



AFIRE CHICAGO

ALLIANCE OF FILIPINOS FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT

TRANSCRIPTION

Margarita Espenilla Interview

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Margarita Espenilla

Interviewer: Christine Sumog-oy

Ano po ang inyong pangalan?

Ako po ay si Margarita Espenilla. Or call me Maggi.

Maggi, pwede po ba kayong magbahagi ng kwento tungkol sa inyong kabataan.

Sure! Galing lang ako sa mahirap na pamilya. My parents were farmers. And I grew up as a hardworking child. Until now. Dahil syempre, mahirap lang kami. I learned a lot of work from my childhood until now.

Saan po kayo ipinanganak? And what do you remember most about your childhood?

Ako ay ipinanganak sa Santa Fe, Leyte. Pero lumaki ako sa Tacloban City. At ang natatandaan ko sa childhood ko, is very, I can say, it's very hard to remember. Kasi nga dahil sa mahirap lang kami. 7 years old pa lang ako, I can remember na natuto na ako ng mga mabibigat na trabaho. Because my father died in my early age. My mom worked as a dressmaker. So kaming mga magkakapatid ay tumira sa isa naming kapatid na medyo may kaya. So doon ako nag-aral. In exchange to my work with my sister, treating me like a slave. So maliit pa lang ako, nung elementary, I have to finish all the household work, being a child at that time, kung baga sa ngayon eh child abuse na yun. Dahil hindi yun pinapansin at that time sa probinsya, I have to go on. Just to live and matupad ang mga pangarap ko sa buhay.

Ang ambisyon ko nooy ay para maging isang nurse. So dahil ambisyosa ako, nagtiis ako na magtrabaho bilang katulong duon sa kapatid ko. Nag-aral ako mula elementary hanggang college. Dahil nga sa hirap ng pera, at sa maltreatment ng kapatid ko, hindi ako nakapagtapos ng nursing sa aking college. At natukso ako sa pakikipagkaibigan without the experience of having boyfriends like that. And having experiences as how an ordinary child would experience like playing, etc. Hindi ko yun naexperience. Until I reach my teenage life, I never experienced having boyfriend. Kaya nung nakakilala ako ng isang guy, dahil may tindahan kami, yung kapatid ko, may grocery ako ang bantay, may isang guy na ahente ng Colgate Palmolive. Habang he was posting the advertisement, he was looking at my beauty. Na-staple ang finger niya. From that time, hindi niya na ako nilubayan. Through my neighbor, he learned about me. Kasi close friend nya ang neighbor ko, kaya tanong sya



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ng tanong sa kanya about me. So the next day, nag deliver sya ng mga products sa tindahan namin, kilala niya na ako, at nagtaka ako. At dahil kinwento ng friend ko na ang kapatid ko ay matapang, ang ginawa ng guy, kinaibigan nya ang kapatid ko, at binigyan ng maraming regalo na mga Colgate products. So the next visit, nung kinausap na ng guy yung sister ko, tinanong nya kung pwede ko ba ihatid si Maggi sa school. Pumayag yung sister ko agad. To cut it short, siya ang naging first boyfriend ko, at naging husband ko kaagad.

So that's the story why I was not able to finish my studies. Because when I got married, akala ko maipagpatuloy ko yung pag-aaral ko. Naniwala ako sa kanya. But luckily, I got three kids from my first husband. And after that, I was unlucky to raise my kids with him because he passed away early.

So I worked hard. I visited Manila. Batasang Pambansa was only under construction at that time. Because I was alone raising my kids, I applied as a janitress. Out of 127 applicants, only 17 of us were accepted. So ako lang ang college level. At medyo may beauty. So natanggap ako doon? Alam mo kung saan ako na-assign? Duon sa area where the President, the First Lady, the assembly people were eating. I worked there for four years.

The Assembly Woman Putri Pacason from Mindanao has an agency for Saudi Arabia at that time. She liked me very much. She appreciated that I work hard. So she approached me. She talked to me silently. And she asked me if I am willing to work in Saudi Arabia at that time. Nagdalawang isip muna ako. Kasi I have three small kids. What will happen if I leave my kids? But I need money to feed my children.

And luckily, I was able to go to Saudi Arabia, and work there for eight years. With a Prince family. We were eight workers there, from different nationalities. Ako lang ang Pilipina. Every year, nagtu-tour sila, at ako lang ang sinasama. That's why nakarating ako ng Paris, naka-akyat ako ng Eiffel Tower, nakapunta ako ng London, nakapunta ako ng Spain, tatlong lugar, so yun ang nangyari sa buhay ko. Habang my kids were with my mom.

