



MAGGI ESPENILLA

63 years old, caregiver, community worker

From Tacloban, Philippines

living in the US since 2008

“I Worked Hard to Support My Family”: Maggi’s Story

“I am learning a lot, even if I am still new to the Filipino community in Chicago. I feel loved and supported by other members. I enjoy attending more meetings and meeting more members as much as I can so we can keep building a strong community together.”

Maggi Espenilla, from a very young age, already knows what it means to work hard for the family. Born to farmers, she had to endure the impact of poverty in their lives. Because she had a dream. And that dream was to become a nurse. She endured working as a housemaid in order to finish college. But that changed when she found her husband, and decided to go to Manila to find a new life. *“At that time, Batasang Pambansa was still under construction. I applied as a janitress at Batasang Pambansa. Out of 127 applicants, only 17 of us were accepted. I was the only one who reached college level. So I was accepted there. And you won't believe where I was assigned. I was assigned in the area where the President, the First lady, and the Assembly people take their meals. I worked there for four years.”*

After some time, she found an opportunity to work for a royal family in Saudi Arabia. *“Eventually, I did go to Saudi Arabia. I worked there for eight years with a royal family. There were eight workers who were assigned there, from different nationalities, including myself, who is the only Filipina.”*

Her eldest son, who later on got married to an American citizen, petitioned her and her husband to come to the US. When she received her green card, she also petitioned her other children. At that time, she thought she already achieved her American dream. *“That’s how we were able to come here 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. I was imagining at that time 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 my expectation was not what the reality is.”*

Asked how she finds her life in the US, she said: *“Honestly speaking, I can say money here is easy, but life is hard. Very hard. In the Philippines, even if there is poverty, we can still 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.”

She worked as a caregiver for more than eight years. “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. Because I already was here in America. I want to spend all my time with all my clients to help their needs.”

Maggi started joining AFIRE as a member and had since then learned about the Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights. *“What I appreciate about the DWBOR is that it promotes the rights of the domestic workers to rest, to be treated with respect, to receive decent pay, and to be afforded with dignity.”* She encourages people to become more aware of their rights and to get involved with the community.

Read more about Maggi’s story:

<https://www.afirechicago.org/single-post/2017/05/22/Oral-History-Series-Maggi-Espenilla>