

TESTIMONY

Lidia Platonoff & Alberto Lozano

Board of Directors,
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Lidia Platonoff:

Normally we don't realize how we are all immersed in migration. I think everyone in this room has a relative somewhere along the line that came from Spain, Italy, or France. If you get to look at the family tree, you will find someone who came from abroad.

My father came to Mexico in 1928, as a result of the situation that was beginning to surface in Russia, when the Bolshevik government came to power with the start of Communism, the change over from the Tsarist period, and people were living in dire poverty.

My father was a Russian peasant and he was the youngest in his family. We had the pleasure of visiting his homeland in 2000, because I felt a great desire to get to know where my father came from, and also to find someone from his family. He never again had any contact with his parents nor siblings. After he died, and one grows up and matures, I realized he had a pain deep in his heart. We went to Poltava, Ukraine and saw the houses of the Russian peasantry made of adobe brick, covered with several layers of straw and limestone, to make them like a cave that would be very well insulated in the winter time. He would tell us the whole winter season was spent inside the house and they made crafts, and very nice embroidery, tablecloths, blouses that you have seen the Russian dancers with when they come here to Mexico, all hand embroidered. They had already made cold meats for the winter because everything was covered with ice and they couldn't go out.

My father left Russia, the Ukraine, and he crossed the entire area from Siberia and Manchuria, into China. All this took about 4 years. He used to say that there were

always good people on the way. Once he was on a train and soldiers boarded it looking for people who wanted to escape, and a small group of Chinese artfully stood in front of him, so that the soldiers passed by without seeing him. He told us how throughout his life, he always felt protected by God.

When he got to China he learnt Chinese and also began to learn English because then he said, "I'm going to America", meaning the United States. Then he took a boat in Shanghai, with only a few letters from a Consul of Denmark, as a presentation to get to the Danish Embassy or Consulate in the U.S. It was a long journey of 40 days on a cargo ship, sometimes without seeing the sun, or anything, because he was down below. The first ship docked in Manzanillo and said, I'm getting off here, not a minute more on the ship. The place was Nueva Rosita and there he met a good person who helped him, although he didn't speak Spanish, he was a Russian foreigner, and at that time, Russians were a bit scary.

However, my father always told us that there were good people, and I say this a lot, because we all should understand this. There are always good people who will help us, whether we are immigrants or not, when we are out feeling rather fearful on the city streets, and we realize there are kind people willing to help, so we should be free from fear. In themselves, people are good.

Then my father reached the capital and began working as a laborer, carrying cans of cement for houses under construction, and so continued until he began to build his own little houses in Lindavista. He began to think seriously of staying in Mexico and learned to speak Spanish. There was a married couple, the Alonso's who took him in as their son, and to date remains his family. They always treated him as a son. Their children were also like his brothers and sisters, and we were their grandchildren and nieces and nephews. Lovely people who were near my dad throughout his life and gave him a family, the family that he couldn't bring over here. He found one in Mexico, good generous people, who took him in.

About 10 years after his arrival, in 1938, he met and married my mother. This wedding was against the wishes of my grandparents because he wasn't only a foreigner, he was also Russian.

My father continued to struggle; he began building more significant houses. There are many houses in the Polanco neighborhood, some of the ones with stonework that he built. He went and worked with Jewish people, with Mexican people, and began making his fortune. My father was very thrifty; I think that should be the first rule for migrants, don't waste money.

In 1955 someone suggested making lubricating oils for cars. My father was interested in the business and became partners with him. Afterwards, the partnership was dissolved, but my father was the one who continued with the business. Today, it is a business that has almost a thousand workers, most employees are in offices. My father was always very concerned about all his workers. He was a man who cared. For example, once a man who had a very swollen gum, and he said, so and so what's wrong? I don't know, sir. But have you been to the doctor ... well, in the end, my dad took him to the doctor. It turned out he had the most terrible appendicitis, if he hadn't have seen a doctor right then he would have died, because he would have developed peritonitis. My father was very humane. He lived the works of mercy in capital letters. He didn't give for the sake of giving, that is no way to help, but if somebody explained what was wrong, he would definitely help him. My father loved his grandchildren very much.

