

Interview with Juanita Velasco

Deerton, MI

February 22, 1995

Russell Magnaghi (RM): Okay, Interview with Juanita Velasco, Deerton, Michigan February 22, 1995. Okay, Juanita let's start out with talking about where you're from, your village and when you mention these different words like your village name and some other words, the language and so on, could you just spell them after you know, as soon as say them just automatically spell them for me? Now, what village do you come from in Guatemala?

Juanita Velasco (JV): I come from the highland of Guatemala and my village is called Nebaj and my people is called Ixil and speak Ixil. In the Quiché area, that's north of Guatemala City about eight or nine hours in the bus and the population there is seventeen more like seventeen thousand people. And of course there's more including Chajul, Cotzal those are the two other villages that speak Ixil.

RM: Okay, how do you spell? Juanita could you spell the names of the towns and the language for us?

JV: The other villages besides Nebaj, Chajul is spelled C-H-A-J-U-L. Cotzal, C-O-T-Z-A-L and Nebaj so those is the three villages that we call the triangle Ixil because those three villages that speak Ixil. And there's a lot of more small villages that speak Ixil also but there, they dress like we do from Nebaj. Chajul and Cotzal dress another different, you know, outfit.

RM: Are those, are those three the largest villages? Those three are the largest villages?

JV: Of where?

RM: In the area, of Quiché

JV: Of Quiché, um. Yes, I would say that, yes. There is more other villages.

RM: Okay

JV: Probably, I would say, probably there is more villages that's bigger than that, but far as I know that those, even though they're not the biggest village but they're a very important village for the people that, for example the refugees especially when the war happened in Guatemala in 1981 and these villages got lots of help from the Europeans, even the United States, and Canada. And so they're very important those villages, the triangle Ixil.

RM: Now, how do you spell Ixil?

JV: You spell I-X-I-L.

RM: Now, what do the people do in your village? What is their economic activity, what do they do to make a living?

JV: The women usually stay home, weave and the men spends his day in the field farming corn, beans, and squash. Since everything has to be done by hand in Guatemala so the women, for example, how they wash clothes by hand and cook with firewood and everything takes a long time, especially when she have lots of childrens and she weaves for the whole family. And so, again it's not just Nebaj but goes to other villages in Guatemala like that. And another thing that I would like to say that, it seems to me that the women is making more money than the Mayan men because at home weaving that she weaves sell them, and she sells them to tourists and then plus they plant a lot of vegetables in the field, even the women goes in the field and work with

the vegetables and sell them to other countries like El Salvador, Mexico, even United States. And so, and the men, of course when there's a day where it's raining so he can't work in the fields so he's stuck home, you know, because he can't weave, so of course the women has always chores there do to, cooking, and take care of children.

RM: Now, do the, could you tell us a little about the weaving that the women do? Could you briefly tell us, you know, where they weave. Do they weave in their homes? So tell us a little about the weaving, weaving activity.

JV: When you go to Guatemala and visit different villages, you will see a Mayan woman weaving at home, in the back of her house, or her loom is tied up connected to a post that is connected to the house or a tree. And almost every day you'll see women, sometimes there's groups, sometimes by self, you'll see them almost every day weaving, they have to because they make their clothes. And I guess weaving or back strap loom that we call has been for generations and is part of our culture. It does not mean it's not important to us, the Mayan but is not the number one in weaving and then the languages of course, and the culture. And we try to keep as much as we can. So, now in this day the women does not weave the skirts because the European brought the foot loom with them, so now the men can weave the skirt now. But before the European, the woman has to wool [weave] almost everything.

RM: So today then the women weave the blouses?

JV: The head pieces and shawls, the belts, and the suite and special kind of other, like ceremonial and suite for the tortillas and then sometimes she, and they weave the men's clothes too, his pants, his shirt, his jacket, except his sandals and his straw hat, this is what he makes, and his bag.

RM: And you said, today though with the coming of the European loom, now the men have, the men weave?

JV: With the foot loom.

RM: With the foot loom?

JV: Mm-hmm.

RM: But that wasn't traditionally done by?

JV: Nope.

RM: This is something new?

JV: New, yes.

RM: What, what...Do you know why that happened? Why the men?

JV: Because the skirt is bigger and our back strap loom is not big enough. So that's why they ended up using this and a lot of little things like buttons and zipper that they use in these days, but before that, no we don't, we don't cut the materials that we weave. We pretty much, we know pretty much understand how the biggest huipil that we are going to make for a certain age of people, certain size of people I mean. And we not use buttons in huipil or zippers you know, cause we want it a traditional way.

RM: Uh-huh. And how do you spell huipil?

JV: You spell it H-U-I-P-I-L.

RM: And, now. When did these textiles, and these, you know, the huipils and the things that you weave. When did they become trade items, where you could trade them, and when the women would produce a surplus for sale? When did that start?

JV: When the tourists came! And the reason we make different weavings of different pieces for the tourists because when a tourist comes and they'd like to buy something a little bit less, you know, less price, so we make something simple with less design, less attention. And we also end up making it of different colors because some of the tourists they might have a, I mean.... A pink room in their houses, you know it all depend on what color is the wall, so we ended up making a wall hanging, you know. We usually weave things that is useful to us, for the kitchen, or wearing it. We don't weave things for decorations, wall hanging or table runner we don't because we don't even have a table as a Maya. And so, we just, those things are new for, and then....