So on my first balikbayan, there we go, I met this guy. Only in the plane. Not thinking he is a Filipino. But I was encouraged by my friend who is a Filipina, she said Oh Maggi, that guy has been staring at you for a long time. I did not believe her. I said, maniwala ako sayo. Eh yung friend ko pala ang may gusto. Since marami akong dala para sa mga anak ko, when I stood up, going down the plane, he followed me, and grabbed my bag, and he said, oh kabayan, mukhang mabigat ang dala mo. Eto na, siya na yung Daddy ni Mona. Within 8 months of exchanging letters, he proposed to marry me.



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When we both went back to Philippines for a vacation, we married through Princess Ali Pacaso. Because she was the one who brought me to Saudi Arabia. To make it fast. Because we only have one month vacation. So to make the story short, we got married. We had Mona. That's why she was born in Saudi Arabia. So I can say, we have a good life in the Philippines before, because we were both working abroad. We were able to buy a house and lot in Tacloban. I can say, I have a better life at that time when we were in the Philippines, because we have a house, we have a car, and then our kids were going to private schools.

It was just lucky that my eldest son got married to an American citizen who is also a Bisaya. My son was also studying at the time for Political Science in the biggest university in Tacloban. This lady visited Tacloban at that time. So she had a cousin who is a classmate of my son. When she visited this school, she saw my son, and she really likes my son very much. That's why they met, and they had communication, kaya nagka-asawa sila, and that's the reason why my son came to America.

After how many years, my son decided to petition me and my husband. That's why we were able to come in 2008. My husband at that time was working in Libya. He's been working there for 19 years. He doesn't have plans to move to the US but because there is no American embassy in Libya, he has no choice but to come to the US, although it is against his will to come here. So he has no choice. Because I was imagining that here in the US, we can have a good life. And I always hear from people that US is a land of milk. I was imagining that here in the US, you will live like a princess. But it's not my expectation.

So eto nga napunta kami sa America, with our kids. After we got our green card, I started petitioning my children, my baby daughter who was only 14 years old at that time, and we let her finish her college in the Philippines as a nurse. When she finished her college, she took the Board exam, which was a requirement here in the US. Until she passed the Board exam, that's the time she came here in the US and she is now working as a nurse in Las Vegas. And the next is Mona. She was supposed to wait for about 18 years. But because she was born in Saudi Arabia, the visa was based on her birthplace which is Saudi Arabia. So instead of waiting for 18 years, she only had to wait for 7 years.

Now that we are all here... I have three kids here...

So how do you describe your life here in the US? And how is it different from the Philippines?



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Honestly speaking, I can say money here is easy, but life is hard. Very hard. All of us know, since we are all from Philippines, life there even if we are just poor, we can afford to pay housemaids. But here in America, you have to do everything. The difference there is in the Philippines, we have a strong family bonding. But here in the US, sadly, we always have no time to talk with family. Because everybody is busy. But to make myself busy and happy, I joined this group in Chicago. I enjoyed my life here in Chicago. Better than Las Vegas. Because I met more Filipinos in the community. Like the AFIRE. I am so happy and I am enjoying. I am so thankful to Christine for encouraging me and giving me importance in all the activities. Which keeps me busy.

Ano po yung mga naging trabaho ninyo dito sa Chicago? Can you tell me more about your work?

Before I came to Chicago, I have already been working for seven years as a caregiver in Las Vegas. I moved to Chicago for good. I have been applying since I arrived here. I was given an assignment week ago. It was just unlucky because the client already passed away. I am expecting another assignment in April. And God willing, this will be a good start here. I will be more happy and more busy dahil magkakaroon na ako ng regular na trabaho.

What do you like about your work as a caregiver?

It is really my passion to take care of the elderlies and help their needs. Although I can say, I was not able to help my own mother. When she was getting older. Dahil andito na ako sa America. I want to spend all my time to all the clients to help their needs.

What did you not like about your work as a caregiver?

So far, of all the clients I have so far, I can say na wala naman talagang naging hindi magandang experience. I believe it depends kung paano mo aalagaan ang isang tao. Paano mo siya i-co-communicate. The same thing, how will they treat you. Kasi ang iba hindi maganda ang kanilang pagtrato sa mga matatanda. Kaya hindi maganda ang nagiging experience nila. So far, I feel so blessed and thankful na lahat naman ng mga inalagaan ko na they are so nice to me, because I am so nice to them. Yun lang ang maishishare ko sa mga caregivers. Sana yung mga inaalagaan natin, huwag tayong magkwenta ng trabaho. Kung anong nararapat, huwag nating sabihin na, ay ito lang ang assignment ko. So hangga't kaya natin, gawin natin, para they will appreciate our jobs. Next time, people will recommend you to other clients that you are good.