He used to say he had no religion, but the truth is I think that was very devoted to Our Lady. I was about 5 when we went to the Basilica of Guadalupe. We walked there because it was the anniversary of the coronation of the Virgin. My brother and I went with him and my mom couldn't go because my third sister was newborn. I believe my father was devoted to the Virgin, that he had been baptized, but I think that the experiences he lived through during the times of the Bolsheviks, the separation from his family, not knowing absolutely anything about them ever again, had an effect on him and many things were erased from his mind. He personally took me, to enroll in a convent school; I finished primary school, in a school close to home, but then he took Motolinia University where I stayed through high school until I finished my degree, because he cared about our growing up in the faith. He didn't go to Mass but went to church whenever he was worried. I know that, at the time of the war, he had many commitments, contracts that were already in force, and he was a person who always fulfilled his obligations, and they were extremely hard

times and he lost everything he had, but I used to see how he would stop the car and go in to pray to the Virgin.

When he already had his business, he started having kidney problems. They had to operate and the nuns at the hospital said, don't you want us to bring you Communion. No, I am not Catholic nor anything. The nun stood there talking with him, and she said, if you come out of the operation alright, promise God that you will be baptized. The following year he was baptized and confirmed. It was a conditional baptism as most likely he was already baptized. He also made his First Communion and my father and my mother renewed their wedding vows. After, he took some Christianity workshops. He was a very loving, extremely helpful person in the neighborhood. It was new, and he filled it with trees. He used to get up in the middle of the night to see if the police were working on surveillance, he would make sure the gardens were well tended; he personally did his own garden. What I really want to say is that my father was an immigrant who came to Mexico and he was like a Mexican. At the time of the big devaluations in '76, '82 and the others he felt patriotic and never wanted to convert a peso to dollars, because it would further aggravate the situation in Mexico. He always wanted his business to be good for the welfare of his workers. He said: "This business has to grow so the workers' children can work here ", and so it remains today. This is my experience as the daughter of a migrant, which as the years go by, I have been more able to understand what that means.

One small detail is that my father, on 2nd November, ever since I remember as a child, would take us to the cemetery and we would walk around the whole Spanish Cemetery, this was in the '50's more or less, when cemeteries were much better, and he would walk and walk around, and whenever he found an abandoned tomb, he would place flowers there. That's what we always did on 2nd November. I had never understood it, it was something traditional. Long after, I understood that what my father did was like putting flowers on the graves of his grandparents, of his parents.

One of my goals when I arrived in the land of my father was to put flowers on the graves of his parents. When we got there, it turned out that during Communism, all the churches and cemeteries had been destroyed, because graves give people their

roots, that's where their loved ones are, and in the church that's where their faith is. Church and cemetery disappeared overnight. Now the cemetery is a large square and there is a garden, and as the dead are underneath, because they just took everything on top off, trees and plants have planted in one corner where there is a sculpture of a poet, a Ukrainian writer called Ivan Kotlyarevskiy , that's where we laid a bouquet of flowers to our grandparents. It is a story I already wrote a book about for my grandchildren, because I say they should know their roots, know where they come from. I feel very proud to have the Russian roots of my father and Mexican descent on my mother's side, and best of all is that my father taught me to love my country.

Alberto Lozano:

I remember a story about Nicholas, Nicholas Platonoff was his name. Someone came and stood in the doorway of his home. Then, with no fear, he asked him what was up, what do you want and the man said I don't need anything. I came to thank you because I came here blind and you realized and without knowing me you sent me to a hospital, you talked to the doctor, paid all the bills, and look at me, I have my sight back.

Well, Lidia spoke of her experience of living with her migrant father and I am going to talk a bit about the subject of our migrant children. We have 8 children, and of the 8, there are only 2 living in Mexico City. It really wasn't that we gave them the example to seek out different environments, but the world has changed. Speaking here in this congress on migration makes us aware of the serious problems migrants have.

Well, six children have left us to seek a better habitat, better opportunities development and have found really great things. Our oldest daughter is in Saltillo. She is the director of a school for native Mexican Indian girls and teaches them hotel and catering. As soon as they finish their studies, the hotels, including ones in Monterrey and all those places, are looking to hire girls from that school, because they are very well trained.