RM: Now, wait a minute, do you, now today do you weave, like these table runners and things like that, do you do that now for the tourist trade?

JV: Mm-hmm, yes but we still do our traditional weaving of course for us. And sometime when there's tourist that wants to have collections, a good piece for them, and then we sell some of our weaving, our traditional one that we wear. And especially like in museum, I have different pieces that I've sold to different museums like the Smithsonian and some museums here in the United State that I sold some of my good pieces to cause they wanted for collections, and...

RM: So now did somebody from the museum contact you and make a contract for you to produce a piece for other people?

JV: Um, well when I give demonstrations there, and so they like my work or they like the stuff I brought with me and of course, I mean, they are my friends and I, some of the museums end up being a very good friend. And especially like this man, his name is Luis he was the Vice President of the science museum in Minnesota and he knows a lot about the Mayan and when those people knows about a lot of Mayan, they know what this tradition weaving is, so you don't even have to tell them, you know about it, because they know. And so, you know, they saw my pieces and they buy it because they know it's a good collections. But it's hard for the tourist today because sometimes like tourist will in to Guatemala or some people will cheat, you know, they Mayan people will cheat them all, they'll say this is the real weaving, they might sell them in the same price you know, and it's expensive and it's not a real one. For instance, I usually told the people, just be careful when you go in Guatemala that, you know, you should check other first, you know check other weavings and look at them and match them, you know, which one looks better. So.

RM: Now, does, like in Mexico, the Mexican Government has these artisan shops, is there anything like that in Guatemala where the Government operates like a handicraft shop?

JV: Most of the shop that I see in Guatemala and Chichi, Antigua, the owner are Spanish. Or...Spanish, that's not for the government, I mean a man that, who has money and he wants to run business.

RM: Just a private, private individual.

JV: Um-hmm, a private. Yes, and that's not, I mean, and a lot of Mayan have their store in Antigua too.

RM: Oh?

JV: A lot of Mayan immigrants people that they, even when, especially when you go to Antigua you will find all kinds of things, different villages, almost all over I mean, of Guatemala you will find there in Antigua.

RM: So they're going to Antigua because it's a big tourist center and there's a lot of trade?

JV: And it's expensive place because of the tourists, I mean it's...it's very famous for tourists because of the climate (clime) and the architectures and I see, oh I have some friends, an American that's, who is retired that lives in Antigua, so there's a lot of business going on. And again I would say to the tourists that when they go to Guatemala, I mean of course, every tourist goes to different villages, but I, a lot of them that end up in Antigua which is fine but it is someplace that's very expensive. And I think the best thing to do is to live, to be with a family. And there is family that, who accept Americans, I mean they will stay, where if you want to learn Spanish in Guate, or in Antigua and there is a family that you will stay with. Sleep and you eat there. Um-hm.

RM: Now, in your village, how much of the traditional culture has been maintained, would you say? By the, you know, I think you mentioned earlier like the men no longer wear traditional clothing but the women do. Could you comment on that?

JV: I, not now, this is my village including other villages in Guatemala that little by little they're losing their cultures. Much of it got to do, a lot of it's got to do with the young girl today. I see, or I have friends that is living, that lives in Guatemala City now and then I'll go, and then I'll see their fathers or their mother like once or two times a year, pretty much stay in Guatemala City because they're working in Guatemala City with the Spanish and then don't weave, they don't have the opportunity to weave and I think it's very sad. And sometime now when they come to

the villages sometime or sometime their parent, their mom or sister weaves for them. But a lot of time they buy their clothes. And...

RM: So then when they're in Guatemala City then there, what clothes are they wearing?

Traditional clothes or?

JV: They are wearing the *corte* which is the traditional, you know, the Mayan skirt but a lot of time they end up wearing an American t-shirt with it and the way they fix their hair and they're wearing high-topped shoes, you know what I mean. And so this girl, some girls like that if you tell them something and sometime they will get mad or something, you know. And that's not good for our culture, especially like the older Mayan people, they do not like that because the way they're losing the respect. It seems to me that when they meet an old people in the villages, they just zoom by without greeting the old people and I think it's sad because it's not the way it was before. Usually when you see an old man coming, you bow your head and greet him and then that, when he touch your hair, I mean your head, and then you know. That's the way you have to do, but we don't that. I remember some of my parents sometime I heard them say that when we don't do that, that when we don't have respect to greet the old people, and when we get home we get into trouble. Why did you do, you know, that? What kind of respect do you have then, you know? So it's just not the weaving, it's the way they act this day in Guatemala City. Now, let's just say that if you bring two girls, young girls, about sixteen years old. One that's already lived for many years in Guatemala City, you will bring them here. And then the other one from a village, small village that's wearing the traditional clothes, and you put them together and you will see the difference, the way they act, the way they talk. And sometime, sometime when you, they end up using a lot of Spanish words, do you know what I mean? And they're trying to forget their languages, the way they speak at home, you know. And so you will tell the

big difference between the two of them. And there's a lot of young girls that are still in the villages, stay with their parents because their parents say, oh no, you're not going. Because some of them, let's just say in my village, and that happened before that's why I'm saying this. There was a girl that came from a small village, smaller than my village and went to Guatemala City and then she saw what happens. And she...she makes, you know, money you know, not very much but she's making some money in Guatemala to work with the Spanish and then she comes to her village later and says, and then come to get more girls to go with to Guatemala City because, you know, there is work and blah-blah-blah. And then so, and then but a lot of parents encourage their daughters and say, "You do not go in Guatemala City." Because most of these girls, you end up having babies with no fathers and then when you come back you're not the same. So during when you're poor, we're not going to go, they don't let them. Sometime they get sad, but it's for their own good sometimes. I mean there's so much chores to do in the villages even when they're poor, but they have to feed their animals and weave and to sell theirs, you know.

