

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARIE ANTOINETTE ANTONIO

An Oral History Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

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The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White
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PREFACE



“It’s like I was born to be a piano teacher.”

Marie Antonio was born in 1970 in Cagayan de Oro, an island in the Philippines which translates to Golden Friendship. Her father was a doctor who worked as a government employee while her mother was a piano teacher who inspired her love for music and piano at the young age of four. Her grandparents lived on a small island where they would visit for holidays and celebrations, and in her free time she spent her days embracing the beautiful nature of the Philippines and playing outside. Growing up, religion had a strong presence throughout her community, and Christmas was all about celebrating Christ and being together with family. Life in the Philippines was hard but simple and fun; everything was in walking distance including the all-girls' school she went to.

In college, she majored in music, still passionate as ever, and talked about all of the ways living alone in Manila challenged her to grow as a person.

Moving back to her hometown after college, she met her husband, and eventually received a work visa to move to Guam as a music teacher. While there, she describes working hard at the Catholic school, helping to put on shows for children, and later what it was like to work as a music director for a church. It was her time working for the church on a R-1 visa that quickly led to her being sponsored and receiving a green card. With her new immigration status on hand, she and her family packed their bags and first moved to San Jose, California, where she continued to work as a music director. After finally moving to the mainland, she experienced a form of culture shock in terms of language, and quickly found that the cost of living in San Jose was very high, which was partially what finally prompted their move to Las Vegas. Already having a high school friend in Las Vegas, Antonio saw the cheaper cost of living as well as the affordability of housing to be attractive and made the leap. Throughout the rest of the interview, she discusses topics ranging from the American dream to cultural celebrations, food, and discrimination.

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December 4, 2021
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

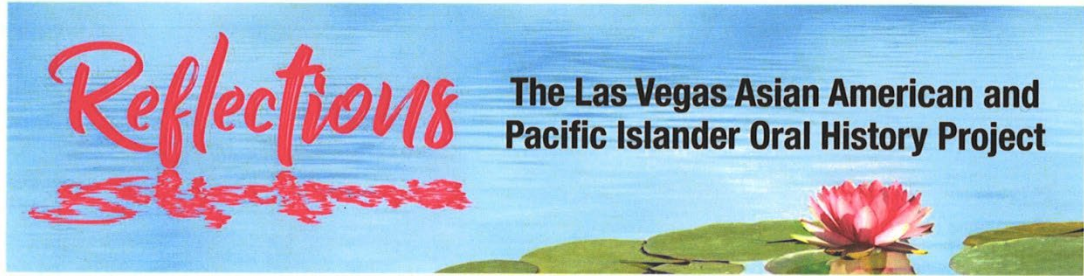
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Good morning. Today's date is December fourth, 2021. My name is Cecilia Winchell. I'm here with Stefani Evans as well as Marie Antonio.

Could you please spell your name for the record, first and last name?

M-A-R-I-E. A-N-T-O-I-N-E-T-T-E. A-N-T-O-N-I-O.

Thank you. To get started, I was wondering if you could tell us about your childhood; where you grew up; your parents; your family; everything like that.

I grew up in Cagayan de Oro, Philippines. It's a small city. The Philippines is really big islands, like an archipelago; it consists of three big islands. I am in one part of the islands called Mindanao. It's in the south. Cagayan de Oro is a booming city right now. There's about eight hundred thousand people living there.

I have three siblings. Three of us are girls, and then I have a brother, and we're ten years apart. But there are two sisters that I have, they're a year apart from each other. My dad was a government employee. He's a doctor, and he served the community, like in the governments, like a government doctor. My mom is a piano teacher. My dad left us in 2012, and so my mom lives with my brother. They're the only ones who live in Cagayan de Oro city right now, so we're away from each other. My other sister is a nurse in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and my sister is in another city; it's like the other island, in Luzon, about two hours away from where we are. I am the only one here in the United States.

Do you have any memories of your grandparents?