Another son, the eldest boy, went to Poland. He had already finished his career as an industrial engineer here, and met a lady over there, who was married with children, who then came to have an important position in politics. My son arrived during a change in government. The lady told my son she was being offered an important position in the new government, but that on consulting with so-and-so, and so-and-so, everyone had advised her not to accept because government was awful. My son was the one who said, this is a chance for you to be useful, go ahead. I followed his advice and not the others'. My son acts as an advisor to this lady and is still very close to her family.

I have another daughter who married a Spaniard. By the way there was a nice story because he came to meet us and then returned for the wedding. It turns out I was with him the day he was getting married. He already had his trousers on, white shirt but still getting ready when his cell phone rings, it was a friend of his, who had no idea where he was, and so he said: do you know where I am and what I'm doing? I am in Mexico and I'm getting married, so it was a real surprise for his friend.

All that I'm talking about years ago wouldn't have happened. Migration wasn't so common, although there were pools of people coming over here, like the Spanish, but it wasn't happening all over the world, it was because of the problems, and now our children are leaving us

At the time the Spanish came here, it was because in Spain there were problems of hunger in their country and we were prospering. They are simply life changes, but in all cases you can see the positive side. When I get to read the papers, I realize that what they do is spread alarmist news that attract readers, but which dampen your morale tremendously, while what the migrant really needs is encouragement to reach out and open doors, to come and be successful and have other opportunities and enjoy them.

Let's see, another of my daughters went to Cancun, when Cancun was starting out a few years ago. Her husband is an American who she met here in Mexico City. They are paving their way out there, he's in real estate and she helps a lot because she is an expert in computing, which is what she studied. Every weekend they manage to go and visit places they don't know and that is wonderful. Cancun is a fantastic

place, or Yucatan, because they go to places that have are unknown to people or very little either by boat, or by bike through streams and they have a wonderful time.

If we were to come to a conclusion, ever since Don Nicholas arrived here, migration in our family has been a wonderful opportunity. We must give our migrants that optimism and we must support all of them so that, with the rest of humanity, our humanity, we can make that journey in search of a better life for families more feasible.

Lidia Platonoff:

I have a letter here. We forgot to say we have a son who last week, on 12th of this month emigrated to Canada. He has 4 children. He felt drowned in Mexico City. He wanted to go to live outside of the capital and someone suggested Canada. They had been there twice, for work and they thought it was a good idea. So as not to make a long story short, he left on 12th, that is, a week ago on Monday, and is already in Canada, beginning to pave his way. He didn't have a job or anything waiting. A company here in Irapuato is going to send him frozen vegetables to sell there. This letter is from my son Alberto, who is in Poland. He sent it to his brother the day he left. It is a letter that I am going to read because it really is very interesting.

Poland, October 10th, 2009.

Dear Ernesto, Irene, nieces and nephews,

May our Lord Jesus Christ and the Virgin of Guadalupe help you in such beautiful and important moments that you are now experiencing. I will try to be brief.

In two days, the nature of your personal, family, social and

professional life will change radically. Each of you as a person will undergo a period of intense maturing.

Each of you, especially Ernesto and Irene will have to act very righteously, in the broadest sense possible to succeed. You will live in a country with customs, beliefs and traditions that are completely different to Mexico. This will greatly enrich you.

You may delve deeper into the knowledge of mankind and the world in general. You will face the beautiful challenge of assimilating the positive and the negative aspects as your new environment.

Your family will experience intense moments that it will bring you even closer together.

If you take care of family unity, if you communicate among yourselves and respond first to the needs of others before your own. Each will have many needs considered more important than the others´.

You will create the foundation of what is so important for the stability of the family. You will have to be assimilated into the new society, taking care not to lose your identity.

During the early years you will be like strangers, then like foreigners, and then later you will be known, and finally you will become members of that society. To achieve this, you need to be very careful, respectful, and open. At the same time, you should be careful to always maintain your standards of conduct, without hurting others when they differ in their ways.

Always remember that the Canadians didn't come and live near you, nor even asked you to go and live near them, you are the ones who want to live near them, never forget, you should adapt to them, and not vice versa, all the time remaining true to your principles.

The biggest challenge will be in the professional field. So far you have worked in a very familiar and friendly environment, where you had the support, guidance and respect of many people who love you. From now on, you will be working in a strange environment, where you must fend for yourselves.

