

Domestic Workers United
afc2015/027

DOMESTIC WORKERS UNITED

Interview afc2015027_03482_ms02

Marie Choubert Exantus interviewed by Maggie Antoine

Interview conducted in Haitian Kreyol. For transcription in original language, see
afc2015027_03482_ms03

English translation of transcription.

00:00 - 00:23

A: Ready?

E: Yes.

A: Ready?

E: Mhm.

A: My name is Maggie Antoine (sp?). I'm interviewing Marie Exantus. Today is 8/30...

E: ...2016

A: ...2016.

00:23 - 01:00

Marie Ketlaine Antoine (A): What's your name?

Marie Choubert Exantus (E): Marie Choubert Exantus.

A: Okay. What kind of work do you do now?

E: I work as a Home Health Aide.

A: Where do you live?

E: Fillmore Street.

A: In what area?

E: Brooklyn.

A: Okay. Where were you born?

Domestic Workers United
afc2015/027

E: Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

A: Okay in what area?

E: Croix-des-Bouquets.

A: Okay. How did you come to work, how did you come to work where you are now, how did you find the job?

01:00 - 01:33

E: Someone brought me there, a friend brought me there.

A: Speak louder.

E: A friend brought me there to the job.

A: Mhm. How long have you had this job?

E: I've worked there for 14 years.

A: How many houses do you work in?

E: I work in 2 houses.

A: Mhm. Can you talk to me about your day and your time or what kind of responsibilities you have at work?

01:33 - 02:03

E: I work three days there. Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

A: Mhm.

E: I stay for 36 hours.

A: Mhm.

E: I stay overnight with the patient.

A: That's your responsibility to stay with the patient? Ok.

E: (*unclear*)

A: What qualities do you need to do this kind of work?

Domestic Workers United
afc2015/027

E: Well, you need a lot of care with the patient. The child gives me everything that I should do for him/her. Food, clean him/her...

A: Mhm.

02:03 - 02:36

E: Etcetera.

A: What training do you need to do this work?

E: Training...I have a certificate. I was in Domestic...

A:...Workers...

E: ...Workers with Ninaj, who got me to participate. I spent one month there. I would go to Manhattan to learn it.

A: Okay. Do you need a specialty in order to do this work?

E: Yes.

A: Like?

E: You need, like, when you are with the person, you're working with him/her...

02:36 - 03:08

E: ...and their child must tell you what to do, the details of what to do for him/her.

A: Mhm. When you're care for these kinds of patients, they are together with you, what's the best way to make the patient feel comfortable?

E: Oh, the patient never doesn't want to see me because I spent so much time with him/her, it's already been three year, understand? I work with him/her. He/She wouldn't want me to leave.

03:08 - 03:31

E: ..understand? He/She wouldn't want me to leave. He/She holds my hand to pull me to sit down next to them.

A: Are there times when the patient doesn't want to eat or cannot eat?

E: He/She can eat.

Domestic Workers United
afc2015/027

A: Oh, okay.

E: He/She always/still eats.

A: Like for example if you were watching a child, what way, what would be the best way to help the child eat?

03:31 - 04:03

E: I care for three children. Their mother goes to work in New Jersey. One is 10 years old, one is 5 years old, one is 1 year old.

A: Okay.

E: Understand? The 10 year old can bathe him/herself and get dressed alone. The 5 year old, I have to comb his/her hair. I have to make breakfast for him/her to eat. I have to give milk to the little one. When I go out with them to bring them to school, to cross the street, it was, it was... the year 2000 that I came they gave me these children to care for.

A: Mhm.

04:03 - 04:29

E: I worked with them. I had to put the little one in a baby carriage so that I could bring the other ones to school and then I had to go back with the little one to put him/her to sleep, so that I could feed him/her, bathe him/her, clean him/her, if he/she soiled him/herself, peed, you can't let them go to sleep like that with a wet diaper. You have to change it and clean it and you'll see that they get sleepy, touching you, touching you, knowing that you are the mommy, touching your chin, smiling, as you pat their bottom so that they can sleep.

04:29 - 05:07

A: Okay. What is the best thing you can do for a child who needs to sleep or is crying?

E: You have to console them.

A: How?

E: As soon as you finish cleaning them and take off the dirty diaper, you check him/her. When he/she is done, you, you, you, you, you have to feed him/her and give them milk. If you were going to give them some juice or some water because they're thirsty, you have to check all of these things, and give it to them. After that, take them onto your lap and you'll see that they'll fall asleep. You can pat their bottoms, singing "sleep little one, sleep little one" while caressing them. Give them affection and they will fall asleep.

Domestic Workers United
afc2015/027

05:07 - 05:49

A: For example, if you are caring for a child who is teething, do you have a natural remedy, a tea leaf, that you can give to that child?

E: Here, I cannot give other people's children tea leaves.

A: But you've used these natural leaves...?

E: In Haiti, I would do it for my children. There is the chyendan leaf, right by my house. You have to steep it. They would make me put a handful of millet in it. When the child was teething, and (*unclear*) was coming up, he/she would take...my son, he got all his teeth without having any diarrhea, with anything happening, understand? I put millet in it with some chyendan leaf, a little teeth flower, lactose, I scrubbed his gums, he was refreshed, etc. But children here, mhm, they don't have that.

05:49 - 06:23 A: Is there anything that you can teach the people where you are working?

E: Yes...

A: Like your boss...

E: My boss, to show him/her the affection that I have for their children and it's the same way I have affection for my own children. I can't be care for a crying child without consoling them. I have to console them. Understand?

A: What's the best part of the job that you like?

E: The money. (*laughter*). That's what I use to pay for my home. I can't sleep in the street in the cold. The money.

