

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Elnora Peralta
Interviewers: Asiya Kazi and Brittney Xu
Date/ Time of Interview: July 22, 2011 at 10:00 AM
Transcribed by: Asiya Kazi and Brittney Xu
Audio Track Time:

Background:

Setting:

HAAA interviews use the ideas of labor and capital as a economic explanation for Asian-American immigration and production. Ms. Peralta recalled her childhood in the Philippines, her job opportunities in the United States, and the future of her profession. She was one of the few Filipino women to become chief nursing officer and actively campaigned for

The interview was conducted in Fondren Library. The interview was approximately an hour and thirty minutes. Mrs. Peralta provided us with information regarding her experience as a professional nurses immigrating to the United States, her passion for community service and reform, and also provided us insight into the nursing profession.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

Asiya Kazi (**AK**)
Brittney Xu (**BX**)
Elnora Peralta (**EP**)

BX: This is Brittney Xu.

AK: And Asiya Kazi.

BX: For the Houston Asian American Archive. We are interviewing Ms. Elnora Peralta. (pause). So Ms. Peralta, can you start off by telling us---the neighborhood where you grew up. What *Orong* was like?

EP: O-rong.

BX: Orong. Sorry.

EP: I grew up--- I grew up in Orong---Kabankalan, in the Phillippines, and um, what else do I?

BX: Um, could you tell us, like the neighborhood? Or anything you remember from your childhood?

EP: Oh! It's um, it's a rural area in the Philippines, and I come from a family of 8 kids. My parents were um, schoolteachers. My father was the principal of the elementary school I went to. And my mother was my first grade teacher. So the people in that place actually were um, working mostly---most of them work in the sugarcane plantation. In that area. And um, and some of them, do some um, carpentry jobs, but it's it's a rural community, and when you need something, you need to go to a town, which is like 6 miles away from that place. So my parents were actually the only teachers in that um place. When I was growing up. And then uh, in high school, I went to the city and did my high school there, where all my other brothers and sisters also went. And a lot of the kids from that place, if they ever go to high school, they go to Kabankalan City. But mostly that's that's what happened in that area. They either ---if they don't go to high school, they end up working in the sugarcane plantation.

AK: So how did you perceive your parents' economic status in relation to the other people in your---

EP: Um, we were considered like the middle class in that neighborhood. Since both of my parents were working professional workers.

AK: So you mentioned that a lot of people were sugarcane---sugarcane farmers. Do you know about how much they made doing that?

EP: At that time? Uh, when you compare it to dollars, here, it's gosh, I can't even. Think. Maybe a dollar a day? At the time.

BX: Um, you mentioned your family's middle class, but even though you were well off, was it still hard to ----for 8 siblings to get all the resources you needed?

EP: Yes...in the Philippines, the school, even in elementary school you have---the education is not free as it's supposed to be---we still have---we still have to. There's a lot of some fees that supposed to be paid by the parents. There's not a lot of government help in the Philippines for schoolchildren. Uh, there's no free meals, you have to provide your own meals. Um, although, since we lived nearby the school, we walked to school. All of us did. And even the other kids that live farther have to walk. The transportation is very scarce at that time, anyway. It was in the 50's, when I was in elementary school.

AK: What about healthcare?

EP: Healthcare. Um, there there's no um, access to---in the rural area, the only way for people to be seen by a doctor, they have to go to the town at the time, Kabankalan. There's none in that community. My mother serves as the ---she's like trained to give --when---for example, when one of the people there gets sick, they go to the clinic in the town and they bring prescribed medicine, and they have to have some shots. My mother used to give the shots.

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That's why I became a nurse, I saw my mother do this, take care of people. And she had first aid, trained as a first aid---to to do first aid to these people. So I grew up watching her do that. So that's why I think I became a nurse.

