

Nuts and Bolts: Stories from New Britain Manufacturing

Connecticut Humanities CT at Work Project

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Interview Subject: Clara Banos

Factory subject worked at: Corbin

Clara is what some would call a pistol. Even at 73, her petite frame vibrates with energy, and her thick Cuban accent colors every emphatic statement. As she recalls her work history, it's not difficult to imagine her on a busy factory floor, deft fingers cutting keys alongside massive machines. Starting in the 1960s, Clara worked for P. & F. Corbin manufacturing keys in their New Britain factory. She originally immigrated to the United States at the age of 23, a mother of two young children, who didn't speak a word of English when she first landed on American soil. Starting out in New York City, she soon moved with her husband's family to New Britain, seeking the promise of a booming industrial town and opportunities for work.

"I was in my early twenties. I came all by myself with two little kids. And believe it or not, I'm proud of myself. I never had welfare, I never had food stamps and I didn't know English. I started at 23, by myself... and I made it." There is pride in Clara's voice, but also a softness, notes of gratitude and awe. She speaks of America in mythic terms, of its opportunity and promise. This is her country, she says again and again, and it will always be her country.