So, I gave it up again. In 2012, I believe, I went back. I said, oh, now I'm going to get a career, I want to do business management. So, I signed up for that. I started taking my classes little by little. Two, three classes at a time. But, I just, I just dropped it. So, I took some classes. I like it. You know I look at my grades and say I'm proud of myself. I'm an A straight student, but I just feel like I'm the type of person who I like to do what I like because since I want to be a you know, I want to study something that has to be financial. I took all my financial classes, but I forget about the English, the math, and all those extra requirements that you need in order to accomplish something. So, now I'm basically stuck with that. I have to go back and take those classes. But, I don't feel like I can do it. |
| S.S.:   | So, you might go back to school?   |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | Yes, you know, I dropped it, I dropped it last semester. But, it was because my mom passed away during that time so, I was going through a really-really hard situation at that point. So, I knew that I couldn't handle that whole stress you know, being a full-time—I have two child so, being a full-time mom, plus take classes, having my mom sick, it was really kind of difficult. So, yeah, I decided not to. And, then this semester I was going to enroll, but I said, I don't feel like I'm ready. I think to go back to school I have to be ready mentally in all the aspects of my life in order to go back and dedicate the time to get the grades that I was getting. So, I don't feel like I'm ready. But, yeah hopefully by this semester coming up in August.   |
| S.S.:   | What will you study?   |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | I think I will get stuck with the same [laughs]—I will finish with my English classes, my math classes, biology, whatever I need in order to accomplish. Otherwise, I think I will be like sixty and still be in school.   |
| S.S.:   | That is good, yes?   |



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| Evelin Urrutia:                                 | Yes.   |
| S.S.:   | Challenging yourself?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:                                 | Yeah.  |
| <b>Family life – mother and children: 19:32</b> |  |
| S.S.:   | Tell me a little bit about your family. Your family here? You said your mother passed away. I'm sorry. I know that she was your inspiration.   |
| Evelin Urrutia:                                 | Oh, yeah.  |
| S.S.:   | But, what about the support and strength from your family now? And, your children.   |
| Evelin Urrutia:                                 | Yeah. [Tears up] Sorry.  |
| S.S.:   | Don't apologize.   |
| Evelin Urrutia:                                 | Yeah, I mean—.   |
| S.S.:   | What do you wish for your children?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:                                 | Well, I mean, it's really hard, but I think there is a big opportunity. I feel that now, even though my mother is not with me, I still have two kids. One of them is fifteen years old. The other one is thirteen. So, they are big now. Now, what I have to do is focus on getting them through the education that I didn't get, that I want them to get. And, that's what I'm focusing on. They are the reason why I wake up every morning and why I go to sleep every night; thinking about how I can make things better for them, right. And, that's why I think I love so much being here because I always, for the past fourteen years, I have been working with youth. Ages twelve through eighteen. So, that's a big part of me. Working with teenagers. And, now I have my kids and all I want is a good education for them. I wish they can go to college. They will decide, but at least there is the base, right. There is mommy who cares about them. There's a mommy who cares about the system to be in place for them to succeed. Even though I know that after they graduate it's going to be up to them. But, they're the ones that motivate me to do what I do. |
| S.S.:   | Do they share their dreams with you?   |
| Evelin Urrutia:                                 | They share the dream about the world to become a better world to live in. Not about college. We have to really think about it. The little one loves books. He likes school. He always says "I'm going to go to a four year college because I don't want to be in community college. I know mommy have to go there, but I don't have to go there if I get good grades and I do good in high school." He already has his life planned out so, hopefully it will work the way he wants it. He's only in sixth grade right now. My biggest one is a challenge, you know. He's more like, I don't like school. He's doing what he can, you know. He's a kid with a big  |