Even the childbirth---most of us---I was delivered by a midwife, myself. Uh, six of us, out of the eight children---6 of us were delivered by a midwife in our home. Home delivery. 2 of my brothers were delivered in the town, in a ---we call it a periculture center, which is a little community hospital in town. Because the the the pre---maternity checkup, the doctor already decided that they---my mother would have a problem delivering them. They were big babies. So. They were not born at home. But all of us were born at home, delivered by a midwife.

And at that time, most of the time, child deliveries were done that way. In the Phillipnes, in the rural areas.

AK: So you said you went to high school in the city. What was that like, transitioning from a rural area to a big city?

EP: um, it's it's it's not---I guess it was easy. Not hard, but---when I was---when my mother delivered my two brothers, in this---what used to be a town, now it's a city. Half of my um...I was sent to school in that town, when I was finishing elementary school, to help her with my two brothers who were being delivered. So I ended up graduating from the elementary school in the town already. So my classmates were already the same people we went to high school with. And I guess my advantage is, I was the top in the school, I was I was I was the valedictorian of the school, of the elementary schooo. So everybody liked me. Everybody was trying to get to be my friend. So it was to my advantage. So it was not hard for me to transition. Because then I---did---had a lot of friends then, and then when I went to high school, a lot of those people became my friends. And I stayed in town with a family friend for the week, Monday to Friday, and then we'd go home in the evening to my my home, and then come back, Sunday evening, to go back to school.

AK: And it was common, the commuting?

EP: Yes. Yes and uh---sometimes we have to walk---this is like a 6 miles. It's not a long walk I guess, 6 miles. The distance between my home and where we went to school was like 6 miles. And we have to walk because transportation was scarce. My father used to have a little sugarcane plantation himself, but all the---the trucks, I guess they were using it for hauling sugarcane. So we don't use it for transportation. Um, sometimes we use horses to go to commute, and it was fun, to go from the rural areal to the town. We ride on horses. On horseback.

BX: So after high school, you decided to go on and get---go to college? (EP: yes) Can you tell us about that?

EP: I went to um, to another province. In the United States it's called a state, in Philippines, it's called a province. It's actually in Illo-Ilo, where I went to St Paul's. at the time, it's called St.

Paul's school of nursing. It's now a university today. Um, that's where I finished my um, college. Started with St. Augustine University, you get your pre-nursing, your preparatory liberal arts courses, and then you go to nursing school. That's where I graduated.

BX: So how ---was it different from the province you grew up in?

EP: No---yes. It was different. It's uh, it's actually, uh you have to commute also, from from where I was, you have to ride a bus for 3 hours to go into the port, where I have to take like a little boat ride to go to the other province. And I stayed in, in the dorm of the school,

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and then I---we were allowed to go home like twice a year. Once in Christmas vacation, and then at the end of the school year.

AK: Do you want to check the recorder?

BX: Yeah. (mess with recorder)

AK: So you were talking about college. Do you remember your tuition was like?

EP: I can't remember. (pause) Um. Hm. And also in the Phillipnes, there's no um---there's some scholarships, like if I had gone to a public um college, like the University of the Phillipines, uh, I would have free tuition. Because when you are out---I graduated top of my school, from first grade until college. Um. They have some scholarships only for the top person of the class, to go to the Univerity of the Phillipnes, it's this governemtn university in the Philippines, it's a big university in Menoa. And and but the private schools, where I went, offered no scholarships at all. And there's no loans from the governemtn in the Philippines. My parents have to send me to school; pay for everything for me: tuition, dorm, and I have to stay in the dorm. They require us to stay in the dorm. And books and everything. Everything is paid for by my parents.

Um. The tuition in terms of I guess it's in pesos---at that time, I guess the rate is like one is to two...maybe...I can't I can't equate it to dollars. It was not uh, it was expensive to the Philippines economy, but if you translate it to dollars, it's not. Maybe maybe about \$50 a month, at that time? Because even when I came here, in 1970, the cost of everything was so low.

AK: You went to college in the 60's?

EP: Yes. I graduated in 1967. So.