Yes, a lot of good memories with my grandparents. They live on a really small island, and so we spent summer and our Christmas there. My grandmother is a singer, and my grandfather is a lawyer, and so they lived a beach kind of life for them. We always spent all our summers with them. They lived really simply, and both of them are gone now. We spent most of our vacations,

like summers and Christmas, and sometimes they come to our house, like very typical visiting family members, like that, so that's how I remember them—spending a lot of time with them.

Could you tell us what it was like celebrating holidays with them?

With my grandparents, or my family in general?

With your grandparents and—both.

We have a tradition of going to dawn masses. It's nine days before Christmas. We usually wake up really early, like around four a.m., and we go to church. Christmas history is centered on the church because it's the celebration of Christ; that's why it's called Christmas. We were brought up like that. We go to church. The eve, which is the 24th, we do a celebration called *Noche Buena*. It's with family. It happens around twelve o'clock, midnight. Usually before twelve midnight, we go to church and celebrate it in the church, and then we go home, and we eat. We also have Christmas Kringle, and we exchange gifts. Everybody gets a gift; I remember that. Santa Claus is not really a big thing. I think that tradition is acquired from the Westerns, but what we really celebrate is Christ, Jesus, and so it's always centered on celebrating him, going to church, and putting up a *belen*, B-E-L-E-N. It's the nativity scene, so there is always the Baby Jesus and Mother Mary and Joseph. It's always that and it's the center of our Christmas decoration, not the Christmas tree.

What was your relationship like with your parents?

Well, I was so close with my mom because she was my piano teacher, and we shared the same passion for music. My dad was a very quiet man, but he was so supportive of my musical studies, so he was the one driving me to lessons, so that was our bonding. I would say that I was closer to my mom, and anything that changes in my life, anything, I always call her, up to now. She is eighty-one years old. She has a sharp memory. We just talked two days ago. It's a regular

thing. Every time I have something new or any problem or anything, I always share it with her, up to now, even if I am married and I have a daughter. We are so far away, so I always make sure that I get to talk to her every week.

How early did you start playing the piano?

I think I was four years old. My mom was my first teacher.

What was it like growing up in the Philippines?

I would say in comparison to growing up—I have my daughter, and she grew up here—our life in the Philippines is hard. But it's a simple life, and even though in my times we don't have all the technology, my childhood was going outside, playing outside, climbing trees, and spending time with our neighbors, talking with kids. Playing whatever it is in the street, we don't have much choice. But we had fun. We'd go to the beach because it is very accessible. We don't drive a car, but there is public transportation that we can ride. Weather permits us to play year-round. My life in the Philippines is spent outside, outdoors. We'd go up the mountains, and it's about five minutes away from our house. I'd go to school, and I walked to school, about a five minutes' walk. It's very different from here. It's not so accessible, like beaches are not accessible. You have to ride a car to go somewhere. Everything there is just very near, maybe because there's not much to do. There are no malls yet, no movie houses. That's why we made use of nature. That's how we grew up.

What was going to school like?

From kindergarten all the way to college, I went to an all-girls school, so it's an exclusive girls' school. It was fun. Very different, though. My parents were so conservative, so I didn't get to spend so much time with my friends aside from being in school and having school activities. I don't go out maybe after five o'clock, and at sundown you have to be at home. They were so

strict with that. My friends, of course, were all girls. One very significant thing with having them is that up to now we still communicate. I still talk to them. We are all around the world. But I should say that we had a different bond. I'm not sure if it's also different with boys and girls, like to have classmates like boys and girls, but I haven't really experienced that at all. I would say it's a different bond, like a sisterhood. I can't describe, but we are still friends up to now. They have their family, but we still see each other. I just had a friend spend time with me for a month in our house, something like that. Even if they are away, in different parts of the country, and we have our own lives, we always make sure that we still see each other, and those are my high school classmates.

That sounds really cool.

Yes, yes.

What would you say religion was like in the Philippines?

