

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

**DOMESTIC WORKERS UNITED**

**Valerie Murray interviewed by Pat Francois**

**Interview afc2015027\_03420\_ms02**

Pat Francois: Good afternoon, my name is Patricia, I'm the lead organizer of Domestic Workers United, and as you know we are archiving the voices of domestic workers' stories. What is your name or the name you will be using for this interview?

Valerie Murray : My name is Valerie Murray. Yeah, I can use my real name, that's all right.

Pat Francois: For this interview?

Valerie Murray : Yes.

Pat Francois: Thank you. What is your [00:00:30] current occupation?

Valerie Murray : Okay, I'm a senior care provider. Right now I'm with a patient, it's a gentleman, he's suffering from Alzheimer's, but he's in the first, well, going into the second stages of Alzheimer's.

Pat Francois: Okay. How do you get jobs?

Valerie Murray : Well, mostly word of mouth because I do private cases. A friend of a friend, that [00:01:00] sort of thing, yeah, people like that. That's a friend who may know a friend, who may know someone else that needs someone. That's how I get jobs.

Pat Francois: What about agencies, because I know like here a lot of workers go through the agencies.

Valerie Murray : Oh, well, the requirements for most agencies I may not have. Therefore with this job specifically, [00:01:30] I did course at the Alzheimer's Association. They teach you how to deal with people suffering from Alzheimer's, dementia. After the course, they will put you on the website. People who have family suffering from Alzheimer's will go on that website. Well, as a matter of fact, they give you a password to go on the website and set up a profile. People [00:02:00] will go on that website and get workers. It's a friend that got this job. She passed it on to me, because I'm certified in dealing with people's suffering from Alzheimer's. That's how I got the job with this lady.

Pat Francois: Okay, good. Do you think word of mouth is more affective than going to the agencies?

Valerie Murray : Well, I wouldn't say it's more affective. You get better [00:02:30] pay, because your employers pay you directly. They pay say \$30 an hour. You get that \$30

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and hour. If it's through an agency, they would keep 20 and give you ten and then tax it.

Pat Francois: What you're telling me is if the employer, who you work for, you're the person doing all the work. One on one employer, you get \$30, [00:03:00] but through the agency they will take \$20-

Valerie Murray : Yes.

Pat Francois: -and still tax the \$10 that you are left with?

Valerie Murray : Yes.

Pat Francois: Automatically, you're getting about \$8 or less?

Valerie Murray : Yes.

Pat Francois: Wow. What borough or neighborhood do you live in?

Valerie Murray : Okay, I live in the Kings County borough. It's, well, in the [00:03:30] basin, [inaudible 00:03:29] basin area, close to Kings [inaudible 00:03:32].

Pat Francois: Okay. Where are you originally from?

Valerie Murray : Trinidad and Tobago.

Pat Francois: Yeah. A lot of people, including myself, Trinidadians. How did you become a domestic worker?

Valerie Murray : Okay. Well, before I started doing home care, I worked at the bakery. There was this [00:04:00] one customer in particular, would always come in and talk to me about Domestic Workers United and what they stand for and what they do. She would tell me everything about them. She kept ... I don't want to say the word. I won't say pestering. She would always come in and talk to me about them. Then one day in particular, she said it's urgently needed, some help. She told me to come along. I [00:04:30] said only if they need help I would be there. That's how I really got connected in the real sense of the word. Yeah.

Pat Francois: After getting connected when it came to Domestic Worker's United, what encouraged you or motivated to keep on coming to Domestic Workers United?

Valerie Murray : Well, I liked the fact that they are trying to help domestic workers. The domestic workers really need help. They do everything in their power, [00:05:00] and then they get connected with the right people that can actually help. I like that idea. I said well, it's something good to be a part of.

Pat Francois: Yes. How many positions have you had?

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Valerie Murray : Oh, one position in the best workers.

Pat Francois: Doing domestic work?

Valerie Murray : Oh, doing domestic work. Okay, I did [00:05:30] one babysit in there. That was when I newly came to the country. Maybe it was for two years. I mostly do healthcare with the elderly. I did it, this is about the fourth I'm working with.

Pat Francois: You want to give me a little bit of your experience [crosstalk 00:05:55] of being a-

Valerie Murray : Elderly care.

Pat Francois: -nanny. No, because that was your first job [00:06:00] babysitting.

Valerie Murray : Okay.

Pat Francois: Do you want to share a little experience of what it was like for you?

Valerie Murray : It was a pleasant experience. It was. I was hearing that some-

Pat Francois: Employers.

Valerie Murray : -mothers don't like the kids to call their nannies mommy. I had that. She really could not stop that little boy, because he would tell her [00:06:30] plain when he would say mommy. She would say oh, she's not your mommy. He would say yes, she's my mommy. After awhile she just cut it out. She couldn't stop him, because of that relationship I had with him. Even up to now, there was this bonding. I treated him exactly the same way I treated my son. That's the kind of person I am. He had this bond with me and I [00:07:00] with him. Overall, it was a pleasant experience. Yeah, it was.

