

Oral history interview, Elena V

Interview Transcription · English · 2026-10-25

Interview summary

Summary

This is an oral history interview recorded on the 12th of March for the Riverside Library community archive. Elena Vasquez speaks about being born near the coast in 1952, her childhood memories of her father's fishing work, and her family's relocation to the city in 1968 due to declining fishing conditions and employment opportunities at a canning factory.

The interview covers her journey to the city, leaving her friend Lucia behind, and starting work at age 16 labeling tins in the canning factory where her forewoman taught her English. She concludes by sharing reflections she wishes to pass on to her grandchildren regarding family support and the labor behind everyday items.

Speakers

- Speaker 1 (interviewer/participant)
- Elena Vasquez (participant)
- Speaker 2 (interviewer)

Topics

- **0:00 Introduction and background:** Elena Vasquez states her name, birth year of 1952, and notes her father was a fisherman and her mother sewed clothes.
- **0:21 Earliest memory of hometown:** Elena Vasquez describes early memories of the harbor smells and meeting her father's fishing boat before sunrise.
- **0:35 Decision to leave the town:** Elena Vasquez explains that her family moved in 1968 after receiving letters from her uncle about work opportunities in a city canning factory.
- **0:51 The journey to the city:** Elena Vasquez recalls traveling three days by bus and train and feeling angry about leaving her best friend Lucia.
- **1:05 First job in the city:** The speaker recalls starting work at age 16 labeling tins in the canning factory, where the forewoman, Mrs. Doyle, taught her English.
- **1:20 Message for grandchildren:** The speaker expresses a wish for her grandchildren to know that the family supported each other and that work went into every tin on a shelf.

Quotes

- [0:10] Elena Vasquez: "My father was a fisherman and my mother sewed clothes for the neighbors."
- [0:24] Elena Vasquez: "The smell of the harbor in the morning, salt and diesel."
- [0:24] Elena Vasquez: "If it was a good day, he would give me one small fish to carry home, like a prize."

- [0:38] Elena Vasquez: "My mother read those letters out loud at dinner, again and again."
 - [0:53] Elena Vasquez: "Three days on a bus, then a train. I remember I was angry, because I had to leave my best friend, Lucia."
 - [1:05] Speaker 1: "The forewoman, Mrs. Doyle, was strict, but she taught me English in the lunch break. I owe her a lot."
 - [1:25] Speaker 1: "That we were not poor in the things that matter. We had each other. And that every tin they see on a shelf was touched by somebody's hands."
-

Full transcript

[0:00] Speaker 1: This is an oral history interview for the Riverside Library community archive. Today is the 12th of March. Could you tell me your name and where you were born?

[0:10] Elena Vasquez: My name is Elena Vasquez. I was born in a small town near the coast in 1952. My father was a fisherman and my mother sewed clothes for the neighbors.

[0:21] Speaker 1: What is your earliest memory of that town?

[0:24] Elena Vasquez: The smell of the harbor in the morning, salt and diesel. My father would come back before sunrise and I would run down to the boats to see what he caught. If it was a good day, he would give me one small fish to carry home, like a prize.

[0:35] Speaker 1: When did your family decide to leave?

[0:38] Elena Vasquez: In 1968. The fishing was getting worse every year and my uncle had already moved to the city. He wrote letters saying there was work in the canning factory. My mother read those letters out loud at dinner, again and again.

[0:51] Speaker 1: How was the journey?

[0:53] Elena Vasquez: Long. Three days on a bus, then a train. I remember I was angry, because I had to leave my best friend, Lucia.

[1:00] Speaker 1: we promised to write every week, we did, for about two years.

[1:05] Speaker 2: And your first job here? Speaker 1: At 16, in the same canning factory as my uncle. I worked on the line, putting labels on tins. The forewoman, Mrs. Doyle, was strict, but she taught me English in the lunch break. I owe her a lot.

[1:20] Speaker 2: Is there anything you would like your grandchildren to know about that time?

[1:25] Speaker 1: That we were not poor in the things that matter. We had each other. And that every tin they see on a shelf was touched by somebody's hands.