



Sally Richmond's Oral History
English Translation

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Sally Richmond
Interviewer: Christine Sumog-oy
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Good afternoon Tita Sally. Thank you for making time for our storytelling this afternoon. First question I'd like to ask you: how do you describe yourself to other people?

Myself? What I can say is that I have great love for the community, especially the Filipino American community. My heart is for them.

Wow that's really great Tita Sally. We have witnessed all of that. Your love for the community. What particular experiences did you have where you feel you have started to develop your love for the community. If we are to go back to your life in the Philippines, how would you describe it, before you moved to the U.S.

What I can say is that, this is already my attitude, my love for the community. I developed this through the examples of my parents, especially my father. He really cared for the people in the community especially those who are in need.

For example, there was one time when he found a stranger, who was suffering from a wound on his legs. My father brought him home. He told my mother to treat his wounds. My mother helped the man. My father also asked my mother, if they can let the stranger stay in the house, for some time, while he is still recovering. My mother was worried, and told my father that their children are already growing up, and it would be risky for them to have someone in their house whom they do not know. But anyway, they still decided to welcome the stranger until he fully recovered and left. So that's how my parents are very helpful towards others. Especially if they really need help.

There was also another time instance when my father found an old man who seemed to have been abandoned by his children. Even though the old man was stubborn, my father saw how he is in great need for help. So what my father did, he brought him food everyday. He told us we need to take care of him. So that's how my father was so caring. He has compassion for other people. Even those who are in prison, we also brought them food. So my father really has compassion.

That's probably how my values were molded. My father showed us great examples of good deeds. My father was also close to his church. Everyday, he would go to mass. This is the same for my mother. They are very helpful towards other people. So that's how I was brought up. In that kind of family.



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As I was growing up, even though we did not have the means, my father worked hard to make sure we get the education that we need. My father sent us to Centro Escolar University. He begged the President of the university to allow me to work on campus so that I can afford the fees. I was able to work at the registrar's office. Until I was able to finish my college. And then I connected with different business corporations like AT&T. And eventually landed at World Vision, where I worked for almost 13 or 14 years, from working as a typist clerk to becoming one of their organizational officers.

That's where I learned about community organizing. I got to see the disparity between the rich and the poor. We would visit remote communities and tribal areas, and then I saw how these communities are in great need. We would implement projects there. But at the end of the day, after serving some poor communities, I noticed that we as project staff would go back to our respective hotels to relax. So that's how I noticed the disparity between economic conditions. I saw what really needs to be done in order to truly love the community.

When I finally moved to America, I worked as a babysitter. For 16 long years. When I moved here, I was not sure if I have a future to hold. I really was not planning to live here permanently, as I prefer to go back to Philippines. Only that my mother is here.

How did you finally end up living here for good?

Because of my mother, who already was settled here. She convinced me to move here since I already have my visa. Although my first visa was a tourist visa for multiple entry for 10 years. I have just been visiting the country several times. Until my mother finally petitioned me and processed my papers to become a permanent immigrant here.

How did your mother end up living here as well?

The first one to come here was my sister who became a nurse in 1960s. She got married, and had children. She needed extra hand to help her in taking care of the kids. This is why she petitioned my mother. And after that, my mother petitioned all her children. That was the story.

Anyway, as I was continuing my babysitting jobs here, one of my friends encouraged me to go for teaching, since I have an education background. I took a training in the Montessori for a year. After the training, I started teaching. But after three years of teaching, I felt it was way better to just do babysitting. With babysitting, I only have to take care of a few children, but with my teaching job, I have to manage at least 20 kids in one room, with only one assistant. It was exhausting for me. Everytime I come home, Anthony would notice I get cranky a lot. He asked me, why don't you go back to babysitting. He noticed I was happier when I was only babysitting. So I told myself I'll go back to babysitting.



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I visited some parks in the city to network with baby sitters. I found one babysitter who was planning to leave the family she is working for because the employers always fought with her. She just made an excuse to them that she'll be visiting California, but she was not really planning to return to the family. So the said babysitter asked me to apply for the job as her replacement. I went for the job interview, and surprisingly, the couple really liked me. It was important for me to have a two-way interview. I also need to ask them questions: what are their jobs, how do they discipline their kids, etc. They were surprised by the questions that I asked. But I needed to show them that I know what I am doing. Just because I am applying as a babysitter does not mean I have to accept all the terms they propose to me without questions. I needed to make sure I receive the right pay and benefits. So they were happy about my perspectives. They hired me right away. And then I was able to go back to babysitting.

After several years, I have another friend, who owns a school, who asked me if I can work with her as a Montessori teacher. She really asked needed my help. I was not keen on going back to teaching, especially because the school is in Melrose Park which is really far from where she lives. But in the spirit of helping her, I decided to help her. I worked with her for several years. Almost 4 years.

Eventually I started doing community work. AFIRE called me. They asked me to do community organizing. I told them I already have a job. But they informed me that it will only be a part time job. Later on, I resigned from the school and focused on organizing.

