



## PAT SAMPAN

88 years old, caregiver, community worker  
from Hinunangan, Leyte, Philippines  
living in the US since 2001

### **“I Marched Faster Than Anyone Else!”: Nanay Pat’s Story**

*“Mas mabilis pa akong maglakad kesa sa iba! (I can walk faster than anyone)”*, Pat Sampan, in her late 80s, shared her excitement as she marched with hundreds of younger people in downtown Chicago to call for labor protections and basic human rights to domestic workers. Known to us as Nanay Pat, her old age never faltered her energy to support efforts that advocate for domestic workers’ rights. Nanay Pat worked as a housemaid, caregiver, laundry worker, and other forms of domestic work almost all her life. She knew very well what it meant to be invisibly and poorly treated. She believed that by participating in marches, she would be able to represent the needs and concerns of the domestic workers community, be it in the United States, in the Philippines, or any parts of the world.

Nanay Pat hailed from Hinunangan in Southern Leyte, Philippines. Life was difficult in the province. People live in massive poverty. Opportunities for employment are limited. And where farmlands become a source of income to some families, severe natural disasters that visit the area each year could easily destroy them. *“Nung nagkaroon ng malakas na bagyo, nasira yung mga palayan namin, na siyang tanging pangkabuhayan namin. Nilamon lang ng putik. Kaya mahirap ang pamumuhay duon. Nahinto ako sa pag-aaral. Pumunta ako ng Manila. At nagtrabaho bilang kasambahay. (A heavy storm destroyed our farmland, which was our sole source of income. It got covered with mud. It is challenging to sustain a living there. My schooling was interrupted. I moved to Manila. And there I worked as a housemaid).”*

She worked for several years in Manila, until she found a friend who hinted to her that there were several American soldiers in the Subic Bay area in Olongapo, Zambales where the United States installed a military base. She decided to move to Subic Bay where an American soldier, who had a wife and children, would later on hire her as their house worker. *“Nakaranas kami ng ginhawa. Mababait ang mga amo ko. May anak sila na maliit. Ako ang nag-alaga. Alam mo naman ang kaya nating mga Pilipina. (We experienced comfort. My employers were kind. They have a child. I took care of the child. It’s our nature as Pilipina).*

This is how Nanay Pat built her journey as a domestic worker. She said that this is the only job she knows. At time she feels it is the only job she deserves because she never gets to finish her education. But she feels blessed that through her hardwork, she was able to support her four children, and her husband, who later on passed away. Her children later on lived separate lives,



and her youngest daughter married a US army, whom she had lived with for some time, also in Subic Bay.

There is a story about the past that continues to haunt her. In her early years, she was raped by a man during her sleep and every time she thinks about it, she felt so much remorse. This incident resulted to the birth of her youngest daughter, who later on was the one who was able to bring her to the United States. *"May halong tuwa, at may halong kaba. Mahirap intindihin ang naramdaman ko nuon. Kaya ko bang buhayin ito? Pasalamat ako na hindi ako pumayag na ilaglag."* (I had mixed feelings. It was difficult to understand how I felt. Can I raise this child? I was grateful I did not abort my child.)

When the Mount Pinatubo erupted in 1991, it resulted a huge catastrophe in the region, which prompted American soldiers to leave the country, and return to the United States. *"Diba maraming nasira nuon. Pinauwi ang mga Amerikano dito sa Amerika. Nagkataon na napasama ako sa kanila. Kami ng anak ko na babae ay nag-eroplano. Sila ay sumakay sa barko ng Army. At dito na kami ulit nagkita sa America.* (Remember there were major casualties at that time. The Americans were sent back to the United States. It so happened that I was also brought to the US with my youngest daughter. We took the flight. While her husband and other US soldiers took their naval ship. And we just saw each other again here in America)."

