



Olola Ann Olib's Oral History
Original Transcription

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Olola Ann Olib
Interviewer: Christine Sumog-oy
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Ano po ang inyong pangalan?

Ako si Olola Ann Olib, senior citizen, Filipina, and a caregiver.

Pwede po ba kayong magkwento tungkol sa inyong kabataan, kung saan kayo ipinanganak, where did you spend most of your childhood memories, and what did you miss most about your childhood.

Masaya ang aking childhood. Ika-apat ako sa aming magkakapatid. I have three elder brothers. Pagkatapos ako. Then the one next to me is a boy. Kaya matagal na ang mga kalaro ko puro lalaki. Kasi yung mga kalaro ng mga kapatid ko sa neighborhood ay puro lalaki at mga kalaro ko rin sila. Akala ng mom ko magiging tomboy ako. Dahil hindi ako nagdadamit. Shorts lang palagi ang suot ko.

And then I grew up in a town in Dipolog. At that time it was called the sleepy town of Dipolog. Hindi sya magulo. Very tahimik na lugar. And then kilala namin ang bawat family sa next door. Next to our house was the Congressman's house. And then yung neighborhood namin ay magandang neighborhood. At that time, which is in 1950s, wala pang motorcycles. Kalesa pa ang sasakyan but I enjoyed it. I studied there until highschool. Pagka-college, saka ako lumabas ng Dipolog. I really wanted to be out of Dipolog because habang tumatagal, dumadami yung mga tao. And I found it very small for me. That's why I have to leave and move to Manila. I wanted to be in a place where you can be free to move anywhere. In Dipolog, madali kang makita, so you really cannot do something else. Lahat kilala ka. Hindi ka makakagalaw. So I don't like it. I like it better to be just like an atom in the air wherein free ka sa kung ano yung gusto mong gawin. So I had to move to Manila early, in 1975, after my college, I moved to Manila and I have to work there.

Kamusta po yung trabaho ninyo sa Manila? At nung panahon na yun, naisip nyo na ba na pumunta ng 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



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ambition. But then we don't really have to be a lawyer to be successful. We don't have to take up journalism in order to write. My first article landed in the national magazine in 1976. That's when I realized na ang mga writings ko pala ay pwede pala sa mga 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 for 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 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 there. 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. 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 tuloy-tuloy na po kayo nung time na yun?

Yes, tuloy-tuloy na. 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 at 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.

Bakit kaya nila mag-take advantage ng mga 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.

Paano kayo nagkaroon ng ideya na magsulat sa mga 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 Gutierrez, 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 (DWBOR), 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. Yung merong direksyon yung undocumented people on what to do. Na makakatulong both for the government and 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. Para free na naman sila. Hindi naman sila mga kriminal eh. Why do they have to issue orders sowing



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fear and hatred? Nakakaawa naman sila. Paano yung social life nila? There are birthdays, etc. Pero may takot na.

So finally, ano ang mensahe ninyo para sa mga undocumented workers, na andyan na natatakot?

Natatakot sila dahil our government cannot interfere, and come up and talk about it. Dahil nagkagalit na rin ang gobyerno. 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 malaking problem yan to them. Meron na nga rin din ako narinig na uuwi nalang when hindi naman sila dapat uuwi, kasi may mga problema din sila sa Pilipinas. Like others wala pa silang matirhan.

So kung may makausap kayo ngayon na undocumented worker, ano ang magiging mensahe ninyo sa kanya?

I always tell them, just go on. And when you think na enough na ang savings ninyo, enough na to start a business, then uuwi nalang. Because what can you do, if this hate thing continues for six years.

Paano naman po yung may mga pamilya dito at hindi makakauwi?

Yun na nga. Yun ang problem nila. Kasi yung iba marami ang nag asawa dito na may pamilya rin sa Pilipinas. They have two families - here in the US and in the Philippines. Meron akong alam na undocumented, who spends 6 months here in the US, and another 6 months in the US, kasi may partner sya in both countries. They make their own problems.

Paano po yung may nag-iisang pamilya dito sa US?

Yun ang problem. Kasi yung mga bata nila estudyante. Kasi they are still waiting for orders.

Pero pag aware sila sa kanilang rights, at least they can protect themselves.

Pero yung rights kasi, it's not even very clear. Kung maprotektahan sila with their documentation. It's not even clear kahit yung provision about minimum wage. It's not clear how much. It's not clear in the law.



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So kailangan mas pa-igtingin natin ang awareness raising?

Yes, and talk to the authorities. Magkano ba talaga ang minimum wage? Kasi confused sila. Kasi iba iba ang sinasabi ng mga employers. Iba rin sa California. Sabi nila 15\$ na sila. 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. Kung may problema ang isa, don't 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. Coz here in Chicago, the Mayor is supporting us, but what about outside.

Thanks Ann for your time.

No problem.