

Group Interview: Jimena, Gerardo, Marlon and Maritza Interview Oscar

Note: Maritza and Oscar are married.

Jimena: Hello, this is Open Sound New Orleans. My name is Jimena and here we are with Gerardo, Marlon, Maritza y Oscar. Hi Oscar!

Oscar: Hello, how are you?

J: Fine, thanks. And you?

O: Fine.

J: Oscar, I don't know you very well, tell me a little about yourself.

O: Well, my name is Oscar Sierra. I'm from Comayagua, Honduras. I'm 36 years old. I'm married and I have a six-year-old son.

J: Mmm-hmm. Where is your son?

O: In Honduras. With my mother.

J: Very good. And you live here in New Orleans?

O: It was four years ago that I came from Honduras to New Orleans. I came illegally. I crossed Mexico by train. I came here with the idea of staying approximately a year in the United States, but that time has been extended a bit. I haven't been able to do what I was thinking, get the money together and do the things I'd planned in my country.

J: For example?

O: Buy a house...and start a business. That was the idea, but we need money.

J: I understand. How were things when you first got here, to New Orleans?

O: To tell the truth, those first months, perhaps because I was new here, but there was very little work, and the truth is I felt sad, maybe because of the change of environment, right, because one leaves one's family, right, leaves one's children. But, little by little I got used to it, I made friends, and then I brought my wife here and that helped me a lot to endure the loneliness here...

J: I'm sure that's true.

Gerardo: Oscar, talk with us a little more about your trip from Honduras to the United States, passing through Mexico.

O: Going through Mexico.... Well, we entered Mexico and that's very hard for us Central Americans because of the "Migra" (border patrol).

J: In Mexico.

O: Yes, in Mexico. Well, the truth is I did the whole thing by train, by cargo train. You wait for one to leave and you climb up on the back, and you hang from the back. They're long trips, maybe a half-day or two days, because the train goes slowly. And, like that. Sometimes sleeping in the bushes, sometimes in hotels—that's how I got to the US border.

J: And you made the whole trip alone?

O: With a friend.

G: How was your border-crossing? How did you do it?

O: For the border? I went with a coyote.

G: Where?

O: At Piedra Negras. They charged me \$1600. We went in a small boat, about 6 meters long, it almost sunk! It almost tipped us into the water and as it was night it was totally dark. For a person—I can swim, right, but imagine for a person that couldn't swim this would be really horrible. We walked three days, during the night, and during the day we slept, we walked at night and slept in the day until we got to....I don't remember the name of the town, where they picked us up in a van and took us to Houston. Three days, that's all.

G: First to Houston and then to New Orleans?

O: Yes, first to Houston where they brought us to wait for the people who were going to come and get us, who was going to bring them the money. So our friends came and after that they brought us to New Orleans.

J: You had to pay them first?

O: My friends had received the money that my family had sent to pay and those friends received me at their home, they took good care of me, they treated me as though I were part of the family. They're neighbors from home. And they got work for me—it was fine.

G: Is this the first time you've been here?

O: Here to New Orleans, yes. But in '94 I lived in California.

G: Then you've already come several times to the country.

O: Twice. In '94 I was here for two years, then I went back, in '95.

J: Then you came back again in 2000—

O: In 2005.

Marlon: Oscar, let's talk more about your experience being one more immigrant in the United States.

O: “One more immigrant in the United States”? Well, there’s a lot of us. I don’t feel that strange because pretty much everyone is the same as me, illegal. Yeah, and the truth is that I don’t feel a lot of pressure as an immigrant here in this state, not like in California where the “Migra” (border patrol) is always following you, in the streets, in the houses, there you really feel the pressure. Here no, here one feels free, I can walk around anywhere in New Orleans, any park in any part of the city, and there’s no problem that the Migra is going to come and detain you, ever.

J: Really not?

O: No.

J: And the rest of you? Do you agree?

Marlon: A little. (To Oscar:) Talk a little more about the racism that there is here, do you feel like there’s more racism?

O: Racism, here? Well, no. I don’t think there’s any racism here. I’ve never experienced any racism and in the place where I live, I have lots of friends who are black. I say “Hey” to them, they greet me too. Well, we’re “amigos de saludo” (friends to greet/say hello to), you know, it’s not that I spend a lot of time with them, but no...

J: But you have the impression that they’re good people that are leading their own lives...

O: Yes. I’ve also worked with lots of black people, with Asian people too and...no, the truth is that I don’t have any problems with anyone.

J: I’m happy to hear that.

O: I hear...really I haven’t seen racism.

Maritza: What are your dreams, Oscar? What is it that you’d most like to do later on, in your future? What are you thinking about doing?

O: Well, the goals are the same. Get a house, start a business, but really it’s already...a lot of time has passed and I don’t know how much time...how much time it’s going to take to achieve these goals. But the truth is that I’m going to stay until I achieve them. I can’t go back without finishing what I started.

J: Have you thought—have you both thought, Maritza, that you might like to continue living here? Live your life here?

O: Live my life? No.

Maritza: We have a son and...

O: We’ve thought about bringing our son, so he can be with us here during the years that we’ll be here, because we were thinking that they might be many...

J: Okay, I have a question myself. When one brings a child illegally, isn’t that very dangerous for the

child?

Maritza: Yes, it's dangerous.

J: Is there someone who would care for him, because an adult can put up with a lot more walking, with difficulties, sleeping outside, than a child right? But a lot of people do bring their kids across the border, right?

O: The people do take the risk but the problem is always that risk—that many kids do die on the trip, you see it every day on the news. That's the risk and that's why we're afraid. Because if we couldn't lose him, he'd already be here with us.

J: Oh, of course.

O: But we keep thinking, how to bring him some way that's safe...

J: To take as little risk as possible, right?

O: There are other ways to transport them.

J: Huh?

O: Other forms than illegal.

J: Really?

O: Yes, one has to study them.

G: You said that you were here when Katrina came. What was that like?

O: That time? Oh, one feels a few things when these disasters happen. I couldn't have imagined it. That is, I stayed because I felt brave, you know, but then one feels that one's life isn't worth anything, you know...

G: You didn't see the movies about our own hurricane then? (Hurricane Mitch)

O: No. Right, it's horrible, nature can destroy everything. It's ugly, I can't tell you.

J: Where did you live during the hurricane?

O: In Gretna.

J: In Gretna?

O: Yes. Where I was, it didn't flood. But you feel the pressure of the wind on the house anyway, when the house trembles and one feels alone because...I was alone in the house during the hurricane and I didn't know if in the other houses surrounding me there were more people or if I was the only one who had stayed. So...I was afraid. There was wind for six hours and...and sounds, strange sounds and...it's ugly. I would never stay for another hurricane...it's like a suicide you know...there are places where

nothing happens and places where the hurricane destroys practically everything. It depends on the place where you happen to be. You don't know where the destruction will be. You can't do anything even if you do know how to swim...

J: Yes. Anything else? Should we say anything else before we finish the conversation without the recorder?

M: Do you have any other family here in the United States?

O: Yes, a brother....

J: Thanks, Oscar!