Pat Francois: Yes, he loved you as you loved him.

Valerie Murray : As I loved him.

Pat Francois: Yes. Do you still have a relationship with him?

Valerie Murray : Yes, I do. Mm-hmm (affirmative). He is-

Pat Francois: How long ago now?

Valerie Murray : He is going to tenth or eleventh grade. I think it's tenth grade. Yeah, he's going to tenth grade in [00:07:30] September.

Pat Francois: Wow. Please, walk me through a typical daily routine. What are your day to day responsibilities?

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Valerie Murray : As a nanny?

DP: Why don't you do both healthcare and nanny-

Valerie Murray : And nanny at the same time.

Pat Francois: No. Well, she more do-

Valerie Murray : Yes, yes. I more do elderly care.

Pat Francois: Elder care.

DP: Okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. [crosstalk 00:07:58]

Pat Francois: We finish [00:08:00] with the babysitting. We're going to elder care.

DP: [crosstalk 00:08:04] elder care.

Valerie Murray : Elder care. Okay.

Pat Francois: Because that is what she's doing now. What are your day to day responsibilities.

Valerie Murray : I will talk about the biggest job I had doing elderly care. It was with two elderlies in Manhattan. I would go in, but there was other workers. I had total responsibility. [00:08:30] There were relatives, but they did nothing for them. I had to take over paying the rent, paying all bills, buying groceries, buying the stuff that they may need, personal stuff.

What else did I do? To be honest, up to now, I am still ... That job ended with them running out of [00:09:00] money. When I got there, they were almost out of money. I tried stretching the money. He even turned to me one day and said, "Why didn't I know you before?"

I would buy groceries in Brooklyn, which would be cheaper and take it to Manhattan. After running out of money, [00:09:30] I worked for them for three weeks without pay, because I couldn't walk away. As I normally say, people go to Africa, India and other terrible countries to do charity work. As I said, the charity work was right in front of me. I didn't have to jump on a plane. It was right there for me to do.

I got them to sign up with Medicaid, which was a tough one. They were still in [00:10:00] a dream thinking that things were okay. I would tell them, you have no money. I'm not getting paid. I can't do this forever. I have my son to take care of. You have to fill out these Medicaid papers, but I have to call up Medicaid and talk to them and get the necessary information. They sent me the forms.

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It was a trial getting them to sign those papers. I had to cry [00:10:30] tears. I said I can't leave you alone. He was bedridden, and she could barely walk. No food, unless I carried the food for them.

Eventually, they did sign the papers. Medicaid came over, and they spoke to them. They got everything done. Now, they are getting help through the government. Mind you, they still live at their [00:11:00] apartment, because one thing he did was pay his taxes. He paid maximum taxes for both of them. The combined social security can pay the rent, because they did not own the apartment.

Everything came down on them at one time. While going through not having any money, the owner of the apartment put the apartment [00:11:30] up for sale. Some people wanted the apartment for investment, some of the people that came in. One gentleman in the building said, because we used to talk all the time, he told me [inaudible 00:11:43]. He said if I buy the building, I would not put them out. I would let them stay there until they pass, because he lived in the building. He was renting, but he wanted the place for himself. Then he [00:12:00] said, I would not put them out. I would let them stay there until they pass. Then I would move into the apartment, so they're there right now.

Mind you, I'm still paying the man's telephone bill, because he's bedridden. He couldn't get to the regular phone. At one time while working there, he wanted a cell phone. I put him on my account. I never took him off. He's still there. I still pay his bill. He has a cellphone. [00:12:30] At least if anything, he can call for help.

To be honest, before they were dry, they were the worst people. He was a typical man who always in authority. He had a bossy way about him. You know about me. I'm full of patience. I treat people the way I want to be treated, because old age is inevitable unless [00:13:00] you die young. It wasn't the worst.

One thing, when it's time for pay, because there was other people working. It was 24 hours. Wednesday, it's time for payments. It was right on the button. I had to do everything, write the checks, do everything. He couldn't do it and neither could his wife.

Pat Francois: Let me ask you this. You went in there as an elder care?

Valerie Murray : Yes.

Pat Francois: I'm listening to what you've [00:13:30] been saying. You become the manager.

Valerie Murray : Yeah.

Pat Francois: You started to manage everything.

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Valerie Murray : Every single thing. Pay all of his bills, [crosstalk 00:13:43]

Pat Francois: Still paying his phone bill with your money.

Valerie Murray : Right now, yes.

Pat Francois: Wow. That was tough, right?

Valerie Murray : Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Pat Francois: I could imagine.

What skills do you need to become [00:14:00] a domestic worker?

Valerie Murray : What skills? Not much. What do I say? You need to-

Pat Francois: Up front you were talking about you took a training to do Alzheimer's.

