

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPTS

Over Here, Over There: Fatima, a Brazilian house cleaner in Boston, tells the story of the hopes that made her flee her homeland for America, and the fears that sent her back.

[A telephone conversation]:

TONY KAHN:
Hello? Fatima?

FATIMA:
Yes! It's me!

TONY KAHN:
So wonderful to hear your voice!

FATIMA:
Thank you! The same to you! [laughs]

TONY KAHN:
Did you get my message?

FATIMA:
Yes --

[Telephone conversation fades to background]

TONY KAHN:
Hi, everybody! This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. I was talking to my old friend Fatima the other day on the phone. We hadn't spoken in over a year and a half, and wanted to catch up with her and find out how she was doing. And her husband Claudio, and their two daughters. They had lived in the United States, in the Boston area in fact, for about five years before deciding to go back home -- in Brazil.

The story of her stay in the States was one of the first WGBH *Morning Story* podcasts that we did back in October of 2004, which we called *A Better Life*. Since *A Better Life* aired both as a broadcast and as a podcast, we've heard from a lot of listeners who wanted to know what had happened to Fatima and Claudio and the two kids after they'd left the United States. So in today's *Morning Story* we thought we'd replay Fatima's story, and then let you hear some of the conversation I had with her the other night, catching up a year and a half after she left. We call it *Over Here and Over There*.

[Music]

FATIMA:

When I was seven years old, my mom was killed. And I saw it. I never met my father. And so after that, my relatives take care of me, but not like a daughter. But as a servant girl. That's why I know how to clean. [laughs] But something inside of me always tell me to go on, never give up. When I was eighteen years old, I get married, and we have our children. And when they start to grow, I was like – "Oh my God, what can I give to them, living here in Brazil? They are going to be just like me! They're not going to get a good education, to help people and have the opportunity to move on in the world." That's when we decide to, to come to America.

When we arrived here, we work really hard. Really, really really hard! My husband helps me clean house. He deliver papers, and he works delivering pizzas. But, we are illegal. If you are illegal, you are not able to drive. You can't have a job, but you can spend money. [laughs] And there aren't any door open. I feel invisible to the world.

In my eyes, I think that Americans, they live like – how I say – they create a wall. You cannot see inside. Like, if you talk to me, you can see my face. And also you can see a little bit of me. And I cannot see in you. They don't let you in. And it's so, so sad. It happen a lot. You know? Like when Americans get older, I've seen a lot of them at the nursing home, and it breaks my heart. They feel lonely! They work hard their whole, entire life. They don't sometimes – they don't even have time to see what means a family. To be together around the table, having dinner, doing nothing but be together. And then they will spend the rest of their lives in a nursing home with nursings, that they have never met. It's – oh my God.

I'm working now for my kids. Mitali – She's twelve years old. And I think that she don't think like a twelve years old girl. She's really smart; she study at East Somerville. For some people the school of Somerville is not good, but for them it's excellent. [laughs] Excellent because in Brazil they don't have what they have in here. You know? And she's doing really, really well.

After September 11 [2001], if a policeman stop me and they see that I'm not legal, they can handcuffs me and my husband as if we are criminal. Imagine how my kids will feel. Oh my God! And I know a lot of immigrants that are really concerned. It's really hard for you, live in a place they will say, "I'm not legal here. I'm doing something wrong." This feeling, if you are a person who wants to do things right, kills yourself.

If I could stay, and like, study a career, I'd probably study something to work with kids. Because if I'm a good mother, if I know how to raise my children, healthy, with good feelings, walking at the bride's side, I think I could help a lot of kids, too. And I could do a really good job! Not just because of the money, but because you are helping someone when they need. And I know what means need something. And get it.

And even now, like in my case, we are thinking about go back. Be more close with people, more . . . human warm? Human warm. Yeah, I think we feel more it. I think so. I miss it. Human warm. I love it. I love it. Just love it. [laughs]

[Music ends; telephone rings]

FATIMA:

Hello!

TONY KAHN:

Hello? Fatima?

FATIMA:

Yes! It's me!

TONY KAHN:

So wonderful to hear your voice!

FATIMA:

Thank you! The same to you! [laughs]

TONY KAHN:

A lot of people in the United States who now know you because you've been on the radio wanted to find out how you were doing!

FATIMA:

I still on the radio?

TONY KAHN:

You're famous! You made people think about what it was like to really be in your shoes.

FATIMA:

Ahhh. You know, I was very sick. I had a – how you say? – ah-ney-me? ah-ney-me? ah-ney-me-ah?

TONY KAHN:

Oh! Anemia.

FATIMA:

Anemia. Sorry. My pronunciation --

TONY KAHN:

Oh, sure! You had anemia in, in the United States, when I knew you?

FATIMA:

Probably I didn't eat as I should, and I don't know what happened. It was very worried after September 11, and after they start to being so scared about immigrants....

TONY KAHN:

Um, hmm.

FATIMA:

And when I got here, the doctors couldn't believe how I was working and doing everything I was doing. But I, I'm doing okay. I still going to the doctor and everything's going to be fine. Mitali, she's still going to school. I still going to school! To learn English. [laughs]

TONY KAHN:

Tell me! Your English is very good, you know.

FATIMA:

No, it's not. I live in a, how I say, in a little town?

TONY KAHN:

Um hmm.