AK: So did you sense that your parents had difficulty paying for college for 8 children? Or they didn't send everyone to college?

EP: Um. It's in turns. My brother was in public school, he was he was going to be a teacher, so he was almost in finishing school, then I was in school, and then my two sisters went to college after me. And also---it's almost like we were taking turns, but it happens because we were I

guess, our age difference is such that only my brother and I were in college at the same time, and then my sisters came after me. So when I graduated from college and I was working at the same hospital, I was sort of helping my mom um, fund my sister, who was in college at that time. And that's the tradition in the Philippines. When you finish school, you're expected to help your younger sisters finish school. And uh, that's that's something that we practice, and I think that most of the families in the Philippines do that, because there is not a lot of help from anywhere else.

BX: So at what point did you learn English and decide to come to the United States?

EP: um, English is the medium of instruction in the Philippines. I think they changed it now. When when we left, there was a in the 70's and 80's---there was such a move to be nationalistic, and and put the Filipino language in school as a medium of instruction. But when I went to school, the medium of instruction was English. So we learned English first grade.

AK: And your first language, can you pronounce it?

EP: Illongo. It's our dialect.

AK: Is it different from Tagalog?

EP: Yes, it's different. The Philippines has about 87 dialects because there are 7100 islands, 87 dialects, three big islands, and all of that speaks differently. Like Christie, speaks Tagalog or Ilocano, I think is her native dialect.

AK: And could you understand Tagalog?

EP: Yes, the national language is Tagalog, and we are taught Tagalog in school as a subject. And some of the schools---'cause I went to a Catholic school for the rest of my school---from um, high school, the school was run by the priests, Columbine priests, and college, the school was run by the nuns.

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We were we were we have Spanish as a course also. So we learned Spanish, and Tagalog at the same time, as a language. So uh, I understand Tagalog, and speak it fluently, like my own dialect. It's interesting---the Filipinos, if they want to understand the other, they have to speak English. There's not one---the dialects are so different and some people don't even speak Tagalog. Some people speak English better than speak Tagalog. So, English is more common to people who are don't understand the language.

BX: Um, you said after college you were working at a hospital there?

EP: I worked---yes, at a hospital there.

BX: When was that?

EP: From 1967 until 1970 I was working in the Philippines, then I went to the United States in 1970.

BX: Ok, what made you come to the United States?

EP: Um, um, my father---everybody's family's dream is to come to the United States. My father, always had been asking me to go to the United States, and improve yourself, and you know...but I was not, at the time, even as a young student, I was always interested in community activities, I liked to volunteer. When I was in um, when I was working, I was volunteering teaching um child...um, family planning in, projects of the churches. I went around and taught family planning while I was there. And I was more interested in doing community activities than going to the United States. So um, a lot of my classmates that graduated with me already left after graduation, they they prepared their paperwork and then they go to the United States in the same year, '68, '67, '68, '69. I stayed. I worked, I worked in the community as a student um not not as um a volunteer. I liked doing that. I wanted to join the operation brotherhood, which is um, it was a civic organization that goes to Vietnam at that time, and do um, community activities like teaching people how to do, teaching healthcare, and all of those things. But then my father wanted me, urging me to go to the United States. And I was also have the responsibility, because I have younger sisters and brothers. There's 4 girls, and 4 brothers in the family. I was the oldest girl, I have a brother before me. Was our oldest, um uh, the oldest one, is the uh brother. But so then my father died, what turned me is when my father died in 1970, I was working in the Philippines, and when he died I felt the urge and the responsibility to fulfill his dreams---he's always asking me to go, I decided I better go, my father died already at that time. So I left, in 1970.

I came to the United States in October, 1970. So I was working for 3 years before I came here.

AK: Did your father not urge your brother to also go to the United States?

EP: No, because um, at the time, the need ---the United States had been um, the need for jobs are more nurses. And I was a nurse, so the the jobs that were---they were recruiting for mostly nurses, and physicians. So there was not a need for teachers. Although the first group of people that came to America in California and Hawaii were all farmers. Cause they were working in plantations. But most of the professionals that came in the the 60's and 70's were nurses and doctors. There were not a lot of teachers.