A: What's the hardest part about the job?

06:23 - 06:57

E: The hardest part about the job... is when you have to get up at 5 in the morning, and at 7 in the morning you have to take the bus to go... to, to (*unclear*) a little sleep. You have needs so you have to go. That's it.

A: What is your relationship like with your boss?

E: My relationship with my boss is I go to work. It's all normal. You can't ask me these kinds of bad questions. I'm going to have to complain about you. I can't be part of any bad relationship...

Domestic Workers United
afc2015/027

A: What is your relationship really like with the person that you're working with, the patient for example?

06:57 - 07:30

E: Yes, what the patient wants me to do for him/her is what I do. If it's making food, if he/she wants a little juice, I'll make some for him/her. Sometime he/she has some juice in the refrigerator. If he/she wants some water, if he/she wants me to clean him/her, I'll clean him/her. That's it. Change his/her clothes so that they are always clean.

A: Okay. How do you manage your emotions with the people that you're working with?

E: If the patient is sick, he/she can't talk, they can't do anything, in order to wash him/her I have to physically push myself to find a way to do that for him/her.

07:30 - 08:02

A: How do you manage your emotions with your boss?

E: My boss... whenever I have a problem, I call my boss. As soon as I get in, if there is something that I need in the house, I ask him/her.

A: Okay. Do you feel that they respect you with the money that you earn, the days that you work and your days off?

E: Yes, they respect it.

A: Okay. Has anyone ever been exploited you or do you know other people who are working that are being exploited?

08:02 - 08:48

E: I don't know.

A: For immigration reasons.

E: No, I don't know about that.

A: Okay. Have you ever shared your culture with the people that you work for?

E: Yes.

A: How?

E: There is my teacher. There is my boss. If I show them a mango that I have, that comes from my country. I showed them an avocado that came from my country. I show them leaves/herbs that I have in my country. They tell me...There were a bunch of people

Domestic Workers United
afc2015/027

from Afghanistan that I went to school with in Manhattan. When I brought 4 mangos for them, I gave them each one, they ate it and said that their husbands were going to lay out with them because of the mango.

A: Okay. How do you balance your life with your work life?

08:48 - 09:34

E: I balance my work life. You know when you come to stay with the children, you have to help them. With Ninaj, she is a big support for me. A big support. When I have a problem, I go see Ninaj.

A: Okay. Are you a member of or are you part of any other organization or group?

E: No. Only Domestic Workers with Ninaj here.

A: No. Okay. When you're working in a home, do you feel like you are part of a group or a community?

E: (*unclear*) community.

(*silence*)

09:34 - 10:16

A: How did you come to be part of the Domestic Workers organization?

E: When I was in school at Saint Francis, Ninaj worked there and Ninaj invited me to Domestic Workers.

A: What does the law that Domestic Workers passed mean to you?

E: Oh, it means a lot to me. I learned CPR.

A: Okay.

E: I learned that if a child that I am watching has a problem, they showed me how to do CPR, if they have some phlegm that needs to come up, how to bring it up, how to do all those things for him/her. I learned a lot of things at Domestic Workers.

10:16 - 11:03

A: Okay. How did the Domestic Workers law affect you when it passed?

E: Oh, it was good for me. I was very good for me. I didn't know a lot of things. It showed me a lot of things here at Domestic Workers.

Domestic Workers United
afc2015/027

A: What's the most important thing that you would like Domestic Workers do do in the future?

E: I would like for them to prolong their work. Show us things like computers, so that we can learn even more. Because when we call our children, they can't help us, we can go on the computer ourselves, so do what we need to do. We won't need anyone to do it for us.

11:03 - 11:33

E: I would be...I would be happy it that were done.

A: Okay. You're happy about the impact that this law...

E: Yes, the law is good good good good...

A: ...has had on your work...?

E: ...for my work. I don't need people or my children to come do anything for me. When you call them, they are so distant and you have to do things on your own.

A: What would you like the people who work on laws or the politicians to do for you or what would you like them to know?

E: I would make sure they know what is going on so that we can open our eyes more, understand? So that we can progress more, understand?

11:33 - 11:57

E: So that we can progress even more. So that they can open doors for us, as people say, so that you all can open up your eyes to listen to the English well so that you all can make the law progress more. For others who are not able to.

A: What would you like to learn in your future education?

E: I would like to finish school. I would like to become a doctor, I would like to learn something. Because here even if you are old, you can still learn what you want.

11:57 - 12:29

A: What kinds of lessons or what kinds of trainings has Domestic Workers taught you?

E: Domestic Workers taught me a lot of things.

A: Like?

Domestic Workers United
afc2015/027

E: Like computers. They taught us English in school. If I am able to go to an agency, fill out my papers, it's because of the school. I go by myself. My children don't know where I work. They just see that there is money coming in to the house. Understand? It's because of the school who did all of these things for me. Understand?

12:29 - 12:59

A: What last words would you like to add or what more would you like Domestic Workers to know about you?

E: Oh...more about me...

A: About your work?

E: About my work?

A:...that they have to do?

E: ...they have to do... that when we come, when we talk, when we come by, if we have a problem, we can meet Ninaj and we can talk about what we need in the street with any person whatsoever, so that we can address any person. That's what I would like to do.

12:59 - 13:31

A: You don't have any more that you would like to add?

E: Enben, Domestic Workers should progress even more forward. To teach us even more things, one, then for them to add even more things for us, for us, for those of us whose eyes are still sewn shut to open up and have more knowledge/wisdom so that we can advance even more, so that we can walk forward even more. Domestic Workers should search for even more things for us. That's what I ask of Domestic Workers.

A: Thank you.

(applause)