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|  | <p>heart. He does believe in social justice. He sees when things aren't fair. That is something I have been teaching them since they were little. Don't bully other kids. Try to help as much as you can. Look at the way the system works. Try to be better than you know, than anything you can be because you can do it. So, [unclear] but when we talk about education, I don't think what they want. I don't know why but he says, I don't like it, I don't like it. But he's doing it. He's doing what he can and I'm there to support him.</p>  |
| <p><b>Teaching her children about El Salvadorian culture: 2<sup>nd</sup> Video 00:00</b></p> |  |
| <p>S.S.:</p>   | <p>Do you talk with your children about your culture?</p>  |
| <p>Evelin Urrutia:</p>   | <p>Definitely. Yeah.</p>   |
| <p>S.S.:</p>   | <p>Tell me how they respond to that, and your experiences. How that may have helped their experiences.</p>   |
| <p>Evelin Urrutia:</p>   | <p>At the beginning, it was really hard. Especially because when they start going to school they were not speaking Spanish at all. And, that was one of the biggest things of all. They didn't want to, they didn't want to until I started bringing them back to El Salvador. I said, "Look, we're going to go to a trip to El Salvador." "Oh, no, we want to go to Disney." "Mommy don't have no money to go to Disney, but Mommy can buy a ticket to go to El Salvador and see some related family that we have out there." One of my sisters is still there. So, I said, "We're going to go and we went for two weeks." They start, you know, they want chicken nuggets and we eat a lot of beans and rice. Tortillas, you know they want pizza. So, it was a big fight around that in the house, but they get used to it because that's what I cook. So, they get used to it. But, it was hard. One of the things that really helped me to make them understand where me and their dad were coming from was getting books from my country and reading together. I was reading to them in Spanish. They were like, we don't understand what you're saying Mommy. I will translate for you. But, it had been challenging, being in a country—they go to school, you stay away from them for so long, I have to work so hard. When I get home, it's not too much communication, you know. We do as much as we can do. We eat dinner together, but sometimes that is eight p.m. because I get home late. So, it has been challenging to keep my culture, you know, to pass it on to them, but I think now that they are a little bit older, they understand it more, they appreciate it more and you know, food is one of the things. Now, they're learning how to cook Spanish food. Which, I don't know how to make pupusas even though I'm from El Salvador. But, normal food like, the daily food that we eat, yes. I'm teaching them how to cook that. About our beliefs too. You know, the way I grew up—even though my family changed our religion—for me, I still think in the way I grew up and I'm guiding them through the same process and they love it. And, I always tell them, you know, this is the way I grew up. I want you to get adapted to this culture because, this is</p> |

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|   | where you were born and everything, but I wouldn't want you to forget where you come from. Because at the end of the day, this is where you come from, even though you born here.  |
| <b>Differences of religion within the family: 02:43</b>                               |  |
| S.S.:   | You said you changed your religion?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | My family did.   |
| S.S.:   | Your family. After you came here.  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | Yes, yes.  |
| S.S.:   | Why was that?  |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | Why? I don't know, I don't know. Probably because in my country I remember my Mom going to church every Sunday, every Saturday—we grew up Catholic. But, coming here she became Christian. I think it's Christian. I don't know why they change, but everyone in my family, except my sister that is in El Salvador and myself, we haven't changed. But, I remember how I grew up. I remember they used to take me to church every Sunday. I'm still practicing the same religion and I always take my kids. And, if they invite me, my older sister invites me to the Church, I will still go. But, I just don't feel like that's my religion. So, I try to respect everyone, but to my kids, I'm raising them the way I was raised.  |
| <b>Music and other elements of El Salvadorian culture incorporated at home: 03:48</b> |  |
| S.S.:   | Are there other parts of the culture besides the food and Church that you want your family to keep? Part of Salvadorian culture, music, festivals, and things like that?   |
| Evelin Urrutia:   | Oh, our music, they will have to deal with it since they were in my belly. Because El Salvadorian people, I don't know, in my house music has to be loud. You know, so I play music every day and they get tired of it because they say, I already know which song is coming next. In my car, play my music. So, I think that's already part of their life. But, about history and the food, they can get lost on that. I have to really relate to them that hey, this is what we eat in El Salvador. You have to eat this, you have to try this. The language is another piece that is really easy to lose it because they spend a lot of time speaking in English, watching TV in English, everything on the internet is English. But, music? They deal with it because I am there twenty-four seven with my music and that cannot change. History about my country, I try to talk to them about the political parties over there, how they become the political parties. I try to talk to them about the civil war. Not too much about how damaging it was, but I want them to know a little bit about why we are here, because I didn't come here because I wanted to be here. I feel like we didn't have another choice. I didn't have another choice when I come here. It was me |