BX: So when you got to New York, what did you do there?

EP: I was---I came to Philadelphia first. I was an exchange visitor participant. There was a program before, it's called Exchange Visitors' Program between the United States and the Philippines. You come here for a year, or two years, at the time it was two years, and then you go back to the Philippines---you train here, they train you for skills and upgraded knowledge, and then you go back to the Philippines and practice what you learned here. But most of the time these nurses don't go back.

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They stay, get more jobs, marry, stay here. When I came in 1970, that was my intention. And then the program was ...the program was cut into a year, one year, and then you're supposed to go back. But before I went back, while I was in Philadelphia, I was always looking for something to motivate people to do something. I noticed that the exchange visitors participant like us, we were used to staff the hospital, but we we were given a stipend. So we complaining why we were paid a stipend, and not a salary, when we were doing the exact same thing the American nurses were doing. And we were already registered nurses, you know---at that time, there was reciprocity, for licenses in the Philippine and Philadelphia and the United States at that time.

So I I and some other people reformed a group called Exchange Visitors' Organization, and I was at Thomas University hospital at that time, and we decided to launch our complaints, discuss it among the community leaders in Philadelphia who were Filipino-Americans. And we sent it to the Labor Department in the Philippines, and filed a formal complaint about what's happening with us. So the the Department of Labor, apparently, I guess they discuss it with with the United States immigration department also. The Exchange Visitors' Program was was stopped. It was cancelled. I always believed that maybe it's due in part to what we did or maybe it was just time for it to expire anyway. So after a year, I moved to New York City. And the Philippine government then and the United States have another program, they call it H---and that's when the H-1 visa was opened, it's like people were coming as working visas. It's already---when the immigration laws were changed. They also made it possible---the immigration law they also has changed that, if you an exchange visitor participant, you don't have to go back to the Philippines--this is in 1972---you can stay in the United States and apply for your permanent residency. Which we did. So we didn't even have to go back.

And the working visa now is better, because the nurses are recruited from the Philippines, they come as registered nurses, and they're paid the same way as the other nurses now. So they are not considered students with stipend. So I guess what we did, worked! Or maybe they they listened to us. That's what that's what we believe! The nurses that were in my group that were filing the complaints formally, believed that it happened because of our work. So I moved to New York in 1971. And then I stayed there until 1978. (BX: Ok) I got married in 1974.

BX: Before we talk about New York, can we go back to Philadelphia?

EP: Philadelphia? Ok.

BX: I just wanted to ask---you said that you um and a bunch of other Filipino nurses got together, so when you got here, did you find a community to belong to, of Filipino people?

EP: Yes. Yes. There was---there was---um, there was a lot of Filipino's who already in Philadelphia that were living here. One of them, actually, became my father-in-law. One of them owned, it's called um the Oriental grocery store? ---it's called Peralta's Grocery Store. Which belonged to my father in law. And they, what they do, is they supply us with with our rice, you know, rice is a staple for Filipino. We eat rice 3 times a day. So we go to their store, and we buy the groceries, and they deliver it to our apartment. And that's how I met my husband. Through

the store. Although my husband at that time was working in New York City. But sometimes he would go home, and I---that's how I met him. Through his parents' store. So there's a lot of--- Christmas time, we gathered in their house---their parents were actually uh, it's like, big elder parents for us, for all of us who have no families there. So we go to their house and celebrate Christmas. And there are other families like that, who help us.

AK: Uh, before you came here, what was your perception like of the United States?

EP: It was like the dream country. Everybody thinks that everybody that comes here---it was good, it was the ---people in the Philippines always look forward to coming to the United States. It's like ---if you want to improve yourself, go to the United States. So that's why my father was urging me---you have to go get better and um, improve yourself, go to school, earn a lot of money, and and then be a better person. so what's what everybody was thinking at that time.

