

**Domestic Workers United**  
**afc2015/027**

**DOMESTIC WORKERS UNITED**

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Liseth Valencia interviewed by Patricia Francois

00:00:00 Pat Francois introduces herself and the interview project. Liseth Valencia explains her interest in this project and in domestic workers' rights. She works as a nanny and lives in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, born in Guatemala.

00:02:00 Liseth tells story of how she became a domestic worker. Her brother had to have an eye removed and her family needed money.

00:03:00 Her mother and father worked constantly, long hours. She came to New York because an aunt, who was a nun, lived here. She met a Guatemalan woman at church who offered her a job as a nanny for a Jewish family in Brooklyn. The pay was \$180 for six days of work. This first job lasted maybe seven months. She heard she could get more pay so she started working Sundays as well doing housekeeping. The husband taught her English. She was getting \$40 for eight hours in 1994.

00:08:00 First time Liseth witnesses a Shabbat dinner. A team of workers had to get the dishes done by hand afterward. She worked into the wee hours of the morning. Long hours but she was happy. They never denied her food.

00:09:30 She loved their food, no complaints. Reflections on whether salary was worth it. Liseth needed the work to pay the rent at the church.

00:11:30 These people opened the door for her. She learned a lot. She has been doing this work 20 years.

00:12:00 Three full-time jobs in 20 years. All involved babies. She does extra jobs doing housekeeping or elder care. How hearing "I love you" from employers is baloney. She keeps her life private. One time she needed to take a test at school and couldn't be late, so she had to explain that she couldn't stay late.

00:15:00 Liseth describes a typical day taking care of a newborn. Cook, feed and bathe the child, do laundry and ironing, clean children's rooms. Follow directions, run errands.

00:16:30 What skills do you need to become a domestic worker: To be tough when people make unreasonable demands (examples).

00:18:00 What training is necessary: little bit of everything. Important to set boundaries. She doesn't mind caring for a child, but doesn't need to do lots of care for the adults. Families are not always courteous. Likes to keep her charges clean.

00:19:00 Ways to get children to go to sleep: sing to them, stay with them. She would like more training to be able to help with their homework. What special skills does Liseth bring to the job: skin care. Likes to do massage, do masks, but she only does this with her friends. Liseth describes more ways to get children to sleep: the before-bedtime routine.

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00:25:30 Ways to get children to eat: select favorite foods, dip food in sauce.

00:26:00 Ways to get children to stop crying or fussing: promise favorite rewards. Sometimes the reward is described only if they stop crying. It depends on the situation.

00:27:00 Home remedies: arguments about whether child has had sugar or not. Homeopathic pills.

00:28:00 What has she taught her employers? Liseth says nothing, they just want to see her cook, clean, and take care of the child. Best part of the job was the fun of feeding twins their bottles.

00:29:00 Worst part of the job is not succeeding at getting children to go to sleep or when they get “hyper” and parents blame her.

00:30:00 What is your relationship with current employers: very formal.

00:31:00 She doesn't see the woman much, man just says good morning. Wife agreed that she would be the one to relate to Liseth, not her husband. This is fine with Liseth.

00:32:00 She stays in touch with some children, not with others. Working with twins is tiring but she enjoys working with children.

00:33:00 Taking care of twins. She still has a relationship with them.

00:34:00 Were her hours and holidays respected: Yes. She got some public holidays off but no paid holidays.

00:34:30 Is being undocumented a reason that workers get exploited?

00:35:00 Liseth provides an example, a friend's employer asking for her Green Card but not providing benefits.

00:36:30 Cultural sharing that happens: Liseth learned Kosher rules. Does not share Guatemalan culture. Employers are not really interested in her, they just want her to do a good job. Work/life balance.

00:38:00 Work and life balance is hard. Sometimes you miss important calls from your family. Her brother died in 2011 and she missed the call because she was on the train. Received the message but had to stay at work.

00:39:30 She finds her employers don't have the kind of respect for elders that she grew up with. Nicer to cats and dogs than to people.

00:40:00 Overhearing families speaking badly about their workers.

00:40:30 Groups she belongs to: DWU. It is like having the family she didn't have when she was younger.

00:42:00 She feels comfortable and secure with DWU. She can laugh and move. How she heard about DWU. First heard about the Long Island case of an Asian woman working as a slave, heard about the movement then, in 2005. Couldn't make meetings when she was working seven days a week but when

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she took the job with the twins she came. Heard about DWU on news and free AM newspaper. Story of the Asian woman. Pat showed up in support of this woman's case. Indonesian. Employers were imprisoned for keeping two women as slaves. She was found naked and without shoes when she escaped.

00:44:30 People being treated worse than animals, examples. Animal groomers making more per hour. Taking animals to schools and camps. Long Island and Brooklyn are bad for domestic workers, and New Jersey market is also bad. Spending \$50 on wine when a nanny could have a cab ride with that. Women fired for not speaking good enough Spanish.

00:47:00 What does the DW Bill of Rights mean for you and your work: it helps in one way and in other ways it doesn't. She can now complain to the Department of Labor, however, jobs are being replaced by daycare because of the laws. People don't want to pay overtime. How some people want slaves, whether or not you offer them documents. Don't want to pay taxes. You work without any help from the government. Liseth hopes the bill of rights will make people realize she came to this country not as a criminal but for a reason, to help her parents pay for her brother's medical care. She hopes exploitation will improve. DWU is important so people can join and learn.

00:51:00 People don't complain because they are afraid, and people are depending on them. She missed her grandmother's death because she couldn't get there in time.

00:52:00 The Bill of Rights impact on the Department of Labor is good, but other aspects, no. People take advantage so the secret is to keep your distance. One friend lost her job suddenly when the child reached a certain age. Another friend had a job for 20 years, told her employer she didn't feel well one day, was dismissed.

00:54:00 How Liseth's brother skipped getting a transplant and took the money for it instead and opened a business. He now is married with children. She tells this story to make people understand she has responsibilities.

00:56:00 How she maintains distance: tells employers she's busy, stays serious. Doesn't buy the "I love you" lines, insists she needs certain hours or pay. Reminds employers she has rent to pay and people to support. Employer referred her to someone else who could give her full time work. How she gets better money now working for this woman's cousin.

00:58:00 People are ready to exploit you if you say yes and fall for the "I love you" or "the children love you."

00:59:30 Legislators should know: that immigrants work for a better life. Their parents were immigrants.

01:00:30 Pat recalls Senator Bill Perkins signed on our bill because his mother had put him through school as a domestic worker.

01:01:30 Immigrant construction workers also get exploited. Bosses take vacations while employees don't get paid.

01:02:00 Education/skills Liseth would like to gain include becoming a personal trainer, nursing skills,

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nutritionist, medical assistant. Nannying is a decent job. Not like selling drugs to these mothers. Enjoyed the Nanny Training course by Cornell. Recognizing signs and symptoms, including signs of abuse. Also, house management skills. Using too much bleach was not good for her eyes. Chemical hazards.

01:03:30 Child pathology and pediatric skills and leadership training.

01:06:30 Migration story and tension being an immigrant in the United States. American citizenship, immigration and immigrants, and threats of deportation.

01:09:34 Immigration status and work permits and visas wer discussed.

End of interview