Valerie Murray : Well, when you do something like Alzheimer's, if you want to be with Alzheimer's patient, it's not just going in and dealing with the regular elderly. If you know, they are timeless patients and a group of people [00:14:30] who can be very hard to deal with, not because they are doing it willingly, whatever they're doing. It's a sickness. You have to know how to deal with them, and they teach you that there.

You have to be patient. You have to know how to talk to them. They don't like too many questions. They don't like to be crowded. They have feelings, but they just don't understand that what's happening around them. I [00:15:00] was trained to do that with the Alzheimer's Association.

The regular elderly, what I realized the elderly love people to talk with them, to sit and talk with them. They will talk to you for hours and tell you about their whole life story. A lot of them I learned from. I learned a lot from the elderly about life. It's not just I helping them. They help me a lot.

Pat Francois: Is [00:15:30] there any particular skills that is needed when dealing with them? Any skill in particular?

Valerie Murray : Any skill in particular?

Pat Francois: Yeah. [crosstalk 00:15:41] That you must have to relate the patients.

Valerie Murray : Well, yes. You must know [crosstalk 00:15:42]-

Pat Francois: [crosstalk 00:15:44] to patients.

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Valerie Murray : Yeah, I think you should know how to if it's a bed ridden patient, you must know how to take care of that patient on the bed, dress him, bathe him, change him. Even if the patient can sit up, you still have to know how to change, [00:16:00] because old sometimes the bones are stiff. You don't want to break anything. Most of them are fragile. You need skills like that, how to deal with them, how to talk to them.

Sometimes they can be very repetitive like little babies. You're not supposed to call them little children. That's the wrong setting, but it can be very repetitive. You have to have that patience [00:16:30] to be able to sit and don't get annoyed, because you're being asked the same question over and over.

If you show it, believe me, the best body language readers to me are the elderly. They read your body. I believe it's because they have been here for years. They didn't have to go to a university to learn that, just by dealing with people for 90 years.

Pat Francois: Instincts.

Valerie Murray : Yeah. They read you.

Pat Francois: Is [00:17:00] there a necessary training beside you go and do your training to be certified? Is there any other training that is necessary?

Valerie Murray : To be honest, I think some people need some training in sociology, how to deal with people, and even psychology when dealing with the elderly. People are not honed, because a lot of people don't have that skills. They may have the skill, as I said, of bathing them, dressing [00:17:30] them. Dealing with them on a one on one basis, some people don't have that skill.

You have to be a people person. If you're not a people person, it would just be a job about getting a salary at the end of the week or month or whatever the case may be. You have to be a people person.

Pat Francois: The reason for wanting these special skills, do you know, within Domestic Workers United, they do CPR training. Is that a necessity [00:18:00] when taking care of the elder?

Valerie Murray : Oh, yes. [crosstalk 00:18:02] It can come in handy. If you do the courses, some of them put it in. I don't think it's really in there in the home elderly course, but I did it. It can come in handy, can save a life.

Pat Francois: For you?

Valerie Murray : For me, yes. [crosstalk 00:18:25]

Pat Francois: Do you think it is necessary-

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Valerie Murray : Necessary-

Pat Francois: -to have a CPR training?

Valerie Murray : [00:18:30] The word necessary ... I think it's important to have it. I think it's important.

Pat Francois: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Is there some specialty or expertise that you personally have that you can bring to your job?

Valerie Murray : Of course. Okay, when I first started with that gentleman, [00:19:00] he was in the hospital, because he had fell down. After falling, he couldn't move. Because he couldn't move, they took him to the hospital. When we thought it was just a matter of him falling, he had internal bleeding. His blood was just going in places that it shouldn't be going. He had this black blotches all over him, big ones. [00:19:30] The doctor said they call it some a-factor or something like that. It's really the blood isn't clotting in your body. It's going all over the place. After awhile, they said they couldn't do anything for him, so they sent him home to die.

I believe in herbs. I believe in eating right, the right foods. I don't like junk food. I don't drink soda and stuff like [00:20:00] that. I went to him when he came back home. I said, "Mr. [Hall 00:20:05] if you want to live, I'm going to change your diet. I'm going to give you different foods to eat that you're not accustomed to. I'm going to change everything about you."

He said, "Okay."

I started making him oats without milk at first. I said, "Your body need protein." I started giving him two eggs a day. I started giving him [00:20:30] at least a piece of steak once a week. He needed iron. He needed protein. I said, "Your blood has to clot." I started making soups.

To be honest when he just came out ... Sorry, let me backtrack a bit. When he just came out, he couldn't really eat those things. I started making him soups, split pea soup, lentil soup. I would crush everything and feed him [00:21:00] with a spoon.

Pat Francois: Puree.

Valerie Murray : Yeah. He did not have a blender, so I used to boil it until it looked very soft and crush them. I would feed it to him. I did that. First he would drink a spoon or two. He couldn't take much like his stomach had shrunken. Day by day he started taking in more. He started talking with a little more energy. Then that is when I started giving him the eggs [00:21:30] and stuff when he could have

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eaten for himself. Then I started adding milk to his diet. I started making the oats with milk, but I made it with full cream. I said, "You need calcium. You need milk." He used to drink some nonfat milk. I said, "That wouldn't do."

