



Olola Ann Olib's Oral History
English Translation

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Olola Ann Olib
Interviewer: Christine Sumog-oy
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Can you introduce yourself?

I am Olola Ann Olib, senior citizen, Filipina, and a caregiver.

Can you tell us a story about your childhood and about your hometown. Where did you spend most of your childhood? And what did you miss most about your childhood?

I have a happy childhood. I am the fourth child. I have three elder brothers. The one next to me is a boy. My brothers play with kids in our neighborhood who are all boys. So my playmates are all boys as well. That's why my mom thought I was going to be a lesbian. Because I was not wearing dresses. I only wear shorts.

And then I grew up in a town in Dipolog. At that time it was called the sleepy town of Dipolog. It was not chaotic. Our place is very quiet. And then people actually know who their neighbours are. Next to our house was the Congressman's house. We have a beautiful neighborhood. At that time, which is in 1950s, we still don't have motorcycles yet. Our mode of transport at that time was a "kalesa". I studied there until highschool. When I finally reached college, that's the time that I moved out of Dipolog. I really wanted to be out of Dipolog because as years went by, I noticed that the city gets more crowded with people. And I realized that the town is getting smaller for me. That's why I had to leave and move to Manila. I wanted to be in a place where you can be free to move anywhere. In Dipolog, people can just easily find you, so you really cannot do anything else. Everyone just knows you there. You really can't move around a lot. So I don't like it. I like it better to be just like an atom in the air where you are free to do what you want to do. So I had to move to Manila early. That was in 1975, after my college. I moved to Manila and I have to work there.

How was your experience working in Manila? And at that time, did you ever think of ever going to the US?

No, I never thought of that. I have an aunt here in San Diego. My parents really wanted me to take up law. They even thought of sending me to a law school here. That was my dad's dream. But my aunt said, if she is single, I will take her to the US. But if she is married, it will be difficult. So then I got married, and I stopped dreaming of becoming a lawyer. Although it was my first ambition. But then we don't really have to be a lawyer to be successful. We don't have to take up



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journalism in order to be able to write. My first article landed in the national magazine in 1976. That's when I realized that my writings can actually land up in national papers. I wanted to be a field researcher because I had background in economics. Also because I don't want to stay in an office for a whole day. I want to go out. That was good. And at the same time, I had the chance to write many things. I enjoyed that.

I had worked with the Department of Environment, so I traveled the whole country, from North to South. Every inch of that, I visited that. So yeah, I enjoyed that job. Although I don't know what's wrong with me. Because when I get bored, I tend to move out, and I don't care even if it's a government office, or a private office. If I get bored in one thing, I move out. So that's what happens. I moved from the government office. To the private office. To the newspaper. And back to the Office of the President. Because I got bored again in the private office work, that's why I wanted to go back to government office work. And finally I said, no I don't like this job. I just want to be a volunteer. So I volunteered after that. After I left the Office of the President in 1998.

At which point of your life or career did you decide to move to the US?

Actually, I didn't really think of coming to the US to work. It was just a coincidence. I had a conference in Puerto Rico. I had to stop by LA. I have so many friends in LA. So when they heard I was there, they came to see me, and they all advised me to not go back home to Philippines anymore. There is nothing there. And I asked, what will I do here. Then they said, you take care of the elderlies. I said, what?! I don't know how to do that! But they advised that I can actually learn it and study in a caregiving class. So I went. And that's exactly what I want. You can decide on your own. You don't have to consult anybody. And then I said, ok let's try it. And then I received a job notice, there is a need for support in a hospital, so they need a volunteer. I was the first volunteer. And they took like five of us for the interview. And the family took me. I said, oh my God, I thought I was just guessing. And the family said, ok we can hire her. And then they chose me. So that was my first encounter in terms of caregiving.

So that's how you just continued the process of staying here at that time?

Yes, I just continued the process. And then I realized I enjoyed the work. I felt I was just playing. I enjoyed it because I like interacting with people. Especially the elderlies. I enjoy being with them. Even if they are sick with dementia, or alzheimer's. I enjoyed it. I didn't get so cranky about them. I enjoyed the work. And I also learned that this ailment gives them this kind of behaviour. And in the process I learned a lot. Many things. Especially because I moved from one patient to the other. Until I decided to improve my skills. I went to school some more. I took homemaker course. To enhance what I know. And the skills.