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|   | <p>coming here, or me staying there and who knows what would happen. So, I want them to understand that if they are born here, they shouldn't take it as—it should mean something for them. It was a sacrifice that we made to get here and that's why we ended up here. They have more privilege that they have to take advantage of. That we couldn't, we can't—.</p>  |
| <p><b>Back to youth during the civil war in El Salvador: 2<sup>nd</sup> Video 05:48</b></p> |  |
| <p>S.S.:</p>  | <p>So, you tell them about what life was like for you during the civil war. What was it like when you were a young girl there?</p>   |
| <p>Evelin Urrutia:</p>  | <p>It was a really tough situation, right. Not just poverty, it was all around the civil war. It was having soldiers killing in front of me with community people because it was basically, the Campesino, which was the community against the government at that point. So, seeing that there was no night that I could go to sleep without hearing bombs and all that kind of things happening probably like, five minutes away from where I was. It was really tough. Even though I was a happy child. I wouldn't say I was—I was a happy child. Everyone in my community knew each other. Every night we used to play outside. Soccer, anything, baseball. As a community, we were really tight. But, if you talk about the impact of the war during that time, it was a really tough situation. You didn't know you were going to go to sleep whether you were going to wake up alive the next day. So, it was a happy childhood. It was really sad because we didn't have no food. I mean, we grew up in a really, really bad situation I would say because there were not too much food around in our community.</p>  |
| <p>S.S.:</p>  | <p>What kind of food did you eat? Where did you get the food?</p>  |
| <p>Evelin Urrutia:</p>  | <p>Corn, beans, rice, the basic. Very basic. Yeah, because in order to have meat you have to have some money. And, during the civil war it was really hard for my mom to go and work. Because, how you call it, the farms were destroyed or they were taken over. People couldn't go in to their jobs because I grew up close to the coffee, how you call it, you cut the coffee—you know, the trees of coffee and all of that. So, most of the jobs my family was doing, including my older sister, were going to those farms and getting corn, I mean, the coffee cut. And, it was during times and periods of the year we were able to do that, but during the Civil War we couldn't. Every time someone was able to go and make it, someone would end up killed. And, then we didn't have no land to harvest our own beans and corn, stuff like that. So, we had to basically ask the neighborhood to give us—sometimes, we didn't even have dinner, you know, but it was really good to see how people—we were supported by other people and we were supporting each other in so many ways. Just to drink water we had to go far away and get water, you know, and bring water to home. It was really hard, and then you see that it is raining and you have to run outside and get water because you know if you don't get</p> |