It's very important. That's the center of our life. Since I grew up in a Catholic school from kindergarten all the way to college, until now I still have that connection with the Catholic community. There is always a church that I belong to anywhere I go. We've been to a lot of places. But I think it's the thing that connects me to the community and to other Filipinos as well. That's where I meet friends that become family. It's a foundation for me.

What did you do after high school?

After high school, I went to college. I took up music. I went to college for five years, and I graduated with a Bachelor of Music, majored in piano. I was away in college; I lived in a dorm. I lived in boarding houses, two hours away from where I was. The only communication with my mom and my family is dial telephone. We don't have cellular phones. We communicated through letters. It was hard being away from home, before, because we don't have FaceTime.

The first year, I was so homesick I wanted to go back. It's like an opportunity. If you come from our small town and you go to a city, because I went to school in a city, a big city called Manila, so it's something, oh, you have to persevere, you can't just give up in the middle of it. It was a challenge for me. It was my first time to be away from my family and from home.

Even though it's still the Philippines, it's a totally different culture. The Philippines, if you really try to look at it, I am from Mindanao, and there is a Luzon, a different island, and people there speak a different language, and we also speak a different language. The Philippines has, I think, about nineteen different languages. If you go to Manila, they speak Tagalog, and we speak Bisaya; it's a different language, too. But we have one, it's like a universal language: it's English, so everybody speaks English, and so that's how we communicate. But just the difference in the language would tell you that there is also a difference of the way you live and the way people look at you and the way you look at things, just because you live in a different island of the Philippines.

It was hard for me at first. I wouldn't say it's like discrimination because you're all Filipinos. But it's, more or less, like people in Manila see themselves as a little bit advantaged because they have everything there. It's a really big city, and they get to have all the technology, so they are more advanced compared to where I came from. Everything was new for me, and living away from home was a struggle. It's like being here away from college; you have to take care of yourself, like that.

But it also taught me to be independent, and it also prepared me to eventually...I'm the only one in my family who left home. After I got married, I left home. I think it prepared me to be more independent and away from them, which actually, if you think of it now that I'm fifty-one, it makes me realize that I'm so far away from them and being for a long time away from

them, I would want to be back in the Philippines. It's always something like, when you retire. I'm getting older now. I want to go back to the Philippines after I've explored all the possibilities here in the United States. I always have that yearning to be back home. It opened up, I should say, my perspective, being away and staying away from my family.

Why did you choose to major in music?

Oh, I have loved music ever since I was maybe when I was five years old. I realized that I love playing piano, and it's one thing I'm good at, and so I pursued it. I wanted to be like my mom. It's more of a passion. Even now when I work and I teach little kids, it's something that I have loved ever since. It's not a question for me. It's like I was born to be a piano teacher.

What did you do after college?

After college, I taught for a few years in the school where I graduated from, and I decided to go home, Cagayan de Oro. Then I taught in a college for a few years, and I decided to have my own music studio. I opened the music studio with my mom and eventually my brother because he also graduated music. Then I got married. A few years after I got married, that's when I got hired as a music teacher in Guam. It's a territory of the U.S., so that was how I started my immigration journey, going to Guam for employment as a teacher.

How did you meet your husband?

He is the cousin of my best friend in college. I met him back when we were in college, but we were still friends. When I came back to Cagayan de Oro and started working, that's when I met him again and...yes, that's our story.

Why did you two decide to move to Guam?

Actually, it's more of trying to plan for the future. Well, because if you're in the Philippines—it's hard to explain—but people in the Philippines always have this American dream. I don't

have that dream. I've never dreamed to be outside of the Philippines, but my husband was so into it. He said, "Why don't we just try it out?" It's an opportunity that you don't want to miss. Everyone wants to go to the United States. It's something that you want to go to. There is this offer for me to teach in Guam, and I don't want to take it at first because I don't want to be away from the Philippines, but my husband said, "Let's just give it a try." That's how it started. But it wasn't my desire to live outside the Philippines.