RM: Hm-mm

JV: A lot of businesses of textiles in Guatemala, and the business is growing a lot about textiles it's a lot of them going in Japan and Europe and maybe in United State, and so there is a lot of businesses of textiles. A lot of women's woven and a lot of wovens by foot loom and crocheted and all kinds, you name it. You just, you know, buy tons of them, and I guess a big company buys them in different countries and sells them. Especially the friendship bracelets. In some of these, like in a village that's called Panajachel, now that's Lago Atitlan's area and I see some of the stuff there that I've never seen it before. A new style, new things, and I think, who brought these ideas? And they said the tourists, the tourists brought the designs. And so they're

changing the colors, I mean the colors especially and the designs are even changing. Because when they, when the tourist here in America, in Europe, when they see what do the people like, you know? So they bring these designs, a new idea, to the villagers to make it. And some of these colors I have never seen it before. And the friendship bracelet, that's the tourist idea and then so, a lot of these things that's, you know. And um, I can't tell you that 100% in my life's gonna change you know some day, can't say that, but the way it looks like to me that's little by little they're changing. Almost every year I go to Guatemala, and, in my village to visit my family cause most of my family's there. And when I come to my village, one year, I don't know, I forgot exactly what year but one year when I came and they even have a bank now. They didn't have a bank before. And then, and then when I come the next year, and then they have a cable T.V. Couldn't imagine in my village! And this is my village, this is in the highlands. So that's what I mean, they're moving fast, you know. And I'm not surprised if next year I go and they even have McDonald's! So that's just the thing, and I guess, you know, it's nothing wrong to learn other things, but I think it's very important, that we've got to keep on our, it's not the number one one but it's important to me to keep our cultures: the weaving, and the language, and the respect, especially. To respect each others and I think it's very important.

RM: Now did, is the change, now in the past when the Spanish came, and we were talking about this yesterday. When the Spanish came you sort of had the Mayan culture and society and you had the Spanish culture, Ladino society and they sort of stayed separate and still continued to exist. But now you're saying that there is, just change is coming in and just overwhelming the people. There's sort of no stopping it. Even in your village, you're seeing that change. So, traditionally, sort of the two cultures stayed...apart

JV: Separate?

RM: Yeah, stayed separate. And both stayed together, I mean stayed within themselves but were side by side. Now today all that's going. There's change coming.

JV: In my village?

RM: Yeah, and it's just, it's just happening now.

JV: Um, well now with the Spanish or the Ladino in Nebaj when they have, when they have a special festival and they have their own cultures and we have our own cultures and sometime we do it the same days or sometime. They do theirs first and then we do ours later, and so it's not that they have to do our culture or we have to do their culture, we're keeping ours separate, and sometime we even end up doing it at the same time. And, so it's it looks like it to me, when I look at it, it looks like to me that the Ladino and the Mayan are getting, you know more like friendly and neighbors. And I'm saying this because I see the way they act, the way they do things. For example one of my uncle die last year in my village and a lot of the Ladino came for the funeral and they even cried you know, and they even felt sorry and lots of them came. And they Mayan do the same too, some of them. Not always, but that's what I see what they do. And before, before, way before I think they do that they're very strong to each other but I think it's important to share and learn from each other. And like I say, they do something wrong, if they did something wrong before when they came here in America, I think it's very important, for them, to learn their mistake, what they've done. And that they should not be doing it or if we did something bad to them then that we should not be doing that again. Now it's time to learn our lessons and love each other. It doesn't matter where you come from, I think it's very important to respect our neighbors and to love them and to welcome them and to share. I think that's very important to me.

RM: Now, with the, the people that went to Guatemala City, did Guatemala City...did, were people attracted, like the Maya, have they always been attracted to the city, to that environment? Like years and years ago, or is this just something new?