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|  | water you won't be able to do your laundry. So, we did grow up in a really, really, I would say, poor, poor community, but at the same time it was good to see that you have a lot of people watching over you, you know. Feeling the love. And, it's totally different than the way my kids are growing up.  |
| <b>Evelin's motivation: 2<sup>nd</sup> Video 09:27</b> |   |
| S.S.:  | But, when you came here, you talked a little bit about how difficult it was to arrive and be at a new school and your mother was working many jobs so, money was probably very tight, and you got through this. But, what now is your strength that keeps you going? What you're doing here in this grassroots organization. What is your tiller inside you? What—?   |
| Evelin Urrutia:  | My motivation.  |
| S.S.:  | Your motivation, yes.   |
| Evelin Urrutia:  | When I got here, I think one of the things that I found in this organization was that spirit of creating change and have a better life, right. For everyone. So, when we look at jobs, I mean I wish that it would be not a minimum wage of \$7.25, \$7.50, whatever it is, you know you cannot survive with something like that. So, one of my biggest motivation that I have is to really create change. I feel that if people are educated enough about the issues and the kinds of things they can do to improve their life, I think we will have a better place to live. Because we know there are a lot of resources. It's about how we use them. When we talk about parks, if you look around here, there is no park for kids.   |
| S.S.:  | In this immediate area?   |
| Evelin Urrutia:  | In this immediate area. Look around me. There is Cora Kelly [School], the immigration center has a park, I don't know if it's available to everyone. But, there are not too many parks where kids can go and have fun. We use to have one behind the CVS [drug store], it's almost gone. It was not even a park, it was more like a basketball court, but people used to go play. It's still play in there, but it was better before than what it is now. And, I think there are like many more resources that communities should have. And, if people will gather together and ask for that kind of resources, it wouldn't disappear, it would stay. So, my motivation is for people to understand that there are a lot of resources, all we have to do is to be sure that we got some of those for our communities. |
| S.S.:  | Is it possible for this organization to somehow implement a park, to work with the counties to make a park somewhere?   |
| Evelin Urrutia:  | The park that is close from here, I know that it was done by an organization in the city, but now with the new construction and development that is happening in that area, I think that part is going to go off. They already take away the fences and everything. So, I think they will destroy that. I think it's part of that development. Because it's really  |

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|                 | close from that development. To the development that's going to be happening.  |
| S.S.:           | Because of the work that you do here, do you think that there is a discrimination against the Latino community on a daily basis? Has it changed over say, thirty years, twenty years that there's more assimilation of both sides, that people are more accepting?   |
| Evelin Urrutia: | Well, you know, discrimination amongst people or the system against the people?  |
| S.S.:           | The system against the people.   |
| Evelin Urrutia: | Well, before—I would say—1994, 1995, we were able to see a lot of different—we could say, discrimination issues like, the police against the community, right. Now, this day, you still have a lot of police coming around, going around, but you don't see it like, so much about discrimination, you see it more as protection. Now, it depends on what kind of work is being done, right. Now, about the system, I think that the school is in place and stuff but, if we talk about like I said, programs for the little kids, programs for teenagers, you don't see that many. Only, you see that through non-profit organizations, but you don't see that through the city. Now, the city can focus on pregnancy prevention, but there are many other programs that the youth needs. It's not just on pregnancy prevention, it's more than that. So, I don't see too much programs for youth, for example. That has to do with the system, it has to do with how much we have to invest in the community like, Arlandria. And, what we want out of this community. |
| S.S.:           | What would you like to see different in the next five or ten years here in Arlandria?  |
| Evelin Urrutia: | Well, honestly, I would like for the city try to keep this community the way it is. Right, because if you see around, all over what is happening is development. When the development happens it's a way to push people out of their community. So, we have already have [unclear] vote as an executive right now, but if this new building next door is going to go up and we're going to have fancy new townhouses and apartments, whatever is going to be built in there, which is going to be nice apartments, I believe—this is just going to give an opportunity for other owners to start looking at it or we have to do the same thing. Rent will go higher. It's a way to push people out of here. So, what I would like is for the city to really try to maintain the community that is already here instead of displace them.   |
| S.S.:           | Does your organization lobby the politicians and officials, for this community on such issues?   |
| Evelin Urrutia: | We have done it. Especially when they were approving the development over here. Close to where they are building we were doing it, but they  |

