

Elsa

*Struggling to provide for their young son in Mendoza, Argentina, Elsa and Alberto followed her sister and left Argentina for the United States. “The situation was difficult, I mean, to the point of buying the essentials. Sometimes there wasn’t even money for the baby’s diapers, and it really was an unbearable situation.” Elsa was thirty-five years old at the time of this interview.*

ML: How old were you when you got married?

E: I was twenty-one, almost twenty-two, and Alberto was twenty-one. Well, Alberto was twenty, turning twenty-one so they had to sign for us to get married. Yes, he was a kid—we were kids, but the difference between a man and a woman is that the woman matures sooner. We always say if we could go back and live what we have lived again, we would go back and do everything exactly as we did it before; we regret nothing. And so we came here with our baby in our arms, Albertito; he was one and a half years old.

ML: You told me that things were difficult. When you said that things were difficult, was it because of the whirlwind of things that happened to you personally?

E: No, well apart from us having nothing, I mean. We got married and went to live in Alberto’s grandmother’s house; she lived all alone. After that, we went to live in my mom’s house and then my sister bought a house—my sister Lucy—and she lent it to us.

The situation was difficult, I mean, to the point of buying the essentials. Sometimes there wasn’t even money for the baby’s diapers, and it really was an unbearable situation. Alberto went out and worked to provide the basics, the essentials, and then Anita was here.

ML: Anita is your sister?

E: Yes, my sister. She was already, I believe, like one or two years living here (United States) –

ML: What year was this Elsa?

E: We’re in 2012, so this was around 2000, 2001, or 2002?

ML: What was it that you heard about the United States that made you say, “Wow, I’m going there”? What were the things you started to fantasize about, to dream about? Why did the United States start to present an opportunity for you and your family?

E: It was an opportunity. In reality I should say that it was on a crazy whim that I got to come; it was nothing I planned. I knew that it was the United States; here I could work, I could earn. I could live.

ML: I would ask, you knew this because Anita told you? You had friends who made comments? Why?

E: Yes, that's why. Because they said everything was fantastic. It was how they painted it. Also it was like, to come to the United States it was like going to the “unreachable country,” or it was the “rich man’s dream,” nothing more. And then—

ML: You mean, as tourists?

E: Yes, as tourists and after as someone who came to work and earn good money. So it was a spectacular opportunity for each one of us to come to a place that was like an excellently proclaimed advertisement.

ML: Did you all ever think of going anywhere else?

E: No.

ML: You know that in our country there are people who think about Spain, think about Italy, they think of other places. Did you guys ever fantasize of another place?

E: I never fantasized of going anywhere.

ML: It was a whim. Did you think, when you came, that the massive economic crisis in Argentina was finally over? There was the fall of President [Fernando] de la Rúa’s government and the six presidents we had in one week; had that already happened, or no?

E: No. It was [Carlos] Menem I believe at that time, right?

ML: Oh okay, so none of the big economic crises had happened yet?

E: No, I believe it was just starting.

ML: Ok.

E: When they started to sell all of the things in Argentina and this started to . . .

ML: Ok.

E: Yes.

ML: Ok, and so you took up on a whim.

E: Yes, it was a whim.

ML: How soon did you decide to come?

E: I believe it was a month less than one month.

ML: In a month.

E: Yes.

ML: What was it that you had to do in this month?

E: Well, I wrote a letter and I told my husband "If Anita answers us, we're going." I can't even if I try to go back and remember, I think I only remember the moment when I wrote the letter and then I came here.

ML: You don't remember what all happened in this month?

E: I think something happened in my brain (laughs).

E: I don't know what it was. I think that I canceled it out because it is so strong.

ML: You do not remember what you said to your family. You don't remember what you told Alberto's family?

E: I don't remember the moment in which I told them. I don't remember the moment I told my mom, I don't remember telling her. I do remember the moment in the airport, and when I arrived here.

ML: Do you remember, even though you don't remember the moment you told your mom, your family's opinion on your decision?

E: No, I don't remember. I believe my mother always supports us in the decisions we make together, even though I think that, I don't know, I think the decision killed her.

ML: She basically put up with it.

E: Yes, she put up with it.

Elsa, Interview by Marina López, June 14, 2012