Then when we moved to Guam, it kind of opened your eyes, like, wow, this is a very good opportunity. It's not much of myself, but it's more of my family, especially my daughter. If you look at it, we could provide well for her by being here, and it's going to be for her future. It's not much of me because it's very secondary once you have a family of your own. They would be your focus. I think that's how it started.

Then opportunity after opportunity, I was there for work, and then after that there is an opportunity to be sponsored for...because we are not immigrants. We only have work status, so that's how we started out. Then after that your employer would have an opportunity to sponsor you to make you a temporary immigrant, to give you a green card. We had that opportunity, and we took it, and then it led us to here, staying for good.

What was it like living in Guam?

It was very much like the Philippines because it's an island. It's surrounded by beaches, water, ocean. It's really nice. We could have stayed there, but it's very small. It's very limited in terms of opportunities. It only has one university and two hospitals. You can actually go around the island of Guam in a day, so it's really small. But it's so close to the Philippines; that's why we decided to move there, because it's very accessible. I get to go home to the Philippines every time it's summer vacation and there's no school. But then looking back, if we stayed in Guam,

my daughter wouldn't have the opportunities that she's having right now because, well, small island. We were trying to debate, are we going to stay here, or should we just go home to the Philippines because there are more opportunities for her there? There are more universities, more work for her, if ever. It was actually a choice of going home to the Philippines or moving to the mainland. That's how we call it when we were in Guam, like move to the mainland. It's where you start, but it's not a place where you would want to be there forever because it's very limited.

How long were you in Guam?

Eight years.

Did you have your daughter there?

Yes. But first, my work didn't permit me to bring my family. I was there for three months, but it felt like it was forever for me. I was like, if they're not going to say yes to me bringing my family with me, I'm going back to the Philippines. When I told them that, they said, "Okay, just let them come." They joined me in 2004, and she was just about two years old. We started there, eight years. She followed me after three months.

What did your husband do in Guam?

Technically, he can't work because he was my dependent. That's immigration law. He was there to take care of my daughter, which was really hard. I go to work. He's there. He takes care of her. It was more of a big adjustment for him. But it was something that he wanted to do. He decided to go there. It's our decision, okay, so he had to stay home for four years up until we were sponsored for a green card; that's when he got his work permit, so about four years of him not having his own work, just doing whatever.

What was the community like in Guam?

It's a very close-knit community. Since I was working for a really small school, a Catholic school, mostly Filipinos, Asians, Koreans, Japanese and, of course, the locals, the Guamanians. The culture was not a big difference between Filipino culture and the Guam culture; it's, more or less, the same. It wasn't much of an adjustment for us in terms of people that we connected with because there are a lot of Filipinos, so we still get to spend our traditions, like going to church, Christmas, and all those holidays more or less the same.

Do you know the process of how you found your sponsor?

That's a really long story, but to keep it short...I was hired as a teacher in a Catholic school, and they were run by Sisters of Mercy, so they were nuns. They hired me as a music teacher, and we were in charge of production because they have these really big productions for their plays. We have a Christmas play. We have a winter play. They had this setup because it's their edge among...there's a lot of Catholic schools in Guam because it's a very Catholic island. It's their edge compared to the other schools.

They hire mostly Filipinos from the Philippines. They hire only for work, so it's H-1B, work visa, so that's how we entered Guam. Then my husband is H-4. Both him and my daughter are my dependents. That visa would give us four years to stay, and it's legal to stay in Guam. Then after that if they decide to keep us, they have to apply again for another four years for that visa for us to continue being there. But the thing is, when you are sponsored as an H-1B, you have to stay out of the U.S., not working in the U.S. for a year, to make you sponsor you again for another year. It's like eight, but then four in between, stop, you have to go back to your country, and they can hire you again in the fourth.

We were hoping they would sponsor us for a green card before that fourth year so that we don't have to go home to the Philippines because that would be a big change for me and for my

family in going back to the Philippines, and it's a big expense on our part because we have to pay for everything. We were hoping for that; we were hoping that they would sponsor us before it expires, our visa. What happens is, they did not. They wanted to keep us, but they wanted to just keep on hiring us as workers, which is a disadvantage on our part because...