BX: And did your perception change after you were here a while?

EP: Um, I think it it --no, I think it is a um, it was---all I know is, when I came it's true if you work hard---what I find in the United States, that it's still true today, there's a lot of opportunities as long as you work hard, and really work at whatever you want to be, you can be. There's no foot---obviously, freedom to do whatever you want to do. In the Philippines, even if you wanted to do something, but there's not a lot of opportunities. So that's the difference. That's why people come here and and work.

BX: So then you moved to New York, after a while? (CP: Yes) So then you got your first job there? Four dollars an hour? (CP: Yes) You said...what was that job?

EP: I was a staff nurse, at at the Baptist Rail medical center in new York City. Yeah...we were paid like four dollars an hour. But remember at at this time, eggs---the iodide salt I remember the iodide salt, Morton's iodide salt, was one cent. That whole can was one cent. A dozen of eggs was ten cents. A gallon of milk was like 15 cents. Everything was low too. And our ---the apartment that we were---in Philadelphia the apartment that we were living in, actually there were four of us staying there, we paid like 50 dollars. I remember getting---we were paying like, for um, the whole apartment for every year---every month, we paid like 50 dollars. So it's very cheap. And and um, when I went to New York, the first apartment that I lived in, the hospital was subsidizing part of it, they paid for part of the apartment. I think we were paying like \$150 a month. For the apartment. So it's very cheap. (pause)

AK: So you got married in '74?

EP: Yes. I went back to Philadelphia---I went back to Philadelphia although we were living in New York City already. My husband and I were already living ---because he was already in New York when I went to New York, so. But we got back we went to Philadelphia to get married. Because most of our friends were there, and his parents were there. And I didn't have any family here per say, so I said ok, we'll get married in Philadelphia. So we went to Philadelphia. But. We we just got there to get married, we didn't live there. We still stayed in New York City.

AK: And was any of your family in the Philippines---did they ever visit you or did you ever go back to visit or anything?

EP: I have not gone back to the Philippines, until 1996. 26 years later. Long time. Um, at the time, at the the when you become a permanent resident, once you're apply for it, you cannot leave the country until you get your permanent residence or took a while to get that. So I cannot leave anyway. Uh, and then I got married, then I had kids, so I decided to stay. But, I was already I was ---yeah, I was already here in Houston when I went back to the Philippines. In 1996.

AK: How long did it take to get your permanent residence?

EP: Uh...when did I get it finally? I applied in 1972. I finally got it around 19—I think 1975 already. I can't remember, but it's it's around that time. It took awhile. And um, actually, because I got married in 1974, I think it made it faster, because my husband, my husband became ---he was also a permanent resident, but because he knew---he knew if he became a citizen and applied with—for me, it's faster. He became a United States citizen because of me. And then he changed, changed my status as as um, they call it um, "priority one", like United States citizen spouse. So my my papers was hastened. So I got my green card in 1975.

BX: Um, I don't know if you answered this already, but did you moved to New York to find a better job or...what was the reason?

EP: It's because the---exchange visitors program expired already. And I have two cousins who live in new York City. And and at this time, I was already seeing, I was had already had Jimmy as my boyfriend and he was working in New York. That's two reasons.

AK: What did your husband do?

EP: He was working for, um, he was a photographer technician, he was working for American Photography corporation, at that time.

AK: So what was your first house like, that you had with your husband?

EP: We lived in an apartment, we never had a house, of our own, we lived in an apartment. It's it's an one bedroom apartment, subsidized by the hospital. We lived there (pause) I guess, even--when I first started in New York I was living with two roommates by myself. It was like two bedrooms. It was also subsidized by the hospital. And and then when I got married I moved with my husband to a---this time it's a one-bedroom apartment with him until we had a baby. My my oldest son was born in New York City. In 1975.

BX: Um, did you find it was harder to work because you had a baby now at home that you needed to take care of?