JV: Well there is, Guatemala City is it's small before, I mean it's small. So there is, and there is villages that lives not too far away from Guatemala City. So a lot of them comes to sell stuff. Flowers, when you go to Guatemala what do you see? Miles selling flowers or vegetable. And so there is a lot of them in there sell stuff. But then at the end of the day they go back home. Because that's the close religious in Guatemala but most of them, most of them like in next to my village they don't even know where Guatemala City is. They stay in their village because they make their clothes and they grew their food. So, let's just say a small village that is in the middle of nowhere, far away from Guatemala City, if you give them a hundred dollar that will last them for several months, like three months or five months for the whole family. Because they don't need that very, I mean, they know how to, I mean except to buy the sugar and the salt. But I mean they know how to survive. I mean, the way they make their clothes and, so like they're always scared. I remember with my grandmother, I remember when one of the Spanish girls, a Latina from Antigua came to my village and I was very young. Of course, like eleven or twelve years old, something like that. And as I was selling my weavings to the tourists in the Pension, it's the hotel in my village. And there she was and I ended up made-ing, having friends you know, being friends with her. And she says I could barely speak Spanish, not very little. And she says, "Juanita would you like to come with me to Antigua someday," you know? And we talk and talk. And then I was very happy, and I said, "Oh please, I want to go to where, Antigua where is that?" Especially I just like to ride in the car, like when the tourist comes in my village, I always ask them for a ride, if they can give me a ride. And they say, "Yeah, but

can you show me the market? Can you do things? Then I will take you for a ride,” they said to me sometime. I guide them around. So and I said “Okay, I would really like to but the problem is my grandmother, you know.” And then so she came to talk to my grandmother, you know, “Could Juanita come with me in Antigua?” And of course my grandmother says “No, absolutely not! Because there’s cars in there!” And they always, the Mayan that’s why they don’t like to go in with cars cause they’re very scared. Most of the Mayan, they don’t like, especially the one that lives in small villages, they don’t like to go in Guatemala City because they say, the cars...you know, the cars the accidents and it’s dangerous and there’s robbers and I might not see you again! So just don’t, she didn’t wanted me (to go). But I wanted to go and I cried I wanted to know where Guatemala City is especially when she said, the lady told me that, the Latina told me that Antigua is more far away than Guatemala City. And I am more happy to hear that because I wanted far as you know, it could be, so that’s how long the bus will go because I really like to ride on the bus. So finally, my aunt told my grandmother yes, you should let her go because maybe we’ll have the opportunity to sell weavings because I heard there’s a lot of tourism in Antigua. So you let her go. So, finally she, I went to Antigua. And then after that I made regular trip. I sold a lot of my weavings there. And I really liked it, but sometimes I’m scared, it’s dangerous.

RM: Now did you have friends then in Antigua?

JV: Oh yes, lots of friends and most of them are Americans. Invite me for Easter, like in Easter? And I have a friend, a very good friend his name is Jack he lives in Arizona. He is a painter, he’s lived in Antigua many years so he’d go in different villages so I end up, and I especially really love ice cream and you know, he’s a very good friend to me. He treated me almost every day and he’d take me to different friend’s house to and to sell my weavings and he welcomed, and so

I, then here I am in America, you know? I guess I just follow the group because I really like it here.

RM: So what do you do, when did you first come to the United States and what do you do?

JV: I came here 1981 and like I said, it's way different in Antigua with the tourists and I did give demonstration there in the restaurant, an American restaurant. A lady, Barbara, from Chicago who used to have a restaurant in Antigua so she wanted me to give a demonstration and I did. And then after that I meet American that was taking Spanish in Antigua, and he was one of my customers. I thought he was one of my customers but he was not interested in buying my weaving, and that's the one that I marry. And we got married in Antigua and I came here in America. And so after I came here, and then the same woman from Chicago, now she's in Chicago, back in Chicago again. And then she hear that there is, she heard that there was this museum in Chicago, needs some demonstrations. They were interested about the Mayans and so I went to that. And before that I did give a little bit demonstrations in Minnesota and so after that and so I say oh well, I should continue because that's what I did before. And now I'm going all over to share about the culture and it's very important to me. Some people say this to me, if you love Guatemala, what are you doing here? And well that's true but of course, I love my country but I am going, I mean I am here because I am sharing as much as I can about my culture and every time I leave my village my grandmother almost always has a tear in her eyes because she doesn't want me to come, she wants me to stay with her and the people in the village says, "Let her go, she has the opportunity to share our cultures!" You know, especially the older people. And that's why I'm just going and sharing as much as I can. Try my best to. Because especially I don't think the young girl that like me very much because sometime the way they want things their way. Which is alright, that's their life. But what I'm saying is that they have a

daughter someday and how will they teach the weaving to their daughter if they don't know how to weave? And...

RM: Now you....

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RM: Okay, we'll continue now. Earlier you mentioned that girls go to Guatemala City, what kind of jobs do they get with the, with the, now is it Latino or Ladino?

JV: Ladinos.

RM: Ladinos, well, what kind of jobs do they, do most of them get?

JV: Housekeeper, or they end up working in the big fabrics where they make you know, things like towels or soaps, you know, things like that. They end up working in there, yeah.

RM: Now you mentioned the girls, do the boys go to the city too?

JV: Yes. Lots of them. But the boys, the boys, when they're in Guatemala City, lots of them in Guatemala City, the boys do. And then so they usually do both. They're trying so hard the way they're doing things, the way I see them doing things. They work in the daytime and in the nighttime they study, they go to school. So they do both.

RM: Ohh?

JV: And it's very hard for them.

RM: Uh-huh.

JV: And I have a cousin that's doing that. That same thing, you know same thing, and a brother too I have. And so that's what they do.

RM: Now are they, now when these young people go to Guatemala City then, they get caught up in the urban culture, the city culture and then all the, the people that are in the city anyway are losing, are kind of losing their culture as well. It's pretty difficult to keep that culture.