Pat Francois: Watered down.

Valerie Murray : Yeah, watered down milk.

I started using coconut oil on him, from his head to his toes. Your body would absorb [00:22:00] that. He was not a man that liked doctors, so he never had any medication to take. Whatever they'd give him, he never really wanted it. I made sure he took the medication when he just came out of the hospital. He took everything. After that they said there was nothing they could do for him.

Eventually, he started gaining his strength day by day. He went back for a checkup and his blood was [00:22:30] doing fine. He's alive today. That was about four years ago.

Pat Francois: Wow.

Valerie Murray : He is alive. He's doing fine.

DP: [inaudible 00:22:43].

Pat Francois: Would you say domestic work is real work?

Valerie Murray : Yes, it is. If you take it to heart, some people don't, but I'm talking about me. If I'm going to do something, I do to the best of my ability. I treat people nicely, because [00:23:00] I want to be treated nicely.

Pat Francois: I agree.

Valerie Murray : I go to do something, I do to the best. I take care of you. If you need to be taken care of, I will do it. Despite sometimes people say things, because believe me, he could be obnoxious. He was that kind of person. After awhile he learned to respect me. He was not obnoxious to me, but he was to the other workers. [00:23:30] I'm the type of person, I will talk to him about it. He would cool down a bit, but then sometimes he flares up. That's it.

Pat Francois: Okay. When caring for elder, what are some of the ways you help them fall asleep? Okay, sometimes it could be irritable and ... What are the ways you help them fall asleep?

Valerie Murray : Like the elderly, most of them, [00:24:00] dealing with the elderly can be tricky in certain things. You know it's elderly. They may be slow, but at the same time, they are older than you. You can't tell them certain things. If you want, you can't have them do certain things if they don't want to do it. Most times, you just

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leave them alone. If they like quiet, you leave them in quiet. If they like TV on, you put the TV on. They just [00:24:30] want to relax sometimes. You leave them in the quiet, no talking. They'll just doze off, as we say.

Pat Francois: Okay. What are some ways to get an elder to stop fussing, because sometimes you say he can be obnoxious? What are the ways that you use-

Valerie Murray : Yeah. To calm him-

Pat Francois: -to stop him, to calm him down from fussing.

Valerie Murray : Most times when you bring up like him, his mother [00:25:00] was precious to him. You bring up about his mom. What his mom was like, what would she do if she was here right now with him behaving that way? Then he would smile, and then he would just start to talk about her. He would be the calmest person, talking about his mom.

Pat Francois: That's true. They have-

Valerie Murray : Yeah, that's true.

Pat Francois: That's good. Yeah. Have you ever used homeopathic remedies or remedies to help [00:25:30] cure the elder?

Valerie Murray : [inaudible 00:25:34] that was exactly what I was talking about earlier. [crosstalk 00:25:37]

Pat Francois: So-

Valerie Murray : Yeah, I use things like that. Even now, where I am on this new job, I use coconut oil and tumeric. The gentleman with Alzheimer's, I was reading online, it's good. A lot of people had good result, positive result. He hasn't gotten worse. His wife, she [00:26:00] has sciatica. That's the pain running down your spine. She said since she started using it, there's no pain. She told me the pain is gone.

DP: Using coconut oil?

Valerie Murray : The tumeric.

DP: How do you use it?

Valerie Murray : Well, you can get the powder. As one lady told me, because she just started using it, you throw it in any and everything. You make your eggs with it. You put it in your tea. You put it in your oats, your cereal or whatever the case may be. You cook with it. I make tea with [00:26:30] it.

DP: Yeah. I [inaudible 00:26:31].

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Valerie Murray : Yeah, it's very good. Yeah-

DP: [inaudible 00:26:33]

Valerie Murray : Okay.

Pat Francois: You're not on job currently right now.

Valerie Murray : Not on that one, but [crosstalk 00:26:42]

Pat Francois: What special skills have you left them with?

Valerie Murray : Oh, in taking care of themselves?

Pat Francois: Yes.

Valerie Murray : Let me see. What would they take to heart? [00:27:00] I know ... skills. I always make sure that he's not on a wet bed. I know he will be trying to be out of that. As I said, all the workers are not the same. I told him that the pee can irritate him and cause bed sores. That's a special thing that I taught them, but I don't know if he's keeping up with [00:27:30] it. That's the best I can put on the table right now.

Pat Francois: What was the best part of your job? Give a little explanation, example.

Valerie Murray : Yeah, it was fun on that job.

Pat Francois: The best part.

Valerie Murray : The best part? Oh, it was no problem with them watching you, I like a thief or anything. They never spied on you. Whatever you tell them, they believed. Be truth or lie, put it that way. [00:28:00] They trusted me. I felt comfortable in that respect. I felt at home.

Pat Francois: Having that trust was the best part of your job?

