



Grace Padao's Oral History
English Translation

Oral History Project

Interviewee: Grace Padao
Interviewer: Christine Sumog-oy
Date: 9 May 2017

Hi Ate Grace. Thank you for accepting our invitation to interview you today. How would you like to describe yourself?

I am practical kind of person. I am helpful. I love music. I like to be with the masses. I am friendly too. These are my types of personalities.

These are great attributes of a community worker. Now I'd like us to go back to the story of your life in the Philippines. Can you tell me briefly about your early life? Where were you born? Where did you spend most of your childhood? Or what do you remember most about your childhood?

My father was working for the government. He was working for the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) as an inspector. My mother was an elementary teacher. We were ten in the family - seven girls and three boys. My father died when I was only 18 years old. I also was a working student. And I worked for the government for ten years as private secretary of the Governor of Agusan del Sur. At the age of 18, I already was able to support my sisters while I was working for the government. I was able to finish my studies. All my sisters also finished also their schooling. Because of my stable job at that time. I finished my AB Major in Economics. I was already 29 years old by then. That's year 1984. A few months after my graduation, I already got married. I was seeking for a husband who has a professional job. And because in my own evaluation, and because of my belief that I cannot marry a professional, unless I am a professional myself, I tried my best to also finish my studies. My husband was an engineer. We have three children - all girls.

At which point in your life in the Philippines did you think about moving to the US?

We had our business. We had ups and downs. Our business had to stop at one point. Because it was not running well anymore. I tried to go to the States to have more earnings. So that we could let our children have a decent profession.

Which year did you come to the US?

It was year 2001 when I came here as a tourist.



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At that time, when you came here as a tourist, you were hoping to find a job? Or why did you decide to make that move?

Yes I came here as a tourist. I was not sure about the job situation. I just came to the States to see the realities here. What America is all about. What can be great for the future of my children. What would be best for them. After that, I saw how America could bring a great future for our children. We tried to become permanent here in the year 2004. We were able to bring our children here.

So how do you describe your life here in the US? And how is it different from the Philippines?

You know, Philippines is a developing country. So in terms of profession, we are really very particular about having some kind of profession. That's why I know it was not easy to look for a job. When I came here in America, you really can't find a job easily, even if you have finished a course. I knew that if my children are able to finish their studies in the Philippines as nurses, they can have nice job opportunities here in America. So I let all my children finish their medical courses. Two of my daughters took nursing. We really tried hard so that they all could work here in America.

What jobs did you work here in Chicago? Can you tell me about your work?

My first job when I landed here was caregiving. Being a caregiver is not an easy job. It's very challenging job. It requires a lot of patience. You know, there are several things here that are not easy. As a caregiver, I experienced a lot of difficulties. It was also difficult to deal with different cultures, and with different values of employers, and employees, or people that you are giving care for. But, because of your ambition, because of your goals, that you could let your children go to school, I have to work hard here in America and endure all the difficulties. And I know that there is greener pasture. Greener future for my children. So that's why I'd like to stay and work here in America.

Is there any point here in the US that you feel exploited or taken advantage of?

Yes, when I worked here, I received low salary. Not the basic minimum wage. At that time, they only pay me 80\$ a day. How much is that when you count it per hour. It's really below the minimum wage. But I was not counting my salary. It's better than nothing, or than having no job at all. I think at that time the salary did not matter for me. As long as I have earnings, I was okay.

How were you treated by your employers or clients?

Some employers were so harsh. They don't give you a break. You work for 7 days in a week. With only 80\$ a day. Then you have to bring your own food. Or cook your own food. Everything else is at my expense - like my fare to get to and from work. You also do more than caregiving.



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You also have to cook. You also have to wash their clothes. You have to do everything. Those were my working conditions. But I did not have a choice. I just have to accept. Otherwise, I'll lose my job.

If you have the power to change how caregiving is being approached here in the US, how would you do it? In what ways this work can be improved?

Right now, there is already power given to the caregivers. We already have the bill approved. The Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. We are strong enough to file a complaint in case of violations. I hope that this bill will help a lot of caregivers. Like giving us enough rest time with pay. And the other one is the minimum wage, so that they should not give us a low salary anymore. We will be paid based on the minimum wage. So it's much better nowadays.

And you were also one of our community leaders who really pushed for the passage of the bill. How was it for you?

I volunteered to advocate for the passing of the bill. Because I am one of the victims. I don't want that what happened to me will also happen to the newcomers. So now I volunteer myself to join the efforts of promoting the bill. Like going to Springfield. For the bill to be approved. Because this bill is so helpful to caregivers like us.

Now that we have this new law, how do you think this can help the domestic workers in Chicago?

We need to have meetings. We need to communicate to all caregivers. We need to inform them. We need to disseminate all the information. We have our Filipino community. We have our office. I hope that all the members - the caregivers, nannies, housekeepers - are aware of this bill. So that we can go forward with this. And we could help one another. Our Filipino values tell us we need to be helping one another.

What are your personal goals for your family? I know that all of your children are already here in the US who are experiencing a better life. But do you have other goals for the family?

I am blessed because all my children are already working here. They have nice jobs. And their job also enables them to help other people. They are all nurses. They are able to do several types of medical work. So they are also able to help other people. As their parent, as their mother, I volunteer to do any community work. Like the promotion of Domestic Workers Bill of Rights. I'm really helping a lot for the implementation of this bill. Because I know it could help us. The law could protect us. We are secured. So whatever happens, we can just meet in the office, and there are a lot of things we can do together.



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Any final message that you have for the Filipino community especially during this time, where our community is one of those being targeted by the immigration policies. Is there any other message that you wanna share with the Filipino community in Chicago?

Being a Filipino community worker, I would like to work to make our membership more progressive. I would like to work hand in hand for the purpose of helping one another. Not only those who have papers, but also those who are undocumented. With the protections of law, I hope we could be aware of our rights. We will disseminate the information. We will reach out to inform people of this new bill. So that we could be unite Filipinos here in America.

Thank you Ate Grace for your time.

Thank you also for your time, Christine, and for this interview.