FATIMA:

So nobody speaks English very well. Even the teachers. Sometimes I think that I speak better than they do! [laughs]

TONY KAHN:

What is the name of the little town that you're in?

FATIMA:

Navidai. We have about 50,000 inhabitants.

TONY KAHN:

And what, what are they like?

FATIMA:

Wonderful! [laughs] Like me! [Fatima and Tony both laugh] Tony, you should come here and see!

TONY KAHN:

What would be a good time of year to come down to your, your small town in Brazil?

FATIMA:

We are in winter now, here.

TONY KAHN:

That's right. You are in --

FATIMA:

Winter! Very cold, here. But anytime of the year that you guys wanna come over would be a pleasure. You're gonna love this. Like tonight, my children are in vacation. Every night their friends come over to dinner. And because it's cold, so I make a lot of different kinds of soup for them. And their parents, everybody! Not just for friends! [Laughs]

TONY KAHN:

Do you really feel that the dreams that you have for your children, you, you will not be able to realize now?

FATIMA:

Tony, I don't know. I have this feeling of giving them what I couldn't have. It's not easy to find a job here. 'Though we're trying by, by our own. How I say, inmobiliaria?

TONY KAHN:

Oh, real estate?

FATIMA:

Yeah! We're working with this. Claudio and me! We just begin this job on December, so that's six months that we're working on this. So I don't know how things are going –

TONY KAHN:

Oh, so you have your own business?

FATIMA:

Yeah! I think everybody's able to do many things in life. [laughs]

TONY KAHN:

Of course. And you more than most. What do you not miss about the United States?

FATIMA:

Working very hard! [This is said with a sigh and a laugh.] And also, well, being so lonely sometimes.

TONY KAHN:

One person said, "Nobody should feel sorry for people like Fatima. They don't deserve to be here. It's -- Why should she complain? And she was taking away jobs from other people."

And, and I wonder what would you say to somebody like that?

FATIMA:

Well, Tony, it's very hard because they don't have the same life that I have. So they are in the right of thinking like that, because they don't know what is, to have a dream. I don't, I don't wish that nobody – how I say? [In Spanish: *Yo no deseo que ningun—que nadie necesite hacer eso algun dia – para nadie.*]

TONY KAHN:

You hope that nobody has to go through what you went through.

FATIMA:

Yes! No, no, no! Not even me! [laughs] But, Tony, let me ask you something.

TONY KAHN:

Sure!

FATIMA:

Did you call me just because you want to – how you say – ask me ask those things, like professionally? [hearty laugh]

TONY KAHN:

Are you afraid --

FATIMA:

That's the only reason?

TONY KAHN:

No. That is one of the reasons, certainly, but I think you gave me a gift when you told me your story. And the way that you told it, let me know that everybody's got a story to tell, and if somebody listens, they, they can tell it from the heart.

How long has it been gone since you've been gone, Fatima?

FATIMA:

One year and a half!

TONY KAHN:

Ohhh! Does it seem like a year and a half to you?

FATIMA:

No. Sometimes less. Time is flying by very quickly, and I, I just can't believe when I look to my children and I see how grow up they are. And, it's like an another opportunity --

TONY KAHN:

Yes, exactly!

FATIMA:

-- of life. That's when we see – when we can see that, how beautiful, how important is to be alive. You know – remember, one time that I told you that I was going to your house, and I stopped by to see the river, and just to breathe? Sometimes we must do that. Breathe!

TONY KAHN:

Yes, breathe.

FATIMA:

It's so wonderful.

TONY KAHN:
Okay.

FATIMA:
All right?

TONY KAHN:
All right. I promise.

FATIMA:
Take care of yourself.

TONY KAHN:
Okay. Bye. And my love to everybody.

[Music begins]

FATIMA:
All right!

TONY KAHN:
Bye bye.

FATIMA:
Bye, Tony. Say "hi" to Harriet.

TONY KAHN:
I shall. Bye bye.

FATIMA:
Bye.

[Music grows a little louder, and then tapers off.]

TONY KAHN:
That was today's *Morning Story, Over Here and Over There*. As always, we're very grateful to Ipswitch, our sponsor for this podcast. If you want to know more about them, check their website out, at <ipswitch.com>. I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H. And as my right-hand man Gary Mott is always found of saying at this point in the podcast –

GARY MOTT:
I'm very fond of saying that our website is <wgbh.org/morningstories> and our email address (we love that email!) is <morningstories@wgbh.org>.

TONY KAHN:

And that's not all he says, but that's all that's gettin' on tape this week. But join us again next week, where you'll hear a good deal from both of us. So catch you then! Bye bye.

[End of Recording]

Original notes from Liz:

This is one transcript that really loses a lot in the transition from sound to the printed page. The emotion behind Fatima's words is as expressive – if not more so – as her words. Also, the musical background adds so much to the listening experience. Fatima's intelligence is evident when she's speaking; I hope that transcript readers will not let the fact that English is not her mother tongue interfere with their recognition of that.

Subsequent notes from Liz:

I was struck while listening to this update originally, and now again, with what a great, great loss to this country it was when Fatima returned to Brazil. Fatima is so open that I'm sure others join me in feeling as if we'd made a friend just by listening to her. Wouldn't it be wonderful if she could come back the U.S.A. and inspire others to be such loving, approachable, appreciative people?

Transcribed by Liz Cooksey <transcripts_liz@bellsouth.net>