Valerie Murray : Yes. Yeah, that's the best part for me, having that trust.

Pat Francois: Yes. What was the worst part of your job? Give an example.

Valerie Murray : Well, as I said, I hated when he screamed at the other workers and curse at them. [00:28:30] We would always get away for that. I would have to talk to him. I say, "No, Mr. [Hall 00:28:34], you don't treat people like that." He could be nasty. He could be nasty when he wanted to.

I believed it was frustration that I never really felt bitter towards him. Imagine one day you're millionaire, maybe a billionaire. He said he made his first three

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million at age of 23, and the next minute he can [00:29:00] barely buy a loaf of bread. That can be frustrating. They were in their full senses. They had no signs of dementia, whatsoever. That can be frustrating. Dealing with that, I knew it was more that than anything else that had him [inaudible 00:29:19] out on people.

Pat Francois: How was your relationship with your current employer?

Valerie Murray : Oh, sure. It's great. It's fantastic. [00:29:30] As I said, the gentleman has Alzheimer's. For some reason, as his wife said, he listens to me. He enjoys being with me. The wife, she's nice too. She's respectful to me, and she trusts me. I spent the night one time, because she needed to go out. She left her credit card for me to buy us dinner. She left. Things like that, [00:30:00] that's a big trust. I am not on the job as long as I have been with the other man. She trusts me. She does [crosstalk 00:30:11]-

Pat Francois: The present one, the current one?

Valerie Murray : The current one, yeah.

Pat Francois: The other relationship with previous elderly?

Valerie Murray : Yeah. Relationships with the [00:30:30] one I was talking about [crosstalk 00:30:31]

Pat Francois: Yeah, cared for. Yeah, yeah. Who you have cared for.

Valerie Murray : Yeah, I have relationships. There is another one. She was in Mount Vernon.

Pat Francois: Yeah, yeah. That was very memorable.

Valerie Murray : Yeah. They went away to the Hamptons, but I didn't want to go there. I heard she's always asking for me. I don't know. I just deal with them [00:31:00] in a way that is respectful. I try to keep them happy. I talk to them a lot. Not too much. I know when to pull back. Certain people you would talk, but then you have to know when to pull back. You can't be talking 24/7 to them, because they love a quiet time, some of them.

Pat Francois: Yeah. I have good relationships with them. How do you manage your personal feelings [00:31:30] with the elder or family you are caring for?

Valerie Murray : As I said-

Pat Francois: Your personal feelings.

Valerie Murray : Okay, like that case with the gentleman and his wife, the one that is bedridden. He has a daughter. She was very, very obnoxious. To be honest, she's not a well

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person. [inaudible 00:31:54] that's why I said that's why she couldn't do any of the business for them. [00:32:00] If someone is sick, they're sick. You don't use that sickness and hate the person that's being stupid. I just deal with it. She's sick, so I deal with it. I really don't make-

Pat Francois: Did she make your job difficult?

Valerie Murray : [crosstalk 00:32:15]. No she tried, but she could not. She even developed a sort of respect for me, because she had to come to me when she want anything. Even if she had to get money, she came to me. I had to write the check for her. [00:32:30] I know she was jealous at the same time. Often times I would tell her, you do it. Then she would say, no, I can't. She depended on me. To me, that is natural. Having your parents looking towards someone else to do certain things that you think you should be doing, but you're not capable of doing it, because you are not well. [00:33:00] You would still be jealous. It's just natural.

Pat Francois: Yeah, have a hurt feeling.

Valerie Murray : It never got under my skin. When she felt like being nice, I'm nice. When she felt like not talking, that's cool with me. I was just doing what I had to do.

Pat Francois: What I gather from that, you sort of have power of attorney over everything.

Valerie Murray : At one time, before he went down, he wanted to do that. One day he called the bank. He said he wanted to talk to the banker. I said, "Okay." [00:33:30] When I called them, he started telling them about giving me the power of attorney. I told him no. I said, "You can't do that. You have a daughter. You have a grandson. Give them that power. I can handle things for you as if. But if you had no one, it was different. But you have family. Let them handle that."

Then he listened and he said, "Okay."

Pat Francois: Oh, yes. Do you feel that the amount of hours [00:34:00] you work and your holiday schedule-

Valerie Murray : I have no holiday.

Pat Francois: -are being respected?

Valerie Murray : I had no holiday unless I took time off and said okay, I'm not feeling well today. I have something to do. To be honest, I have no holiday time.

Pat Francois: Did you have any time at all? How much?

Valerie Murray : No.

Pat Francois: Did you work seven days a week?

