

Alma:

I quit because I was fed up and exhausted. No woman in the maquiladora stands up for her rights, neither here nor on the other side of the border. That's why the owners prefer to hire women. ... I had been working for six years in a textile maquiladora, where I nearly destroyed my kidneys and my eyes. I never earned a fixed salary. They paid me by the job, on a piecework basis, as they also call it. ... The dresses we make are beautiful, for very fashionable women. They're incredibly expensive! They sell them in the best stores in the United States and they cost \$200 or \$300. And what do we get? We make 45 pesos [about US \$1] per dress. Incredible, don't you think? We spend ten hours a day in front of a sewing machine to make a man rich and we don't even know him.

María Luisa:

In the factory where I work now, I make 2,458 pesos a week [US \$43]. ... Factory work has its advantages and disadvantages. You work, have money, and can live better than back in the village, even though things keep getting worse. If I had stayed there I simply wouldn't have had any paid work; my only occupation would be at home. Nor would my son be in secondary school, because they have only primary school there. I believe that I will improve my life by having come to Tijuana

Gabriela:

The plants don't have any windows. It's just walls on all sides, so the lights and ventilation are artificial. ... Where I work, there's only one fan for the entire department of sixty workers. The environment is oppressive from bad ventilation; the air is full of gas from arsenic and other chemicals. ... Our eating area is very shoddy, several faded tables and some grills to warm our lunches. Next to the eating area is the casting department, which is the most hazardous because they use very toxic substances; it's always hazy there from all the gases. ...

Obdulia:

... [T]he room we live in isn't big; it always gets dirty and I'm constantly cleaning. For this room we pay 650 pesos [US \$20] a month in rent. We share the only bathroom with twelve other rooms, and we get along well with our neighbors. We have to wash the dishes outside in the laundry sinks, because there is no water in the room.

-Perspectives of Maquiladora Workers in *Interviews in Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora: Life Histories of Women Workers in Tijuana* (1997) excerpt