

Transcript of Interview with “Maria,” international guest worker, crab picker on Eastern Shore, MD.

August 24, 2014

“The first time I came to America was to work at the tomato packing plant. The recruiter told me that there was lots of work, and that we would do well. They said that here you earn good money, and that everything’s cheap. They said, “Over there, you sweep up the dollars.”

When I came, I had the idea that there was many dollars, “green” everywhere as they say, but all I found were lots of green pines. When we arrived to the U.S., I felt very sad, because it wasn’t that job. Rather, there was no work. We were here without working for three weeks, and the visa we had was for two months. The truth is, yes, I felt a lot of stress. I felt sad because I had a baby at home, and she was only a few months old. There were no dollars. I felt very stressed because I got the (recruiter’s) money on a loan, and I didn’t have a way to pay it.

Then they gave us three weeks of work, but harvesting cucumbers. In the cucumbers we would work eight hours, sometimes six hours, and it wasn’t enough. So when the time arrived for us to go, the little I was able to save was only enough to pay for my return trip. At the time they didn’t pay reimbursements. I wasn’t able to pay off my debt. I went to my home, and when I arrived I went to speak with the person who had lent me the money. I asked their forgiveness. I said, “I went to the US to try to earn money, but there was no work. Next time I go, I will pay you.” I ended up paying the man a total of 28,000 Mexican pesos in interest.

One time I found a recruiter. This man told me that I needed \$200 U.S. to sign me up for the expense of I don’t know what. He told me they were for costs he would have to pay; he didn’t tell me what those were, but he said it was about expenses. Plus another 1,700 Mexican pesos because he had to make phone calls, and I don’t know, whatever else he was going to do to move along the paper processing.

A few months later, when I went to look for him, he wasn’t there anymore. His wife was there, and she said, “Don’t worry, they’re going to send you to the United States. You are going to go. We already have the list here of the people who are going to go.”

Another month passed, and they still hadn’t sent me. So the money that I had borrowed was increasing due to interest, so I returned and asked the wife again. She said, “Very soon, very soon.”

A few days later, one of my friends who had signed up at the same house asked me whether I had heard that our passports had been diverted. I told her, “No, I don’t know.”

My friend said, “The man doesn’t have the passports. I think that he was traveling towards Monterrey, and that they saw him with several passports.”

I didn’t believe her, so I went to talk to the man. His wife said, “No, the passports are right here.” I asked her, “Are you sure?” And she said, “Yes.”

I said, “OK.”

I returned and went to find the woman who had told me about the passports, and I said, “Do you know who I can contact to see if my passport is really in San Luis?”

She said yes, and gave me the number. I called San Luis and I gave them my name, and they said yes, they had several passports from San Luis Potosí. I asked the person on the phone whether they could mail it to my town, because I didn't have the money to go to San Luis. Or, could they at least send it to an office where they process passports? They said they could, and I gave them the name of the city they could send it to because it was closer to me. Then I went to the office and picked up the passport.

"Early in the morning I returned to the man's house, and I told the wife, "I've come for the money you asked me for. I want you to return it to me."

She said, "Why? You don't want to go anymore?"

"No," I said, "I don't want to go anymore."

"Why?"

"Because you tricked me. You don't have the passport here."

"Yes, we have it here."

"No, you don't have it here. I just ask you please to return me the money that I paid you in dollars and in Mexican pesos, and I won't come back here."

She said, "Wait for me for a moment."

In that moment I felt afraid, because there are people who are known to be bad people, and I thought, what if they come out, and instead of giving me the money, leave me lying there?

Then the woman went inside and came back out, and she said, "You know what, I just spoke with my husband, and he says that the money you gave us was already spent, for document processing. So, I'll just give you back \$100 U.S.D."

"And the rest?"

"No, I'm not going to return it to you. Here is your \$100 U.S.D."

When she gave me the \$100, I said, "I hope God forgives the two of you, because you lied to me. I have the passport. I picked it up. It was in San Luis Potosi."

And I went home. I felt sad, because that money was lost."