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What did you not like about your job?

I did not like it when I was new here. Because I was only a tourist. And I wasn't supposed to work. But nobody asked for my green card, or work permit. When they interviewed me, and they asked me what I can do, and I said I can do many things, and they took me, and they never asked any certificate. I even forgot my certificates in LA when I came to Chicago. I forgot all those things because I thought it was not needed.

I also did not like it when I was still a tourist because there was an employment agency that took advantage of me. I know that they deducted money from my pay, supposedly for my taxes, for my Medicare, and everything. But they didn't give me a copy of the W-2 form. Because they cannot. Because I didn't have an SSS at that time. They just continued deducting money from my pay. And that had been happening for about 2 years.

When did you realize that they have been exploiting you?

I realized it when I had a friend. When it got worse because they would delay my pay. And then sometimes they give me the check. But still they say, don't deposit it, something like that. But you can't complain. Because they always emphasize that I don't have a green card, or a work permit. They would say, oh her paper is only this, only that. I said, fine, nobody asked me to show what they're doing. I didn't even think that it was illegal for me to work. Something like that. No, there's nothing there in my mind. Because I was in LA, when I took this study. And this was a study to become a caregiver. And they did not say you are not supposed to work. They allowed me to study this thing, to have the skills, and they didn't say that you need these to be able to work. I showed them my passport. It was the tourist passport. And nobody said you cannot work. So I didn't mind all about that. I only realized it when my friend told me, the reason the agencies are doing this to you is because you are not documented. I said, what? He said, yes, I will go with you to that office, I'll talk to them. He told the agency, why are you doing this to her, she complains that you're doing this, and you're delaying her pay, or something like that. And the agency said, she has no documents. And my friend said, well I'm marrying her, and we'll get married this summer, here are my papers, put that on record.

From the time on, they became more up to date with my payment. Ok Anne, here's your pay. Because there's somebody now who could represent me. Although I know what my friend said was not true. He only said it to straighten up the agency.



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So you mean the agency was just taking advantage of undocumented workers?

Yes! I think most of us were undocumented in that office. And they deducted some amounts from our pay, but they never shared with us the W-2. How can they give you the W-2 if you don't have the SSS number.

Why do you think they are taking advantage of undocumented workers?

Probably they don't even report us. And most of us were undocumented. I knew that. Then the pay was low. We were only paid 100\$ a day. I realized that when I was able to get a direct employment. At first, I was hired for 120\$ a day. After a few months, they increased my pay to 150\$ because they didn't want me to leave. So I realized I could actually get more money if they just pay me well. So that's when I had to leave the agency.

When did you start becoming more aware of your rights as a domestic worker?

Just recently, when I was informed that we have now rights. But before, I tried to write to the Office of the Attorney General. I didn't know where to go. I just wanted to write to different offices - Office of Senator Durbin, Office of Senator Gutierrez. I talked about the problems of undocumented workers like me. Like if they can pass something where we can be exempted from all of these because we are working well, we are earning, we are contributing to the community here, we pay our taxes, we pay our rentals for our apartments.

How did you get the idea of writing to government officials?

Because in your email, sometimes, I don't know how it came, that there's a group called Americans for Immigration Reform. I got it in the email, when they ask you to post your story, or write a position paper. I got responses from them, so I was encouraged. The first thing I said is that in cases of undocumented workers, we actually didn't come to the US as undocumented actually. We had our tourist visa. And then visa just lapsed. If we can just settle for measures how to correct this, we would be willing to do it. To send us back this soon, I think it is not healthy. Because they also have elderlies in their homes. So I think that made sense. One time I received a response from the Offices of Senators Durbin and Guttierrez, and they said said, oh we will incorporate your suggestion. So I was encouraged. But I had a computer crash. I lost all my data.

I think it was also an advantage for you to have a good writing skills, for you to be able to write a position paper for the government officials.

Yes, I am used to lobbying in the Philippines. Usually, we lobby in the Congress.



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So when you finally learned about the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, what did you think about it?