At any point here in the US, did you feel exploited or taken advantage of?



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In Las Vegas, with my first employer, especially Filipino employers in Group Homes. We have 10 clients and we were only two caregivers. And the bad experience I have, dahil maraming workers na undocumented. They accept low pay. Kaming documented are affected. Eh bakit si ano, tumatanggap ng ganito, oh pumapayag na gawin to. Eh hindi ko alam noon na may right pala akong lumaban bilang documented. Yun yung experience ko na hindi maganda. They are exploiting the workers because are both Filipinos - documented and undocumented. Which are not supposed to be.

Ano pong masasabi ninyo duon sa mga undocumented na iniexploit dahil sa kanilang status?

Well, para sa akin, honestly speaking, duon sa mga undocumented, siguro alam nila yun na kung anong mangyayari sa kanila. Kung baga....

Ano pong naging treatment sa inyo ng inyong mga employers?

So far, nuong sa Las Vegas pa ako, yun lang ang exploitation na na-experience ko sa mga employers ko na mga Filipino. Dito naman sa Chicago, ang experience ko naman dito sa napagtrabahuan ko, they were so nice. And this coming assignment, another new client, I am expecting to have a nice client too as I will do my best to be helpful to her needs.

Ano yung mga practices or yung mga ginagawa mo para maging maayos ang relasyon mo sa mga kliyente mo?

Mostly, itong mga kliyente na elderlies ay mga moody. Kung baga, mahirap ispelingin ang ugali. Kung may tantrum ang matanda, you have to divert their attention. You have to tell some stories. Or i-walk mo sila. Or show your love by always being with your client. Everytime. At all times. As much as possible. So that they feel that they are loved. So number one yun, na they feel they are loved. Kaya nga nagugustuhan ko nila. You must show your care and love for them. Para sila naman ay mabait sayo. Yun ang experience ko.

Narinig nyo na po ba yung Illinois Domestic Workers Bill of Rights? Ano po ba ang alam ninyo tungkol sa bagong batas na ito?

Ang maalaala ko, sa DWBOR, ay yung karapatan natin bilang mga domestic workers, yung karapatan natin na makapagpahinga, yung karapatan natin na respetuhin din, karapatan na makatanggap ng tamang sahod, at karapatang mabigyan ng dignity.



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Paano po natin ito maipapaalam sa ibang mga Filipino na nagtatrabaho bilang domestic workers? Ano ang magawa natin para maipapaalam ito sa kanila?

First of all, kelangan itong mga kapwa nating mga Filipino ay maging member ng AFIRE, para ma-inform sila, dahil ang AFIRE ang number one na nagbibigay ng mga impormasyon, tungkol sa domestic workers rights.

Paano po ninyo ma-describe so far ang inyong naging partisipasyon sa AFIRE so far? Ano pong naging experience ninyo as a member?

Well, I am learning a lot. Kahit bago pa lang ako. I am enjoying. I feel loved and entertained well by the members. I am learning more and I want to attend more forums or meetings. And I want to meet more members as much as possible if I have time.

What do you hope we could achieve together as a Filipino community here in Chicago? Ano yung mga pangarap mo para sa mga Filipinos dito sa Chicago?

As much as possible, if we are given the opportunity by God to help each other. At saka, yung mag-respetuhan ang bawat isa. Meron ka man or wala. Tsaka yung being friendly. Iwasan ang tsismis. Magtulungan tayo as much as possible.

Finally po, anong one important lesson na natutunan mo sa inyong paglaki, sa naging experience nyo sa Pilipinas, na dala dala mo hanggang dito sa Chicago?

Most of all, kelangan lang nating maging matatag. Maging masipag. At friendly. Para magkaroon tayo ng maraming kaibigan. Mameet mo yung ibang tao na pareho kayong minimithi. Na maging matulungin. Or friendly.

One last question, what message do you have for Filipino immigrants here in the US during this critical time?

Either documented or undocumented, we need to have trust in ourselves. To do the right thing. Para hindi tayo magsisi sa huli. As much as possible, work hard. Share your blessings. Be open to one another. Para makilala natin ang bawat isa. Yun lang ang masasabi ko.

Thank you so much Maggi for your time.

Thank you also for giving me this opportunity.