It's very complicated. But to make a long story short, there was another employer who was willing to sponsor me for a green card, and it was the church. There is a priest who saw me, and I was playing in one of his concerts. Then he saw me and said, "Oh, I want to hire a music director who will work for me in the church." That would be the first time in Guam because they don't usually have a musical director working for them, paid. Everyone was a volunteer. But he was willing to sponsor me. I was like, "Okay." The church and the school are connected to each other; it's just across the street, so it's going to be a very complicated story. It's like, no, I'm not willing to go through that transition, the change that it's going to be a conflict between the two of them, but it's a matter of life or death for me. I have to take this, or else we have to go home, so I took it.

I have to change from H-1B to a religious visa, an R-1 visa, which is actually very fast because there is not much being sponsored for religious, and most of them are priests, but I am a layperson, and they are going to sponsor me to work for them. I went through that route instead of the other route, which is H-1B, and it usually takes years for you to get a green card. It's a reality especially when you're from the Philippines because you have to be in line. There is a long line of workers who want to get that green card. It's very stressful and very expensive. He sponsored us, me and my family, of course. They were my dependents, but this time it's a different route, and it was faster. Once it kicked in, after a few months, we were able to go back. I resigned from my teacher job and went to the church as a musical director.

After two years of working with him, he sponsored us for a green card, and that was our ticket to going here to the U.S. Once you get sponsored for a green card, you don't have to keep on working for whoever sponsored you because you are free. Your status is not dependent on your sponsor anymore. You can do anything. You can get any job you like, and it doesn't have to be the one who sponsored you. That priest was so willing to help us. He said, "It's okay. Go ahead if you want to go to the mainland and look for another job and work for another church. I don't really care. It's my way of just helping you out. Two years of you working with me is enough. Then you can go. I'm letting you go." That's how it started. We owe our life to him, actually, that priest.

That's really nice of him. Obviously, you decided to come to the mainland. Where did you land when you first came?

Because we have friends, my high school friend, one of my friends, they live in California, in San Leandro, so we lived with them first and tried to look for a job. My first job was being a musical director in San Jose, California. We moved after six months of living with my friend. We moved to San Jose. I worked for them for three years, and then we moved to Vegas after that.

What is it like being a musical director?

For me, it's better compared to being a teacher. Being a teacher, especially here, if you're a music teacher, you have to teach kinder to fifth grade, and that's a lot of prep. If you're teaching English and you're teaching English for third graders, you have only one syllabus for them, and you're fine. But with music, you have to teach kinder to fifth, or maybe six to eight; that's how it is. You have to do a lot of prep. I would say that teaching is something that I like to do, but having to prep a lot of lesson plans, it takes away the fun in teaching, honestly.

Working the church as a music director and having that priest who helped us, working with him was like, wow, it was like heaven. Everything was so, so, so relaxed. I still get to teach kids because we have a choir. In any job that I have, I always want to teach and have kids with me. It keeps me going, seeing them and seeing them learn. I think that's my calling, having kids learn because I teach them. It's very important for me. Every time I go and transition to another job, I always make sure I always have that kind of job, teaching kids. I had everything. If you work for a church as a musical director, it's a yearlong thing. You would think, oh, it's just leading the mass. No. It's something that you prepare for church, you prepare for Christmas season, you prepare for Advent season. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the church, but there's always something happening. Being able to still teach music at the same time, of course, because this is not the same. It's not really a big deal making them sing in the church every Sunday, but it's still music for me. It's something that I love. I like being a musical director. It's like working for the church, working for God. As I told you, I grew up a Catholic, and the church is really important for me.

What was it like living in San Jose?

It's really nice in San Jose, but then it's too expensive. That was also our deciding factor why we had to move to Vegas. We wouldn't be able to buy a house in San Jose. It's very expensive. Our goal is to have a house and live somewhere to settle down finally, so this is the place that we chose to settle down, for now.

Were there any other reasons why you chose Vegas?