Advice over the phone and via e-mail may not be as effective, since the others don't know the environment you are living in. The way you make decisions and how you reach them, your tenacity, resolve, skill, perseverance, promptness in correcting errors, there will be many, and so on, will have a major impact on the success of your business.

You are taking a step that you will have been thinking, planning and dreaming about for a long time. It won't be easy, on the contrary, it will be very difficult but possible.

You should always analyze your steps coldly and critically, and, quickly correct any errors that occur, there will be lot. Take very safe steps and have a long-term perspective.

Be aware that for the first few years you will suffer a lot, lack of money, time, success, etc. and in that time you have to sow the desire for a better life in the medium and long term.

Be very careful and clever, don't waste a cent, always save some money. At the beginning with savings and after with profits, only in 10 years time will you begin to achieve your

desire. 10 years is a long time, but then come dozens more.

It's something they want to do in order to improve your standard and quality of life that you have had until now. It is risky and difficult but achievable, don't ever forget that.

You have to weigh the risks, be very virtuous in the face of difficulties and have firm hope in the realization of your projects.

In early June 1995, I was asked if I wanted to come and live in Poland, I immediately said yes, but was asked me to think about it. The confirmation was made on 26 June. From that moment we went through a very intense time of preparation until 3rd October arrived. We said goodbye at the airport and I got on the plane. Until then my head had been full of preparation. I had not paid much attention to what lay before me. I got to my seat where I was alone among strangers. The plane taxied on the runway, the pilot received permission to take off, the engines revved. The plane begins a rapid acceleration, the passengers feel the momentum as we feel stuck to our seats, I feel a lump in my throat. I look outside the window and on the top floor of the parking lot, I see a group of people with a banner "Goodbye Alberto, we love you." My heart sunk to my feet, I was stunned and began to cry. I was all alone. My heart was torn.

For a point I understood a certain part of the madness I was committing. Still crying, I could hardly breathe. My mind kept seeing that sign with the people so dear to me, around it, I was still alone. The plane rose and rose to full power and I wanted to jump out. Then the plane passed through some clouds, it was dark, then the plane came out of the clouds and the sun's

rays shone on me. It was God telling me you're not alone, we are together. I felt comforted but I kept crying, until exhausted, after several hours of meditation, between sobs, I fell asleep.

I arrived in Poland and was welcomed by a wonderful family that so far has always loved, guided and supported me. Thanks to God and to this family, it wasn't so difficult to adapt.

The first years, I think the first ten, were very hard work, especially in the professional field. My biggest mistakes were when I wanted the professional development to be faster than normal. When I made decisions that were riskier than usual, I paid dearly for them, especially the first three years. After that I decided not to take risks. Faster progress should be grounded, not on risky decisions, but on labor intensity. I got on much better, but that wasn't the best decision either. I paid a high price for it, since I actually did develop, but my family suffered from the intense activity. I suffered too.

Now I understand that things have to be done with great intensity but it isn't good to want to jump steps. The results don't cover the price paid, the risk or deterioration of family life.

If in early June I had had the experience I have now, my answer would have still have been yes, go to Poland, but I would have been calmer and more collected, with a better hierarchy of things. Only God knows what would been the result. I do not regret the mistakes I made, I mention it now to convey my experience to you, so you who are going to have it more difficult for me, can get more out of it.

I'm happy and I think this is due to one thing, try to be always close to God. This is all that really matters. Something very good has been to have good friends, but that requires always being respectful and not asking for more than you should.

Remember the most important thing, our life on earth is temporary, we are on the way to heaven. Successes and failures are relative and we cannot judge them. We can learn from experience to seek a better future, but never judge. Only God knows if things went right or wrong. Always be close to God, in grace, relying on the family that although far, will always be near, always be happy in the face of suffering, needs, problems, successes and mistakes, but always be happy. Learn to distinguish and separate worldly things from things of the soul.

The whole family suffers with you at this very moment and will forever. We will try to support you with our prayers, everything else depends on you. Ask for what you want, we will try to help you, knowing that as far as advice is concerned, we don't understand, don't see, nor feel your circumstances.

May the Lord Our God give you special enlightenment to live this new stage of life with success, however that may be understood. Stay under the cover of Our Lady of Guadalupe and you will always be fine.

With much love, from your brother and uncle who loves you so much,

Alberto