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- Valerie Murray : Well, at first I did, but then I lessened it. It was getting to me, to my body, so I had to cut [00:34:30] down-
- Pat Francois: Wow.
- Valerie Murray : -and have other people work for me.
- Pat Francois: You were like an energizer bunny, ain't you? Would you say that you or any worker that you know has been exploited due to immigration status?
- Valerie Murray : As a matter of fact, I have been. First, I worked on that job off and [00:35:00] on. The lady that was there as the main worker ... What I noticed though, every time she went inside to take care of the lady, the mistress of the house, the lady would be like this. She would just be shaking [inaudible 00:35:20]. I used to wonder why is this [inaudible 00:35:24]. She would be shouting at her and screaming. She used to be shouting and cursing at the [00:35:30] daughter, when the daughter come there. They did not want her there. One time I flat left. I going home, because I did my time. The phone rang. This other lady asked me if I could come to work. I said, "Why?"
- She said, "They fired that lady."
- I said, "Yeah. I can. Okay, I can come." After I started working there, the lady knew I didn't have my status. She started and calling and threatening [00:36:00] the elderly. They would call immigration for her. They have an illegal person working there. They kept calling and calling.
- Again, that is when I spoke to my friend. She always told me about Domestic Workers. I told her what was happening. She told me well don't be afraid. There's nothing they can really do. Immigration wouldn't do anything, because I didn't want to call the police. I was thinking, and she came. [00:36:30] With her, they called the police. When the police came, they said [inaudible 00:36:36] we would ... I was telling them that because of my status this lady kept calling and harassing these people.
- They said, "Why would immigration do anything to you if you are taking care of two elderly people? They're not here for that." Then they went to the lady, and they send detectives and stuff. Whatever the outcome, I don't know. [00:37:00] She never called back again. Yeah.
- Pat Francois: Were you saying a member from Domestic Workers United-
- Valerie Murray : Helped me, yeah, yeah. [inaudible 00:37:08]
- Pat Francois: Yeah, and encouraged you to ... Okay. Good things. Domestic Workers are like leaders doing good things. Yes?

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- Valerie Murray : Yup.
- Pat Francois: I'm glad to hear that. Okay. How do you manage balancing your personal life, family [00:37:30] life and your work life?
- Valerie Murray : Okay. Well, I have one son. I came here with him. He was a year old. I couldn't leave him behind. I said I would not do that. It breaks that bond that you have with your child, a child growing up away from you. I brought him with me. When I started doing this kind of work, he was older. [00:38:00] He was in middle school. No. Middle school, yeah. His [inaudible 00:38:06] is in middle school, going on to high school. Yes, that's when I started doing the domestic work, because I never did anything that would keep me away from him. I had it this way, when I'm at work, he's at school. When he's at home, I'm on my way home. I did other jobs before. [crosstalk 00:38:26]
- Pat Francois: Okay.
- Valerie Murray : -bakeries and other things [00:38:30] like that. He was older, as I said, when I started that, so he understood. He could manage himself much better then. I didn't have to help him with his homework then and stuff like that.
- Pat Francois: From what you said, I would say you had a rather balanced life. You could have that time that you got to spend with your child.
- Valerie Murray : Yes.
- Pat Francois: You know many a times within the domestic work industry [00:39:00] we work long hours, right? Sometimes the kind of late hours, those hours run into. You maybe in that other person house, caring for the people kids. You're still wondering, I wonder where my kid is. I wonder if my kid in bed. I wonder if my kid is inside.
- Many a times, after hearing women stories, they may get a phone call [00:39:30] where your son is in trouble. You get caught up there. You get caught up there, because these days it's very hard. Especially when a lot of persons home, and your home is unsupervised, especially where there's a lot of single moms now, as well as single dads. At the same time it's harder for the single mom, especially bringing up young men.
- I really like the [00:40:00] fact that you balance it out to the point where you could have be there for when he really needed to have that person in his life-
- Valerie Murray : Yes, yes. When he was- yeah. [crosstalk 00:40:12]
- Pat Francois: -to guide him. At those tender age, kids need their parents.
- Valerie Murray : Right. I know that.

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Pat Francois: Parents need to know where my kid is right now.

Valerie Murray : Yes. It wasn't just-

Pat Francois: I commend you for that.

Valerie Murray : It wasn't just about the money. I had to be there. I had to help him with his [00:40:30] school work. I don't want him to fall into this.

Pat Francois: The system.

Valerie Murray : I had to- Yes. I had to be there for him. I believe it paid off. He never got in trouble, even at school. He always respectful. He has always been a well rounded child. He still is as a young man, now. He's 22. He's doing perfectly fine.

Pat Francois: Good job. Bless you. Are you [00:41:00] a member of any organization or other group?

Valerie Murray : No, no. Other than DW Union.

Pat Francois: Okay. When you are doing domestic work, do you feel part of a larger group of community?

Valerie Murray : Yes. As you said, Domestic Workers United, yes, I feel [00:41:30] like I'm a part of a large group of people. Whether there are two people in the room or a hundred, it feels like a large group. Yeah.

Pat Francois: It make you feel encouraged. It motivates you. Okay. When and why did you become part of Domestic Workers United? How did you hear about it?

Valerie Murray : As I said, one worker always came to me and told me about the Domestic Workers [00:42:00] United for years and would always encourage me to come to meetings.