Because my very close friend, also part of my sisterhood, was here first, and so she was trying to convince us, "Come to Vegas, just come and see how life is here." It's like, oh Vegas, I'm not going to go to Vegas; I'm not going to live in Vegas, because all those impressions about Vegas:

It's a desert; it's hot; it's just the Strip. Every time you go to Vegas, you always visit the Strip, and that's not a life that I would want. But then she was like, "No. Stay away from the Strip. Just go to where we live and come and see." We did for how many Christmases? Maybe three summers, three Christmases, we always come to visit them. It's not like a one-time decision that we made. For three years, it was always visiting Vegas every time we had a little vacation, and then finally, okay, let's settle here.

At that time, my daughter was about to go to high school. Being in San Jose, you have to be in a very good and expensive community, or you have to live in the expensive district, you have to stay in that one to get to a really good high school; otherwise, I would say it's not the best. Having to think about paying a big rent just for her to go to a really good school, it's not an option for us because it's too expensive. She was gearing towards performing arts, and she was playing the cello at the time. I've heard about Las Vegas Academy of the Arts. She got into that school, and that actually closed the deal for us. Okay, let's go. Then she made it to that school, and it was like, okay, maybe we'll give it a try. That was in 2015, and we're still here.

Just in general, not just in Vegas, but did you feel like there was any culture shock when you came over to the mainland?

Definitely, yes. Of course, language, it's very different. I didn't grow up speaking English because we were speaking our native language, which is Bisaya, in my house. Then when I went to college, it's Tagalog, the language in Manila, so that's how I communicated. Then having to speak a different—it wasn't really a different language. We learned it all throughout the years going to school. But then speaking English, not going by the book, is so different. That's a big challenge for me. Having to teach kids that are English speaking, it was hard. They always look at you like, what did you say? "You have an accent." Things like that. Kids can say that to you,

like, oh, okay. That and being far away from home; that's also a big hurdle for me. But then everything else, yes, you get used to it.

What were the hardest things to leave behind back in the Philippines?

Of course, family and living a comfortable life. You have everything there, your house, your home. The beach and the weather, yes, it's something that I still miss up to this day.

What were your first impressions of Las Vegas?

Dry in terms of the weather. It was so dry. Actually, I didn't dislike it, it's just that I didn't see myself living here the first time I got here. I thought, it's not the place for me, because I love the trees. Of course, when you're in the city, where are the trees in Vegas? You have to go to Mount Charleston. But I got used to it. I always go to Mount Charleston, and we do hikes because I love nature. You get by, but it's something that, oh, you don't have trees here.

What do you do now here in Vegas?

I have students that I teach. I'll teach at home, my piano students. During the day, because I only get my students after school, during the day I work for Dennis Ortwein Elementary. They have a specialized program for pre-K. I am a teacher assistant. I don't want to teach anymore, so I decided I am going to be a teacher assistant. I don't want to be looking for a job that's going to take me away from having to teach kids, so this is the nearest thing where I will still be teaching kids, and I will still have time for my piano students when I get home. It's a relaxed environment, pre-K. They're cute, and I still get to teach them, and I don't have to prep. I only go there, and once I get home, I'm fine, so I can focus more on my piano students. I also work part-time for a church. I still play for the church. I can't really stay away from the church. Every Sunday, I play for three masses in one church in Boulder City, St. Peter's Church. I play for those the first, second and third Sundays. It's part-time.

I'd like to shift the focus a bit. Could you tell us about—actually, what do you enjoy most about living in Vegas?

For me, living in Vegas, you can actually still go to California; it's near, so you can go to the beach. If you want to go to the mountains, you can go to Mount Charleston. Being in Vegas gave us the opportunity to settle down and have a place of our own, finally, after how many years? It was still affordable at that time. I get to do what I like, what I love. I don't have to work really full-time. We can live simply in Vegas. We have a house. We can pay our mortgage. It's just a really relaxed life that we're looking at and still get to enjoy what we love to do, having time to do what we love to do, like going on hikes and going to the beach. I think that's it.

