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Interview no. 1762

Leyva Bustamante

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Leyva-Bustamante

Interviewer: N/A

Project: Farah

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: N/A

Terms of Use: Unrestricted

Transcript No.: 1762

Transcriber: Andrea Santos

Summary of Interview:

In April of 1970, Leyva started working at Farah. Everyone at Farah despised their job, and she didn't understand why at first, but after two months, she realized what was right and what was wrong. Leyva, like many other Farah employees on Paisano, was fed up with the unfair treatment and low pay after only a week on the job.

She initially assumed that the hiring process was simple and that Farah employed anyone who was willing to work. Soon after, Leyva recognized that Farah had employed a large number of individuals, and that they needed to balance the number of employees. She realized why she was hired with little experience after that discovery. With their lack of retail knowledge and incapacity to lead, Farah's managers were the worst part of the company. Leyva stated that her employers were indifferent about employees being cut or burned by the devices. Accidents were widespread since the personnel were just not provided any training prior to using the gadgets. Many of the workers were fired in a period of two weeks due to error they commit, because of the lack of knowledge with machines.

When workers got injured, they would go to the nurse and they would give them a white pill. Leyva mentioned that for every type of pain or injured you will feel they would always give you that same white pill. One time a worker died at Farah because she was allergic to one of the pills, they gave her, but that never came up on the news. Many workers at Farah knew about it, but they needed a job so they didn't say anything about it.

After this incident Leyva started to figure out that she would soon be fired. A couple of weeks passed and she did get fired, but she got help from the Union. She mentioned that her case was one of the only cases that the Union took and that actually went on with it. Leyva ended up being compensated for being fired without a reason behind it. After Leyva left Farah the strike

began. She didn't know who was actually part of the plan, until that day that she saw some of her old coworkers at the strike. She decided to join them. When Leyva walked out to the streets to strike, an older lady started slapping her with her bag and telling her that Farah was a great man, according to Leyva. She knew at that time that many people considered him as a hero, whereas in truth he was a cruel man who treated his employees unfairly. Farah was regarded to be a god or something by everyone. At this point, Leyva discovered that Farah's only victims were Chicana women, whom everyone viewed as troublemakers, which fueled her desire to fight for her rights even more. Shortly after the strike began, the union organized a national boycott of Farah trousers, which proved to be a crucial factor in the strike's success. By January 1974, forty labor leaders had coordinated boycott campaigns in over sixty cities. The ACWA disseminated leaflets, posters, and public relations kits, as well as collaborating with other unions, churches, and student groups, to carry out the boycott. Many Farah employees went on speaking trips to promote the boycott. All of these initiatives contributed to the Farah strike's transformation from a local issue to a countrywide movement with popular backing.

By the end of the strike the goal was met and Leyva was just amused at all the people who actually contribute to the strike and how big of a movement it became for unjust treatment in the workforce. She now tells this story with pride and joy that it finally ended and that something was actually done. She is also grateful that she didn't had any children at that time that depended on her and her low income.

Length of interview 1:54:13

Length of Transcript N/A