When Nanay Pat finally arrived in the US in 1991, she thought she was already living the American Dream. Growing up she had always seen the US as a land of several opportunities. She took advantage of every opportunity to work and earn income. *"Dito na ako nagtrabaho. Dalawa-dalawang trabaho. Sa umaga sa nursing home. At pagka-alas-kwatro, nagtatrabaho ako sa isang restaurant, sa Pan De Rosa. Hanggang mag-closing, sa kusina rin ako na-assign."* (I worked multiple jobs. From a nursing home to a restaurant called Pan De Rosa where I was assigned in the kitchen).

When she was asked how different is life from the Philippines, she said, *"Malayo. Sa Pilipinas, wala man tayong chance. Kulang yung oportunidad natin na mga walang kakayahan. Pero dito left and right talaga. Kung sipagin ka, kung masipag ka lang, hindi ka lang magtamad-tamad."* (The difference is great. There's not a lot of opportunities in the Philippines for those who are not skills. But here, jobs are everywhere, only if you work hard for it.)

Later on, she moved to Chicago when she found out that there is a huge Filipino community here. *"Dahil wala nga akong tinapos na pinag-aralan. Walang iba. Bagsak ka as housegirl. Bahay talaga ang bagsak ko. Kaya narinig ko nuon, na dito sa Chicago, maraming Filipino, at maraming trabaho. Kaya mula nuon, naglakas-loob ako na pumunta dito."* (Because I did not finish my studies, I ended up working as a housegirl. Or working in private homes. Where I heard that there are several job opportunities in Chicago, I decided to move here.)



Nanay Pat has been proud of her ability to offer patience, love, and support to her clients as a caregiver. And at the same time, she had been thankful of the love given to her by the family she is working for. *"Hindi ka magtagal kung hindi mabait ang mga kasama mo sa bahay. Yan ang garantisado ko. Sa akin, napakabait nila. Dahil ako lang ang nagustuhan ng nanay nila. Ang nanay nila, may Alzheimer. Kung ilang nag-alaga na, hindi makatagal."* (You could not sustain your job if the family you are working with is not treating you well. But in my case, my family was treating me well. My client who was suffering from an Alzheimer also really liked me.)

But she also recognized the challenges confronting domestic workers like her. *"Maliit lang ang sahod. Pero wala akong alam nuon. Pero mababait sila sa akin"* (I had very low pay. But I did not know that at that time. All I know is that my employers were very nice to me.)

She explained that she also was not given opportunities to take a time off, and that she had been required to work from Mondays through Sundays, without rest. *"Yan lang, mula nung nasa kanila ako, wala akong off. Kasi wala man akong ibang mapuntahan."* (Since I worked with that employer, I did not have a time off. Because I did not know where else to go.)

As she was retiring, she got to know AFIRE, and the many resources and forms of support that are available for domestic workers like her. She wished she had known them before, so that she felt more empowered. But she said that it is not too late, as there are other domestic workers out there that are needing support, but are not aware of this organization or community. *"Ngayon ko lang nalaman itong Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. Ngayon lang, noong nakilala ko na ang AFIRE. Nagkaroon din ako ng pagkakataon na makausap ang ilang Senador sa Springfield para maipasa ang batas na ito"* (I just recently learned about the Domestic Workers Bills of Rights. Just recently, when I started knowing about AFIRE. I was given an opportunity to speak to a Senator in Springfield in order to push for the passage of this law.)

She also got to join the Healthy Heart Healthy Family trainings where she learned some health information. *"Binigyang diin yung kahalagahan sa pag-aalaga ng iyong sarili. Lalo na ang iyong puso. Yung mga kinakain mo. Duon ako natuto. Nagamit ko ang mga natutunan ko sa sarili ko. Kung hindi ko yun natutunan, siguro wala na ako. Kaya na-appreciate ko yung mga natutunan ko."* (I also get to know more about self-care. About how to protect our heart. About how to maintain a healthy diet. I applied what I learned from these trainings.)

Read more about Nanay Pat's story:

<https://www.afirechicago.org/single-post/2017/06/05/Oral-History-Series-Pat-Sampan>