I have a small circle of friends here, but we still get to see each other. When I was in California, I had a lot of friends, but we don't have time to see each other because you have to work, work, work, work. You can't do anything but work. Here, I still get to go out and spend time with friends and close family friends.

You touched on this a little bit earlier, but how do you see the American dream now?

The American dream is actually for young people, but I was young once. It's actually so hard to describe the American dream because I've never really dreamed about being in America in the first place. I think America grew on me. It gave me a lot of opportunities that I would not be able to have if I were just in the Philippines. The realization was when I was already here. When I was still in the Philippines, I didn't know what I was missing because I grew up in the Philippines, and that's my whole life, and without technology, before, you don't have access to videos, to all these traveling videos, so you are just satisfied with what you have. I grew up very simply, and I thought that's life for me. But then when I came here in America that's when I realized you can attain what you would want to do here in America. And the opportunities, if you

work hard for it, it's attainable, and you can live a comfortable life. Looking at what we have done in the past few years, getting your own car, having a house to live in that you could call your own even though you're still paying for it, it's a mortgage, but it's attainable. For me, you can see equality in terms of economic status; if you work hard, you can attain what they can attain.

For younger people especially, if you work hard for it, I think you get what you try. There are a lot of possibilities for you and opportunities compared to living in the Philippines. Sadly, it's a poverty-stricken country, and not a lot of people get a good education. Like here, even if you don't earn much, if you aim to be in school, you have that opportunity. You get scholarships. You get grants. I think that's the most important thing: Given the chance, you can be—I know it's cliché—you can be anything that you like if you aim for it. I always talk about this, too, with my friends. I may be a teacher, and my other friend is a nurse, and you know that nurses earn well. But we can go to the same restaurant, we can eat the same food, I can buy what she can, she drives a car and I also have a car. If you're in the Philippines, you will see the difference between a person who works for a bank and a person who works as a waitress or a waiter or maybe working in the casino. It's a big difference. You wouldn't be able to afford owning a house or a car. You see the difference of that one? I think for me that's really important.

Thank you for that. Now I'd like to shift a little bit. What cultural celebrations do you still participate in and celebrate?

Noche Buena, we still do that every Christmas, and I talked to you about that. It's a celebration, we eat, actually a dinner or whatever, but the food usually is very festive. The usual adobo, and we have a roasted pig. Then we also have this thing for New Year's where you have to gather fruits that are round, anything that's a circle because it's like eternity. If you have that on your

table, you'll have prosperity throughout the year. It's strange, I guess. You collect all the fruits that you can and put them on your table. I don't really believe in it, but I grew up having that, so it's like, okay, I'm just going to do that. At home we always have the advent wreath celebrating the four Sundays before Christmas. You light a candle every Sunday. I'm not sure if you're familiar with that. We celebrate. Every Sunday after church, you light one candle, and the candles are three purple and one pink candle, and it ends on the Sunday before we celebrate the 25th. It's the Sunday before the 25th. If the 25th falls on a Sunday, then it's going to be that Sunday. Just light it up and say a prayer with your family. Usually, the youngest in the family gets to light the candle. That's something that we still do up to now.

This is interesting. Courting, when you like someone, in the Philippines, you have to meet the parents, and you have to go to the house. Before going out to spend time with whoever, you have to show yourself to the parents first. That's also one cultural thing. I hope it still stays right now. I'm not sure. But that's how it was with my husband. He had to come and meet my parents, and then spend some time with me at home before we can go on dates. I know here you go out on dates before you get to meet the parents. It's the other way around.

Are there differences in cultural celebrations in different parts of the island?

Not *Noche Buena*. It's the same. Not really. Not too much of a difference. It's not the celebration, a lot of it that's different, it's more of belief, maybe. We always have what we call *utang na loob* in the Philippines, and it's very prominent in the province. When you do something for someone, you are compelled to do something good for her in return. We practice that back in our province, in Cagayan de Oro, and not too much in Manila. I don't know why. If you think about, it's like, why? Just because somebody helped you, you don't have to...It's ingrained in us, oh, I have to do something good in return just because he did a favor to me.