To be honest, the way I work, I always tell people I never want to leave my son in a state where he would feel neglected. Even though he was in high school, he started high school once. I'm not working. I want to be there. I want him to see me. Even though he may not look as though he's noticing me, I know he is. That's how kids [00:42:30] are. They love to see their parents around. I really didn't want him to fall in that group where he doesn't know what I look like. Once I'm not working, I want to be there.

People ask me about come in here, come in there, but then I said I like to be around. I like to be around him. That's just me. That's just the kind of mother I am. Then I'm making use of it now. After a while, I would want to see [00:43:00] him. He would be busy with his life. I'm making use of it now.

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Pat Francois: Yes. Yes, you're right. What has it meant for you and your work that the Domestic Bill of Rights passed in 2010?

Valerie Murray : I like the fact that we have rights. At least then I know that we have rights, because I really didn't before. It was a scary [00:43:30] thing. Doing these jobs you never know when you will go to work and they would say you're not needed anymore.

I can tell a story about a lady. She worked as a domestic worker. Sometimes you deal with your employers in a way that you think is friendly, not knowing there's still an undercurrent. She invited a lady to her house. She was having some sort of celebration. [00:44:00] When the employer came to her house and saw where the lady was living, when she got back to Manhattan, I believe she didn't get back into her house properly. She called the lady and told her we do not want you anymore. The lady kept a nice house, and she's probably saying I'm paying you too much.

Pat Francois: The employee had a nice house, who invited her employer-

Valerie Murray : Employer, yeah.

Pat Francois: -to [00:44:30] come to an event she was having.

Valerie Murray : Yeah, she was having-

Pat Francois: -to her home which is the employee home.

Valerie Murray : Yes.

Pat Francois: After employer seen what employee have acquired, sacrificed to have, don't know how she got it, when time to go back to work-

Valerie Murray : She said she didn't want [crosstalk 00:44:51]-

Pat Francois: -employer find the employee have too much.

Valerie Murray : Yeah. At least, [00:45:00] situations like that, I think Domestic Workers United let us know that we have rights and something can be done about things like that. At least you can't just up and fire someone on the spot, and the person didn't do anything.

Pat Francois: Wow.

Valerie Murray : Yeah, I really respect Domestic Workers United for that. Yeah, letting us know that we have rights. That's important.

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Pat Francois: Yes. [00:45:30] I would say that is a form of discrimination. You discriminate upon me, because I have worked and sacrificed and build a nice home. I'm discriminate because I have worked hard to acquire a nice home. I am being fired at will.

Valerie Murray : Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Pat Francois: Did she know about Domestic Workers United?

Valerie Murray : [00:46:00] No.

Pat Francois: Wow. An employee knowing about Domestic Workers United. that would have been taken care of.

Valerie Murray : Yes, it's going to.

Pat Francois: That is clear discrimination.

Valerie Murray : Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Pat Francois: Yes. What would you like to see happen in the future with the bill of rights?

Valerie Murray : I would like to see the bill of rights to really [00:46:30] be in effect. I don't think everything is. Make sure that people can get sick days, domestic workers, vacation time, real vacation time. Well, you can't threaten someone to show you respect as an employer. That's out of the question. At least, sick days and let it be in effect. Some people may get it, but everyone isn't getting it. They still threaten [00:47:00] you with getting rid of you if you don't do what they want. I want those to be in effect, actual effect. I would like that to happen.

Pat Francois: Yes. From your perspective, why is DW, Domestic Workers United important for domestic workers?

Valerie Murray : The only group of people really standing up [00:47:30] for domestic workers. Without them, that bill would not be here in the first place. That's the reason. They stand up for domestic workers.

Pat Francois: Yes.

Valerie Murray : The organization.

Pat Francois: Yes. Are you happy with the bill impact?

Valerie Murray : That's what I was saying. Yeah, things need to be-

Pat Francois: As it is right now, are you happy with it? I'm not.