How did you enjoy your experience as a community organizer of AFIRE? What were your responsibilities?

I enjoyed it. I organize meetings with community members. And I raise awareness. Here in Illinois, 7% of the Filipino population lives below poverty line, as per survey led by Mango operations. We were reaching out primarily to that 7% of the population. Since we were not occupying an office space at that time, we usually meet community members in a restaurant. Sometimes in someone's house. Sometimes in a church. We distribute flyers. We would also go to the Cook County. Or to the train stations. Or when we board the bus, we would look for Filipinos. Most of them do not know how to get food stamps or SSI.

ICIRR gave us several trainings including one on community outreach. That's when we learned the tools in community outreach. It was a great experience to learn how to approach people even if you do not know them but you have great intentions of sharing resources or any form of support.

Any challenges you encountered in community outreach?



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It is not easy to do outreach with the Filipino community. They need to trust you. You have to earn their trust. You need to sustain connection. When you earn their trust, you can also ask them to help you with outreach. Because outreach should not be your sole responsibility. You can have other members of the community do this effort with you.

You mentioned that through your experience with World Vision, you were able to enhance your skills in community organizing. What skills or experiences did you particularly learn from the Philippines which you were able to apply in your organizing work in the United States?

The interaction with the community. You need to unite with them. You need to make them feel that you are with them. That you are not someone they need to look up to because you are from the metropolitan city. You need to be with them. If they throw parties, you have to celebrate with them. If they enjoy dancing, you have to dance with them. You would not be able to win their trust, if you do not relate with them. You need to dress humbly. You need to act responsibly. You need to hold your ground as you relate with others.

So community organizing really involves trust building? And that it is important for a community organizer to remain humble and to empathize with people?

Yes. You should be their ally.

How did you get involved with organizing domestic workers?

When I joined AFIRE, domestic worker organizing was already started by other groups. There was Myrla. There was ARISE. I expressed interest in organizing domestic workers because I am one of them. I worked as a babysitter. I find my compassion in that work. I fully understand the experiences of being a domestic worker. That is why I get myself involved. At the beginning, it was not easy, for lack of funding. But when we were able to find some resources, we started collaborating with coalitions.

How did community outreach for domestic workers go for you? How did you find them?

It is essential to build first the necessary skills. When we went to Springfield before, we were unaware of what to do. Only the lawyers were involved in lobbying. We were just following them, without understanding our roles, without realizing the purpose of going to Springfield, or without knowing how to approach lawmakers or how laws are passed. Later on, we were provided with trainings for once a month for a whole year. Through those trainings, we were able to build our skills, and finally understood our role whenever we go to Springfield.

With regard to organizing domestic workers, I already have my experience in that field, because of my previous job as a babysitter. I already have experienced organizing babysitters before,



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although more on social and civic purposes. There was one time I was able to organize domestic workers to raise funds for the victims of the eruption of Mount Pinatubo. We were able to send support to a Christian organization in the Philippines.

What are the concerns or situations faced by domestic workers here in Illinois? What are the problems they have been experiencing?

There are challenges, because the work is not regulated. Domestic workers are only strategizing on their own to survive. There were no policies on minimum wage. You will have to negotiate, and if you do not have the confidence and capacity to do so, you lose. Also, if you do not know how to negotiate, you would end up not having clear job description, and you are prone of being required to do other jobs that are not supposed to be within the scope of your work. When you are hired for babysitting, you are supposed to be babysitting only, and not do other household chores unrelated to babysitting. This is why a clear job description is necessary. Some domestic workers who have no papers have no confidence however to assert this clarity on their work agreement. Unless you are able to find employers who treat you well and give you proper compensation, you will most likely end up being deprived of what is due you.

Did you personally experience working with employers who aggravated you or violated your rights?

So far, my relationships with my employers have been fair. There was even one employer in New York whom I have been working with for a year did not want me to leave their family. But I had to go back to Chicago, because my mother needed me. My second boss treated me like a part of their family. I was working for them as a live-in babysitter. If I get sick, they would take care of me. They have three children, whom I call my three angel boys. The mother, the whole family, and even the extended family really loved me.

There was one occasion when the adults in the house planned to get dinner somewhere. One of the kids got really mad because they did not include me in the dinner plans. The kid said, why will you not let Sally go with you, since she is also an adult. I was amused by the concern of the kid. I made him understand that it is my responsibility to not leave the house to make sure they have me as their company in order to ensure their safety.

The community where the family is situated was however racist. But Kathlyn always praised me in front of anyone in the community. They told them, oh Sally is really great, and in fact, she is the one who reads New York Times to us. She also told them about the articles I wrote, one of which is about the March for Life. That's why they have high respect for me. Although I fully know what my role was as a babysitter.



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Anyway, that is how I enjoyed my work with Kathleen and her family. We still communicate until now. Just a few days ago, it was Kathleen's birthday, I sent her an email to greet her. When it was my birthday, I also received emails from the family. During Christmas, I would visit them. The kids are all grown up now. Two of them got married, one of whom already have a son. All of them grew up with me by their side.