JV: It is, it is difficult.

RM: I'd like to go back. We've talked about the weavings and so on. Do like wholesalers, people from say different countries? What countries would come to the village or go to the villages and buy the weavings? For instance if you didn't leave and sell them in Antigua, how would you sell them in the village and get them out? I'll, ah, yes it's going.

JV: Well, um. Usually, like in my village there would be a Mayan girl who would be from Neba. And she would go to different weavers who makes this weaving and she would buy them. In other words she would be in the middle. But, and she collect, you know, all of them from Neba and she will bring them to Antigua or to Chichi, the market there in Chichi, Castenango. And so the people who buy those things they come to the market then to buy a whole bunch of them at once. And so I feel very, I feel bad for the people who weave because when they make the weaving, they work so hard and spend so much hours so much time for it. Plus the materials and then they make so little. Very little and you get the most less from the middle people and.

RM: Could you give an example of maybe the size of a weaving and how much it would, what they would get for it and how much it might sell here for instance. For a huipil?

JV: For example...Okay, let's just say for a huipil that takes like three months to make, a huipil that takes three months. But instead of sell much it very much, what they sell is wall hangings. So the huipil that takes three months and they sell it for three hundred quetzal, which is sixty dollar. And for three month that's sixty dollar. And then the middle people or maybe even less than that, probably let's just say about maybe forty dollars. And the middle people probably sell it for seventy dollars and then here in the United States and then you buy for two hundred dollars. Something like that. So that's the big difference, you know. The real people you buy it to forty dollars and then here in America it's like two hundred dollar.

RM: Uh-huh. Now is there, have there ever been any attempts by the local people in the village, maybe your village or other villages to form some sort of cooperative to buy and sell the huipils and the wall hangings themselves? Has anyone done that, sort of form their own company?

JV: Well they can't because like in Neba some of the villages is too far away, they don't know where Antigua is, they don't even know who to sell it to. Except if there is a company which there is one that comes to the villages, them their selves. They live here in America but they have some people that works with them, and they come. This is honest, this is Ladino people that, very few people that is very honest, you know. And they come to the villages, the small villages and they order such, you know, how much of this they need, you know, purses and how much the wall hangings they need. And then the money, and they don't argue very much with the people who makes it, how much it will you know, how much you wanted for it and how it would take you and the people make up their mind this is how much it will take and this is how much it's going to be. And then, they say it's ok. They're don't argue with them, and then they pay them the way it is, it should be because they want to make sure these people have to be paying and not to be in the middle, you know. These people want to make sure that there's not

going to be a middle people that's between them. Of course there's middle people here in the United States of course, after they sell it to the tourists. But still it happens a lot because most of the money that or what they make they send to it to the people who makes the stuff, which is very nice. And I wish that more people would do that. Because it helps the Mayan a lot and this is one of the things, they can...how they make a living selling, weaving textiles.

RM: So you've noticed in your own experience and lifetime how this trade in weavings has increased then?

JV: Yes

RM: So now do most of the villages, like, you know, we were looking at the map of all the villages in Guatemala, do most of them now do weavings?

JV: Yes, most of them weaves. The women especially, when you go to the villages you see them weaving outside their houses almost every day. Little girl, especially there is big businesses with crochet, like purses and coin purses. You know, big purses. And then so this is crocheted and so they're selling a lot of those now. So there is this village is called Acul that's not too far from my village. It's A-C-U-L. And this village, my, when you go to this village you will see even the small boys that's making them every day, every day! Even though he's taking care of his sheeps or his animals in the fields he's making them in there. Because he has big orders from Neba that they want, you know, like dozens of this and this and this. And so they come and then they buy them. And there's still lots of them out there that they want to do the same thing but that would be nice if they can get the prices they should get. But I mean it's, in the way I look, I don't like it like when, like one day when...now this is my uncle's wife. I was in the market and there was this lady because I always buy, you know, a lot of stuff to bring here

in America and in Neba. And then I remember when my aunt says when there's a lady came to her store and the lady, I mean, sometimes they need money to buy their groceries, sometimes they need money to buy, if there's sick people and they're with their families and they have to buy medicine so they have to buy this stuff. So this lady, it looks like she's desperate wanted to sell these bags that's crocheted. And so you know, I say "How much? How much is it?" She came, actually to sell, to sell it to my aunt's store but I was there. And I looked at her and then I say, and then I got up and I say "How much do you want for it?" And then my aunt just stood up in the middle, it's like she was pushing me and she's telling the lady "How much do you want for this?" You know, with the greed in her voice, I mean, she's not very, you know what I mean, a nice polite person. And then the lady says I would like to get fifteen quetzal, which is only three dollars for a bag, a big bag, which takes like a week and a half to make. And then the lady, and then my aunt says "No, that's too much. Give it to me twelve quetzal!" You know. And I said how can she do that, how can she be so, and I said well, I'm not going to listen to here. So I went in there and I said her "How much do you want for it?" And she says, "Sixteen." And you know, I just need and I said okay, I can take it. And so I bought, when my aunt just looked at me and said, "Juanita, you don't know how to do business," You know. "I will help, I bet you I will help you to sell hundreds of quetzales if I will be with you when you buy your stuff." And I said, "Well you know how much this takes, I'm a weaver. I mean I know how much this takes." And I thank God for I have the opportunity for me to come here in American to sell the stuff because then in here you sell them more. So then you go to get, you know, matches. And then like in Antigua I have different weavers a lot of like especially in the village called San Antonio Aguas Caliente. I have a lot of friends there that when they see me even though they see me coming far away they get so happy because they know they're going to sell something. And then