The more that it should be encouraging for the undocumented workers, for domestic workers like me, both documented or undocumented. But I discussed about this with the other domestic workers who are undocumented, and they said yeah, we are happy about this, but still we are afraid, I think that the administration's campaign is against the undocumented, so they are still afraid to make a demand in the public - that we need this, we need that. But since I knew this DWBOR, it made me, it spoiled me. Because I get to select now my job. If I don't like the terms, I get to select other options.

So you feel you have more power now to decide?

Yeah I could finally say when work is not acceptable for me, or the terms are unreasonable, or when the work is too dangerous for me. And then, agencies say ok, just stay there for a couple of days and we will give you something else.

So given the political climate right now, how can we work together to protect the community, especially under the new administration, and since you also mentioned, that some undocumented workers are still afraid.

Yeah, people still have fears in going out in the open. Nothing has developed ever since with immigration policies. There were announcements about executive orders.

Well, they started arresting and deporting people.

They probably have been arresting. But maybe only those involved with crimes.

In what ways can we involve people about what's going on?

You know it should come from the government. They should come up with better announcements of policies, not sowing fear. Because they are sowing something. They should issue policies that are not harmful to undocumented people. There should be a guidance for undocumented people on what to do. That can be beneficial for the government and the communities as well. I would also suggest more ground working activities for non-government agencies or organizations. There should be more work in the ground. Not really to interfere in personal matters. But to help them address their problem. And go around the community. So that they can freely move around. They are not criminals. Why do they have to issue orders



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sowing fear and hatred? I really feel for them. How about their social life? How will they celebrate birthdays? They are fearful.

So finally, what message do you have for undocumented workers who are living with fear right now?

I believe that they are afraid because even the Philippine government cannot interfere, and come up, and talk about it. Our governments are fighting. The Philippine President himself said I cannot help you. What kind of President is that who could say he cannot help his people in other countries. So that is a very big problem to them. I even heard someone that they would just rather go home now even when they are not ready to go home, because they also have problems in the Philippines. Some of them don't have homes where they can stay.

If you could talk to an undocumented worker right now, what will be your message for that person?

I always tell them, just go on. And when they think that they have earned enough savings, enough to start a business, then they can go home. Because what can you do, if this hate thing continues for six years.

How about those who have already families here and therefore cannot find it easy to be going back to Philippines and leaving their families here?

Exactly. That's really a problem. Some of them have a spouse here, and another spouse in the Philippines. They have two families - here in the US and in the Philippines. I know an undocumented person, who spends 6 months here in the US, and another 6 months in the US, having partners in both countries. They make their own problems.

How about those who have family only here in the US?

That's the problem. Also because the kids are still studying. Because they are still waiting for orders.

If they are aware of their rights, they can protect themselves.

Rights can also be unclear. If these rights can actually be protected with their documentation. The provision about minimum wage is not even clear. It's not clear how much. It's not clear in the law.



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How do we raise awareness then?

We can talk to the authorities. How much really is the minimum wage? Because a lot of domestic workers are confused. Because employers say different things. It's also different in California. They said they already have 15\$ minimum wage. What minimum wage can you claim now?

So you mean there's a need for us to educate more domestic workers regarding minimum wage, regarding all of these rights, and to work towards the possibility of getting wage increase?

Yes! Do we need to lobby more? Do we need to get this minimum wage clear? With which department? With Congress? Where's Congress now? If there's something on minimum wage, they didn't say how much.

So we actually have the FAQ for minimum wage. But I think it is just a matter of letting people know.

Yeah, we need to let people know what minimum wage they can receive. Depending also on their work - if it's housekeeping, caregiving, etc. Those who are involved in the health care provision.

What is your final message to the Filipino community in Chicago? And also to the members of AFIRE?

We have to cooperate with each other. If one person has a problem, do not just keep it to yourself. The AFIRE is here to help. We have pro bono lawyers. Although not everyday, but we can come up with a schedule. Just come! Don't hide! I said just don't travel along boundaries. That's where probably enforcers stay. But not inside Chicago. Because here in Chicago, the Mayor is supporting us, but what about outside.

Thanks Ann for your time.

No problem.