It's a blessing to be working with family who treats you well. Unfortunately, there are other domestic workers out there that have different experiences. Based on your organizing experience with AFIRE, what motivated you to help with the campaign to push for the passage of the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights?

I know other domestic workers who endure poor working conditions in their workplace. This is true especially for senior caregivers, or live-in domestic workers. They are paid low. They work for 24 hours, but they are only paid for 8 hours in a day, which means that they only earn 5\$ per hour. When you live with them, they can wake you up at night, if they need something from you. Most domestic workers do not realize they are being paid way below the minimum or living wage.

One of our efforts is to raise awareness regarding the rights of domestic workers. What are your goals for the Filipino community in Chicago to make this happen?

I hope that we will be able to develop not just individual but collective awareness. I have noticed that some Filipinos only think about their individual situations, but not so much about the community as a whole. Some of us do not step out of our comfort zones and stick only with our own group of family and friends. For us to succeed, we need to learn how to build the community and to expand our network. Through this community or network, you will feel supported. For example, if you are a babysitter, organize with other people who also work as babysitters so that you all can have collective awareness about your working conditions. Some of us are very active with our religious activities, but we are not concerned about raising political awareness. This is why trips to Springfield are important because it brings awareness to people. That we go there for a purpose. That we go there because we want to express concerns about what is going on around us or about how particular policies impact our lives.

This is more relevant nowadays under the new administration. There are several policies being enforced affecting immigrants and domestic workers. What do you think we can do to protect the Filipino community?

We really need to have ongoing discourses so that we can continue building awareness about what our rights are and about what is really happening. People only believe what they read and hear, without efforts in finding the truth. The United issue, for instance. It was an issue not just for one group, but for the whole Asian community.



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One of my students shared how she experienced racism. Her father is a Puerto Rican, her mother a Filipina. Her parents met and got married in Taiwan, and moved to the United States. She was born and raised in the US. She grew up feeling she is the same as everyone. When she reached high school, she started noticing how she looks different from her other classmates. She is being excluded by her classmates, and realized that it is because of her color and feature. She focused on her studies. She was very intelligent. She pursued computer engineering.

This also happened to my nephew. My nephew was a valedictorian. He is one of the brightest in his class. His classmates would approach him only if they need something. But when it comes to socializing, he is treated differently.

For myself, I experienced it one time when I accompanied my employers to a Fair in town. People who were passing through the main entrance were stamped on their hands to mark their entry. When it was my turn, to my surprise, the one in-charge decided not to put any stamp on my hand. I said, hey how about me? Is it because I am brown? Is it because I am just a babysitter? People who heard me were laughing, and so finally I got my stamp. So that goes to show how racism is real in Wisconsin. There was also one time when I went with the family to a restaurant. I tried to ask the waitress for a highchair for the kid. But I was ignored. My employer saved me, and said, don't worry Sally, I'll take care of it. These are instances where racism is so real. That is why we need to take care of each other.

How does this racial prejudice impact you? How are you able to assert your identity?

I really call them out for that. Like one time, in a supermarket, with my siblings. We tried to return our cart to the counter. One of the patrons yelled at us, because she said we did not return our cart properly. She said, go back to your own country. I said, why, who are you? Are a native? Only the natives are the first to come here. All the rest of us are immigrants. So I really call them out for their racist rants.

One of the goals of AFIRE is to provide safe space for people of color to share their stories and build capacities, especially with the ongoing hatred under the new administration. I also would like to ask you if you have any message to the people of the Philippines and to the Philippine president with regard to the experiences of the Filipino community here in Chicago, especially those who have challenges with documentation.

I think President Duterte's popularity is now dwindling. Because of several lives that were taken away. People initially thought his approach was good for elimination of drug abuse and crime or for the restoration of peace and order. But now, people are discouraged because there were too many innocent lives wasted in the guise of war on drugs. I also really do not like the President's comment to not lift a finger for those who are undocumented here in America. To be



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undocumented does not mean they do not deserve to be afforded their human rights. Those who are undocumented are also like many other people who are working hard to support their family. They are not here for mere pleasure. They are here because our very own country cannot offer them decent jobs. It is not their choice to leave their family behind. It is lack of employment opportunities that force them to flee the country, which unfortunately, destroy the cohesiveness of family units. It is not their choice to lose time with their family. It is not their choice to leave their children without proper guidance, causing some of them to get high on drugs. There is a whole complex picture that we need to see in order to understand why they are undocumented in this country.

The reason why we hope to launch the oral history project was because we would like to share different stories behind people's migration to the US. Our power is in our stories. We are thankful that you are able to spare your time with us to share your story and your experience with the Filipino community in Chicago. Any final message?

I just really hope that we all develop our own awareness. We should not be afraid to understand the political situation. In order to be whole, we need to understand not just the cultural, religious, and social aspects of our society, but also political.

Thank you so much for your time Tita Sally.

You are welcome Christine.