so, I just, you know, I bring their stuff. And I thank God for helping me to help those people because they need it, you know, they need help bad sometime. And sometime when I just came, I remember some of the time when I was in my village I, I mean I, especially when I spend months here in the United States. And I go back to my village and I see the weaving that they make everything looks so beautiful to you even it's not, it looks so nice. So one, at some time my grandmother get a little bit upset sometimes because, I don't know, at the people saw me coming and the buses in the villages somehow they see me, but the first night when I arrived...the first evening I arrived to my village, here I am with my family, greeting my family, so happy to see them. And then soon a knocking at my doors, and then I, so I, and then my grandmother, my family get mad sometimes, because they say, "No, no, no! They can come back tomorrow because Juanita just got here, we got lots to talk!" You know, that night, and that's as well but they need, you know and Oh Juanita! And I open the door and sometimes they say, "Oh Juanita good thing you came!" You know it's like they're saying we need you, you know. And then and I said well where's your stuff, you know, this time we're going to have a meeting and tomorrow and then you're going to bring your stuff. Say okay, okay. Then they bring all of their baskets filled up with weavings and oh! I just have a good time too with them. And sometime my aunt get greedy sometime because, my other aunt, I have a lot of aunts. They say we are your family, and we should be first. Because they weave too, they sell weavings too just like the rest of my neighbors so there is competitions, you know selling stuff. And they, you know, they wanted to be first it's like lines, like in a patio? And of course I didn't went to school and I don't know how to write very good or to add up the price all. So I got one of my cousin with me that know how to do those things. And then my aunt you know, wanted and I say, well I look at it this way. You know, if you believe in God, that's another thing. Just because they are,

they are you family and they are the first, you know what I mean? It's not the way I look at it, I have family that has, I mean, a lot of thing that has, I mean a lot of things that has. Like my uncle that has a bus, he has a truck, he has a car, he has a bicycle, he has a home, he has lanes. I don't know how he end up having a lot of these. And some time, and one time his son asked me, Tony, he says, "Juanita everytime you come to the United States you end up helping other people that's not your family. And what about us, we are family. Did you ever, you know, give something?" And I said to them, "Do you need something?" You know? Just because they're family and even though they have lots and lots I'm going to give them, I don't look at it this way. I mean, to me as a Christian who believes, I mean everybody's, I mean to me everybody's family they need it. If there's someone out there who is desperately sick and they need it badly, just because they're that's not your family, that's not going to happen. No, they don't look at it this way. And that's why my aunts, you know, doesn't like that, you know. And then I said, "This lady's first, she was here first and even though she's not my family, but she was here first and you know we can...we can do it. Oh, just be patient with it."

RM: But then do you buy your aunt's stuff anyway?

JV: Oh yes, I do. I do. But I what mean...

RM: But she's just upset that you didn't take care of her first?

JV: First! Yeah but I don't look at it this way. What is there first? And, you know, I just get, you know.

RM: Now is that because of a strong sense of family among the Maya is that what causes that maybe?

JV: What do you mean?

RM: Well that the family's very strong and these people feel that you should be dealing with them first. That they are the most, that they should be the most important?

JV: Well I don't look at just the Mayan, I think all over the world is like that, always family first, which is fine. Nothing wrong with that. But then what I'm saying is there's a point that when there's a people who really needs it and your family doesn't need it, just because they're your family we, you going to be, you know? No, no I don't look at it this way. But some of us, we don't understand, we don't see these things. And I think it is wrong too. And so someday, sometimes in the end of week or I'm ready to go back to the states I don't even have enough penny for something. And I say, well God knows what I'm going to do because he knows where the money went and there is still more coming, more coming! "More, please! We need the money, please!" And I just, but I don't have much money right now. I still have some in Guatemala City and I keep it what my friends, who are maybe just I am going to go get it. And then you say oh ok what day, we're gonna come back. "But just make sure you're gonna be here because your aunt doesn't let us in the house," you know. And I say, "You're coming to see me, you're not coming to see my aunt and if they say, you know, which is Juanita's not here, you're not gonna"...sometimes my aunts say, "Juanita's not here and it's lie." I'm inside and sometimes I told them just walk through the house and go find me. Go straight to the kitchen where I am, you know. Sometime my aunts, because they don't understand, you know; the other people. Everybody needs help you know, everyone. Now another story about the other people in San Antonio, same thing just because they are my friends, they wanted to be first than the others and I don't look at it this way. And I even told them if you are greedy and you don't know how to share I'm not going to buy to you next time. I'm going to buy somewhere, you

shouldn't be that way! Everyone wants to sell their stuff and their stuff I think you have to be, know how to share things you know. And they just look at me like you're supposed to be our friends, you know. And I say I am your friend but share it with others not just you, you know.

RM: Yeah. Now do they sometimes get mad and then...don't...