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- Valerie Murray : Well, [00:48:00] that's what I'm saying. The things need to be in effect. Yeah, I'm not.
- Pat Francois: The bill, to my understanding, it's not really recognized. That bill is supposed to be recognized. Workers, employees are still being- [crosstalk 00:48:22]
- Valerie Murray : [crosstalk 00:48:22]
- Pat Francois: -treated in-justly. It have domestic workers, I understand they're being paid on the [00:48:30] minimum wage.
- Valerie Murray : Yeah.
- Pat Francois: I'm also a domestic worker myself. This is where I can relate and understand what another domestic worker is going to do. I myself went to an interview to take care of the elderly as well. In this nice way, oh, I'm paying a \$120. I look at her, a \$120? [00:49:00] Is that eight hours? 24 hours. I smiled, because 24 hours, a \$120, we're talking \$5 an hour. I looked at her mom. Ma'am, do you know that is under minimum wage? She looked at me is she [00:49:30] really telling me this? Would you work for under minimum wage? I know when I reach in that state, I know that that job is not mine. I let you know one time, I will not be exploited.
- As hard as it gets, as tough as it is, I'm in the front line sight into any exploitation. It's really, really, really hard to put myself in a situation to be exploited. [00:50:00] Currently, right now, some women cannot do that. Why? Yes, I have rent to pay. I have bills like everybody else. Then again, when you look at that baby and that baby open that mouth and you don't have some milk or some food to put in that baby mouth, what do you do?
- Valerie Murray : You take what you get.
- Pat Francois: This is why I understand why some women go through the exploitation and the sacrifices and the [00:50:30] abuse, all for the sake of putting some bread or milk in the children mouth, to shelter them, to have a little roof over their head. I understand when you say you know. You take the jobs that can help you. Like when you're on the job, your son in school. When your son in school, you're also leaving the job to meet up with him or you go and pick him up from school. What do you guys [00:51:00] go home together, but you deal to make sure he stays on the right path. As I understand, some employers doesn't really recognize us, employees as real people. They have the real world, but they think we have a world that is just-
- Valerie Murray : A fake, yeah.

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Pat Francois: It's always a pleasure to hear somebody else story. That is [00:51:30] what make us stronger. That is what encourage us to stand up and push back. If we don't, especially the marginalized women, what do we do? It's really tough.

What areas of education, skill are you looking to gain?

Valerie Murray : Well, I-

Pat Francois: Currently. Right now.

Valerie Murray : I should [00:52:00] do- Yes. Sociology, to be able to learn more about dealing with people. I like dealing with people, so along that line would suit me fine.

Pat Francois: What skills did Domestic Workers United teach you? What type of training?

Valerie Murray : Domestic Workers [inaudible 00:52:26]. Well, to be honest, they teach you to stand up for yourself [00:52:30] and do not ... The word is abuse a lot. Do not be exploited by these people, because you have right. They give you that strength. Even though you may be at your job alone, you don't feel alone. If anything, you can call on them. That is what it gave me. I'm being honest.

Pat Francois: Since I started speaking to you, what I got was Domestic Workers United is sort refuge [00:53:00] for domestic workers-

Valerie Murray : Yes. [crosstalk 00:53:02]

Pat Francois: -to turn to.

Valerie Murray : Yes, you can put it that way.

Pat Francois: Okay.

Valerie Murray : Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Pat Francois: Okay. Do you have any last words or parting shots you would like to share?

Valerie Murray : To be honest, I would like to know that this dream [00:53:30] with Domestic Workers live on and become a reality in their lives of domestic workers out there. More people knew about it and it becomes more widespread and a household name.

Pat Francois: Domestic Workers United.

Valerie Murray : Instead of saying Phelps, you know if they say Phelps on boat in the house, it must be in the homes of domestic workers. You must only be in domestic worker. You can always turn to domestic worker [00:54:00] if anything happen. I

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think it will make a lot of lives easier, people that do this work, if they know that there's this rock they can lean on in times of trouble.

Pat Francois: Yes.

DP: I have one question. I'm sorry. You had said you had learned some things about life [inaudible 00:54:20] or-

Valerie Murray : From the elderly. Yes.

DP: Is there one thing-

Valerie Murray : In particular, I can talk about? Okay, let me see. I really do learn a [00:54:30] lot from them. I learn so much.

Pat Francois: Just one.

Valerie Murray : Yes, I know. He asked me when a lot just keep flooding me. Yeah.

Pat Francois: Hmm.

Valerie Murray : To be honest, I learned in this life, right, as we have it, sometimes we think it's all about money. I used to think so. Once you get rich, life would be easy. Everything [00:55:00] would be fine. Working with them, after a while I realized it's not about money. It's about happiness, being happy. Of course you have your bills to pay. As long as you have sufficient, you don't need to have millions. I even got it from them. They said it's like nothing to them now, because you do this work.

Most of the elderly you work with ... That man was unfortunately, he and his wife ... Most of them are practically billionaires, millionaires. The money is there. They are working houses. You see money, [00:55:30] just piles of money of here, piles there.

I worked with a lady on Park Avenue. She used ask my advice, and she was an educated lady, her husband too. For some reason we clicked. We believed the same thing. She was spiritual. I am too, but I believe in God. She believed more in the universe, but it's one in the same.

It's not just about having money. It's about being at [00:56:00] peace with yourself. I learned that from being at peace with yourself, loving yourself and being a good person, being as good as person you can be. That's an effort, but at least if you tried. I learned that from them.

Pat Francois: Valerie, it was my pleasure.

Valerie Murray : Same here, Pat.

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Pat Francois: I enjoyed interviewing you. I [00:56:30] also commend you, especially with your work description that you shared with me. That you were so giving, you were so open. Also, to know that currently right now, you still paying your past employer phone bill. I commend you on that.

Valerie Murray : Working or not working it's still there.

Pat Francois: I commend you, and I thank you.

Valerie Murray : [00:57:00] Yeah. It's a [crosstalk 00:57:00]-