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|                 | <p>still vote in favor. We know what is going to happen. This business will disappear, the community will be moving out. Because usually that's what happens. We can look at what happened in Old Town [Alexandria, Virginia.] How Old Town public housing used to look like and what it is now. Right. We can look at over here—Del Ray [neighborhood], not too much, but if you would look at Calvert, which is really close from here, same thing. Who used to live there, doesn't live there anymore. It's a big change. When you bring new development, new buildings, you're thinking about making stores that are nice stores like, Starbucks and things like that; we already know, this is not for our community. Because our community, maybe they eat pupusas or they eat something else. [laughs] So, it's challenging. We as an organization, we don't want what happened in Old Town with all the public housing, happening here with the Latino community. But, it's really challenging when the city's looking at how they can make beautiful, the city, instead of looking at it for whom you're making it beautiful. Right? Because it's not for the people who live there.</p> |
| S.S.:           | <p>So, do people come to your office every day or call you and say, I cannot make my rent. I'm not making enough money. I need help. Can you help me and how can you help me? And, do you work with federal and state and the city agencies to help them?</p>   |
| Evelin Urrutia: | <p>You know, yes, people come with bills that they have not been able to pay. Whether it's their electricity bill for example, right. Especially because everything's going up except their salaries. But, I know that a lot of the people that we work with are in the undocumented community. They don't have no access to food stamps and stuff like that. If they're looking for food, I try to get them into the list of ALIVE [a nonprofit organization which helps people in need] but that's once a month.</p>  |
| S.S.:           | <p>What is this?</p>  |
| Evelin Urrutia: | <p>ALIVE. But, that's once a month.</p>   |
| S.S.:           | <p>One time a month.</p>  |
| S.S.:           | <p>One time a month. I try to guide them to churches and sometimes they do help with bills. Some churches do that, they have emergency funds, they call it. So, I try to help them as much as I can, but it's a really hard situation when everyone is looking for something.</p>   |
| S.S.:           | <p>Is there a food bank right here in your area?</p>  |
| Evelin Urrutia: | <p>ALIVE brings food once a month.</p>  |
| S.S.:           | <p>But's there's no other walk-in food bank?</p>  |
| Evelin Urrutia: | <p>Not as far as I know.</p>  |
| S.S.:           | <p>Tell me a little bit about your role with New Virginia Majority and what that is.</p>  |

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| Evelin Urrutia: | I work for that organization. I am the Organizer Director. So, I do supervise the organizers that we have working on different issues. One of them is in the immigration rights, trying to see how Virginia can change their laws on having an opportunity for immigrant communities to have access to a license to drive. Which is similar to what happened in Maryland. That, we know is going to be really hard in Virginia for them to adopt something like that. Even though in the past that law was in place, but it was taken away. That's one of the work that I oversee. I oversee another organizer that we have in Richmond, Virginia, a ways from here. So, I oversee four employees at this point. The education part that we do in Alexandria, that is one of the biggest piece that I have been working with and supervising. Trying to get restore to justice [Restorative Justice] to be implemented in high school, ninth grade through twelfth grade. |
| S.S.:           | What is that?   |
| Evelin Urrutia: | It's called restore to justice. It's not like a program, it's a philosophy. It's for teachers and administrators to be trained on how to deal with issues that are not punitive, like suspended students and stuff like that. So, that's one of the biggest, I would say, things that I have to do, to work. That goes along with Tenants and Workers United, that's work being done by Tenants and Workers United, but I supervise that from New Virginia Majority.  |
| S.S.:           | You go into the schools to talk with teachers to talk with school board?  |
| Evelin Urrutia: | We work more from the ground up. So, we work with students and parents to advocate for that. Yes, it's really hard when you're in the system to be advocating to change the system. But, it's easier for students who are suffering through that and the parents who are going through issues like that, to be asking for a solution to the problem.  |
| S.S.:           | Is there anything that you would like to add that I haven't asked, that you think will help people understand your experience here in Alexandria, as an immigrant to come here and put down roots in this city?   |
| Evelin Urrutia: | I think as an immigrant coming here when I was sixteen years old, and now I'll be almost forty, it's interesting just to see how the city has developed. See so many changes and it's still looking at the same issues. You see a city who has a lot of money, who has developed a lot, but you still see a lot of same issues. Like when we talked about education. Even though it has improved a lot we still have the achievement gap, we still have suspension, we still have all the kind of things that you would say you wouldn't see in the twenty-first century, but you still see it. As an immigrant, all I can say is, we are here, we end up putting roots because even though we say we come for two years, three years, that's not true because when you leave your country, you leave everything behind and you start from fresh. But, I think everyone who comes here has big  |



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|       | dreams. Sometimes they don't come true, but we have big dreams. |
| S.S.: | Thank you. Thank you very much.                                 |