JV: Sometimes, little bit.

RM: But they still want to be your friend because you're going to still sell?

JV: Oh yes, yes.

RM: Okay. Now how much so you, like if you go down there, and you bring back boxes, bags, suitcases, of these weavings, then you sell them all when come, when you're up here?

JV: Um-hmm. When I give them straight from the museums and the museums and the gift shops they sell them for me. And sometimes I don't the money, I don't have enough money to buy it. Like I would take like \$2000, maybe 2500 and take it with me, that's what I spend. Then that's going to be 10,000 quetzal which is a lot of money in Guatemala. And so sometimes I don't have enough money and there is the stuff that I really like and the people says, no, no take it Juanita, take it! And when you come back you pay us and I thought that if you do that, I will pay you more. Because, you know that makes sense, I'm not paying them right away so when I sell it I bring the money you know. Not all of them, of course, because like sometime I pay. Like my expenses here in American like, you know, the customs and all these things so I totally understand. But so I really like this, you know, I really like the relationship with my friends in different villages because sometimes when you don't even have a penny, and then there they are waiting for you and your bed and your lunch and your food and what do you need, you know?

And I thank God for them; I guess, I guess they're at looking you, who you are and they know you are this kind of person and that's I guess. I don't know, but the way I look at it. And I'm just pleased with them when they do that. And sometimes I'm not having a lot of money to buy, you know, groceries for my family. One day I remember, when I told my grandmother, come with me, and I have certain different friends. Some of them are very rich Mayan, you know, they're a rich Mayan that lives in my village and they're my friends and I told my grandmother, come with me. And she followed me and I went to visit my friends, and they said, "Here you are Juanita! Come in!" You know, and they welcome me and I eat there and drink and they end up sending stuff with me like beans or squash, you know, corns. And then so, a lot, one day I remember my grandmother didn't have room in her basket. She was carrying a lot of stuff and my suit and she says, "You are impossible Juanita, I couldn't believe, look what you have!" And I said, "Well, thank God for the blessing and you know, just welcoming and sharing things." That's way you get when you share. How you going to be like that if you're going to be like that, if you are so greedy, everything's mine, mine, mine. You know what I mean? I don't like that. And people will know you in different villages if you have been honest. And the best thing for me is being honest and kindness and you share the people love. Doesn't matter what village they are, I think it's important to respect them and just to be honest with them. Because not many people in my village will say here just take this and sell it and then you bring me the money. Uh-uh, they don't trust people a lot. They usually you pay them there and then let your huipil. Especially huipil that I have, I just sold one of them like two weeks ago for 1000 quetzal. She send that to me, the huipil and then I sold it so I'm going to take her money back. But that's what they do to me. And sometimes I say to them, sometimes I no more, no more. Because sometimes I forgot and when I come to the village and, "Juanita, we sent our stuff with you.

And did you sell it?" And I say, "What stuff?" Sometimes I forgot because I don't write it down sometime. So, but anyway it's still better to write it down, how much you take, you know. So it helps them a lot and I am having, I am enjoying my trips with my families and friends and...

RM: Okay. Okay Juanita could you tell us a little about getting back to the life in the village. Could you tell us little about you know, the foods that the people eat, the traditional foods that the people eat in the village?

JV: The Mayan foods?

RM: Yeah

JV: Oh, it's simple. They eat lots of tortilla like three times a day. And they eat a lot of vegetable with the hot sauce which is the chilé and beans. And they don't meat every day because then the men does not make very much day so they have to eat a lot of vegetable. But it's good for their health, I mean vegetable. But in Sunday is gonna be the day when we have meat, you know on the market days and you buy fresh. And speaking of fresh food, of vegetable. We do not have refrigerator or microwave or stuff like they have here in America. So when we buy meat we usually salt them and smoke them so they stay longer. And then we buy our groceries two times a week, Thursday and Sunday. To make sure we have enough. And a lot of these people that comes from the different villages they don't have not much money to buy their groceries so sometime they bring what they have home with them like chicken, turkeys, or weaving that they make and then they sell it and they buy their stuff to take home with. Like things that they can't grow like sugar and salt and those sort of things.

RM: Now do the people drink a lot of coffee down there?

JV: Yes, they do. But they have a special drink which is called atole which is made out of corn and they have. Especially the men, the men have to make sure that you have lots of atole for him especially if he works in the field. Nothing but the men, they do not like cold lunch. So even though they work miles and miles away from home, the woman she have to bring his lunch in the field and then eat there. And then, you know sometimes they take their lunch with them and they start a fire, heat their lunch, but they don't like this. They like it when their wife brings their lunch to the field. And then sometimes when the woman brings the lunch and sometimes we just sit down and talk or sometimes, in the mean time when he's resting eating his lunch the woman can work with the *azadon*, I don't know how you would say that in English. Um, it's like the shovel, you know like the *azadon*, it looks like this.

RM: Um-hmm, like a big hoe?

JV: Yeah

RM: Like a big hoe kind of. And that's A-S-A-D-O-N, *asadon*?