Could you tell us about some of the Filipino foods that you cook at home and your favorite dishes?

I don't really cook well. My husband comes from a part in the Philippines, which is called Pampanga, and they are well known to be really good cooks. He is the cook in the house. I can cook adobo. It's like pork stew. It's cooked in soy sauce, the adobo, and then the lechon. The lechon is the roasted pig. I don't cook that, though. It's usually in the celebration, if there's a birthday, if there's Christmas, any big celebration like wedding, there is always lechon. You go to the party because of the lechon, so it's a roasted pig and it's served. If you have two roasted pigs, it's like, oh, she is rich; she comes from a rich family, just because she has two roasted pigs. Adobo, that, and *tinolang manok*; it's like chicken, a soup. You just boil the chicken, and then put some potatoes. It's like chicken stew in a way. That's very famous, too.

From my husband's place, it's different from where we come from. For them, we have sinigang. It's cooked in vinegar. It's a little bit sour. It can be pork, it can be chicken, it can be beef, just cook it in vinegar. We call that sinigang.

Have you ever experienced any racially discriminatory practices here in the U.S. especially in Las Vegas, like racism?

I would say maybe a witness, but not to me in particular. I would say I have an advantage because I worked in a school setting. It's not like a big corporate job where there is a lot of diversity. My first job here was in a charter school, and it is run by Asians, so there wasn't much discrimination in terms of me being a Filipino. Right now, in this elementary school, I don't feel any of that. But I've experienced being called...because you're an Asian. We were in an accident. Somebody bumped our car, and he was obviously at fault. Then there is this person who just passed through. He was driving and he saw me. Of course, because I'm Filipina, I look

so Asian. He said, “Oh, Asians don’t know how to drive,” something like that. He was shouting it out to me on the road. That was something, but it didn’t really affect me. It’s like, eh, okay, I don’t care. Maybe because I’ve gone through all this process of immigration, it’s like, you know what? It’s not going to bother me. I know my place here. I am grateful that I’m here. I’m just grateful that I’m here being Asian. Not that it matters, but I see this as an opportunity, so I’m more of a grateful person rather than dwelling and, no, I’m here, I’m Asian, and I am much lesser than them. I’ve never really felt that, and I’m happy I didn’t feel it yet. I’m thankful that it didn’t happen in a workplace. It’s just a random person has told me that, and it doesn’t really matter.

I’ll turn it over to Stefani now.

When you came to Las Vegas, what part of town did you move to?

Southwest in Mountain’s Edge. We lived with our friend for about four months before we rented an apartment, which was also in the southwest.

And that’s where you live now?

Not in Mountain’s Edge, no. We are in southeast, Cactus and Silverado Ranch. What’s the other cross street? Maryland Parkway, but south Maryland Parkway.

You worked for the Sisters of Mercy in Guam.

In Guam, yes.

Do you attend a Sisters of Mercy Church here?

No. This one is a diocese one, it’s St. Peter, the Apostle Catholic Church. It’s in Boulder City, in Henderson. I haven’t really met any Sisters of Mercy out here in Las Vegas.

Does your friend still live in Mountain’s Edge?

Yes.

Is that the only friend from high school that's here?

I have another friend from high school who is in Henderson, too, yes. She is a nurse. All of my friends here in the U.S. are mostly nurses, yes, because those are the people they hire, nurses, teachers.

When you came, your daughter was of high school age, so she went straight to the Academy?

Yes.

How did she like it?

Well, she had it hard over there, just like a transfer, going to a magnet school and having to practice and do academics at the same time. But I think she learned a lot about discipline over there, I want to think that.

Thank you.

You're welcome. I hope it helps you for whatever you're going to use this.

I actually have one last question.

Of course.

I want to ask if there is anything you wanted to talk about that we didn't ask you.

Actually, no.

Awesome. Thank you so much.

You're welcome.

[End of recorded interview]