JV: And, um. Now some Spanish comes from Guatemala City to small villages to buy beans because they say that the Mayan beans, the Mayan people in the villages have the best beans. That's what they say. So there's all kinds of beans and they come to the villages and buy the beans, a lot of beans and eggs and sometime in the villages, in the small villages they do not understand any Spanish so when the Spanish people the Ladinos buy stuff from them and it's hard for them to communicate sometime. Or maybe there is people that are able to help. And there is, but every day in my village the usually get up, they get up like six o'clock, five thirty. The women goes straight where the corn you know, to the Molino. That's how, where they grind the corn, now they use molinos. In the old days, like my grandmother they grounded the corn in

the mataté. So now they have machines and I can hear, I just really like in the morning when I get up sometime and I hear the women going like this [claps] you know at six o'clock making the tortillas and feeding their husbands that are going to the fields and working. You hear the roosters and you hear the molinos and you hear the dogs barking. There he goes, another thing about the dog, that when their masters are ready to go to the field and they want to make sure they're fed too. They get lots of tortilla to eat and when they're done eating they just go with the men with the field. They just like to be in the field. And I'm very happy about animals when they're free and they're out there. When I go to other villages, when I visit other villages and I see some of the turkeys and chickens in the field, a big field and they have so much space to walk. And really I like that and I think it's very important for the animals. But like when small villages, or I mean big villages and towns that animals is in cages. I don't like that when they're locked up inside and it's not. And so this is every day and as soon as one of the men leaves, six o'clock to go into the field, the women start weaving a little bit. And then start the lunch at ten o'clock and then take it at eleven o'clock and then when she gets there it's by then twelve o'clock. Because if she gets there past twelve, past lunch, then the men just angry, where is my lunch? They usually eat at the right time; breakfast seven o'clock sometime, and then twelve o'clock lunch, and then five-six o'clock dinner. And then they do eat popcorns and tell stories to each other, when they don't have television they usually tell stories. For example how the Americans ended up on the Moon. And sometimes they ate up more things in there and sometimes they scare the little children. Like I remember when I was little when they talk about spooky things at night time. It's dark, there's no electricity and I'd get scared. You know, sometimes I'm shaking. And they tell stories to each other and...

RM: Now, are these stories traditional Mayan stories?

JV: American!

RM: Oh, American stories!

JV: Like I say how the Americans end up on the Moon or some of them are traditional like from a long time ago, yes, that they have. And so, and then the women have to when they leave she will have the opportunity to go wash her clothes, or before lunch she'll wash the clothes by hand. And then a little bit, but not very much time with weaving for her. The young people have more opportunity to weave. Another thing, the headpiece which is called cinta, in my village you only see almost all just the married women is wearing it, the older woman, the young girl will not wear it, you know a cinta. Which is just. And again, I think it is sad when they do that and I can't say that twenty minute, everyday I'm wearing my cinta here in America. But that doesn't mean I've completely forgot. And there is festivals, when they have big festival in the villages, for example they have like Miss Guatemala, you know the Mayan. And then when they have that, and the young girl just running around the neighbors borrowing the cinta, you know, because they don't have one. And that means they're just not wearing it anymore. They don't even have one at home. So I remember last year I have three, about three cintas. And my friend when they end up with those kind of things that's going on, and they end up borrowing my cinta often then.

RM: Now do the Mayan people in your village for instance, are there some people like you said the medicine man, do they still treat the illnesses and so on with herbs and plants and medicines and so on?

JV: Yes. Yes they do, and my grandmother knows certain kinds of men, like that older kind of Mayan men that used the medicines and plants, what kind of plants to use. My grandmother, she

knows those things. She doesn't even have to go in this man, she knows what kind of medicine, what kind of plant to use. And she is a very survival woman, she knows how to protect and care for her children, she had sixteen children.

RM: Sixteen?

JV: Yes, and she pretty much knows, and I learned how to weave. And she's not an easy lady to be like, you know, Juanita this is what you gotta do and these and nice, you know. She says Juanita this is what you're going to do and then do it. This is what she do to me and sometimes I cry but I think it this way, it's for my own good, I learn many things. I learned how to weave and I think it's very important. Another thing about the cultures in Nebaj or in the villages in Guatemala that the grandmother or my grandmother's parents usually tell us this or some of them not all of them says that but, that we believe, that I believe that, we say that there is a man in our house even though he's younger than the women let's just say there's a girl, fifteen and there's a boy ten years old. And we always will serve him first, I mean, I don't know that's just the way it is for generations, they're still doing that today that they, the way they act with the men. If there is a meeting of mens who will talk, you do not, a woman will not enter and sit in the middle of the men and talk. You know what I mean? That would be embarrassing for the husband to do that you know, at least for that culture, you know what I mean? That's what they are, their ways are different and then you just don't go zoom in front of them when they're talking, you usually go around of them. You know, go in the middle of them when they're talking, you know what I mean? Yeah, little things, little cultures. I mean things they're still do.

RM: Now do the, like in the village is there still sort of Mayan government? Are there like elders, older men that govern the village or somebody is elected as, what do they call the guy, governor?

JV: Yeah like Alcalde? He's the same.

RM: Yes, Alcalde.

JV: Yep. Now in my village is this, which some year, I think they last three years. One, each Alcalde lasts three years. Two? No, let me see, about two years probably. So every two years it could be a Spanish....

End of Tape 1 Side B