EP: Yes. It was---it was---we didn't want to leave the baby anywhere with babysitters, 'cause we don't know a lot of people who would babysit at that time, so. What we did, like I worked, I worked 3-11 shift in the evening, and my husband worked during the day, and uh, sometimes,

sometimes, we would meet in the doorway of the apartment, to give the baby, and then he comes in and I go to work. And because my my job is just a block away from work, I would come during break time, for dinner, to visit the baby, and my husband, so that's how we tried to raise our kid. Uh, in New York City they give you an hour for lunch. I---that's---when I came to Houston, they give you 30 minutes for lunch! So I said oh, there's a difference! I would not have been able to do that---come home and visit, if I had 30 minutes. But they gave us an hour. And I lived so close to the hospital.

BX: So you lived in New York until---you said that Melody and Pete Versales convinced you to move to Houston?

EP: No, no. Melody and Pete---no they were here already. I met them here. They didn't convince me. I have a friend, who um, my roommate, Lily Fronda, she was my roommate in Philadelphia, we came as exchange visitors together and then we moved to New York together also, she was my roommate. And then she got married also, she got married, uh, before me, and just six months before me, so we were very close. And then they moved to Houston, in 1976. And at the time, after after a while, everybody was saying, you cannot raise kids here in New York City. It's too much. So. Some people were---some of our friends lived in the suburbs of New York, or New Jersey; and then they come come and commute to New York City to work. And some people were already leaving New York City and then um, there was a time that New York City was going bankrupt, and and everybody was getting out of New York. My husband actually was laid off from work in 1976. And uh the company closed, his company American Photography has been there for 34 years in that city, closed down. So a lot of people were leaving. And my friend Lily and her husband Don went to Houston, and uh they were saying, instead of---my husband and I brought a property in Florida, we were going to go to Florida! And then Lily Fronda and her husband convinced us to go to Houston instead. So we moved to Houston in 1978. Um.

I have a 6 month old baby at that time. Ellen. My second baby was born in New York in 1977. So I cannot---I was pregnant at that time, so I was telling my friend, I should have the baby in New York first, before I moved, because it's a more convenient place, the uh health uh the doctor that I was with is in New York City. So I had the baby, and after 6 months, we moved to Houston.

BX: Did you have any expectations about Houston?

EP: Uh, I had a few---I went to visit here with with Rex, my oldest son, and we came here to visit before we moved. Just me ---not even my husband didn't come with me, it was just the baby. Um, it was different, but I said I like it because it's like a country living versus New York City, and then uh, and my friend Lily already bought a house, and in New York City, it's too expensive to even buy your house. And then um, the also, in New York, when you buy a house at that time, they ask you for a lot of the deposit, like 25% or something like that. Here, I found out when I moved here, you just put 5% down, you can buy a house! So I said oh, that's that's good. So uh...we decided to move because of that. It looks like a place that you could raise a family. And it's more country versus city.

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AK: Houston was even- was Houston as big then as it is today- today it's the fourth largest city, but at the time you said it seemed like being in the country?

EP: yes, the population was less and there was less- I remember when the first time I went to Hermann hospital where that's my first job. There was only like maybe less than maybe about ten Filipino nurses working in Hermann. There's like hundreds of them now there. So even in, there's a lot of people still coming to Houston but the population I think is less than now and the city was growing. I remember when the- at night, everything is dead. I mean, you know, I came from New York City where there is a lot of night life. My friends who were single they said when they have to go to a club or something, they have to go to Dallas. They didn't have places here that opened. Later on, downtown was I think the first restaurant that opens until two o'clock in the morning. Everything closes early here before, so there was no place to hang out at night.

AK: how did you find the diversity, ethnically, in Houston?

EP: in Houston, compared to New York City, it was not as diverse as New York. But then, pretty soon, I see people coming in from different countries but I'm used to diverse population because New York is like cosmopolitan. It's like everybody from everywhere are in New York City, so um people here to me, people - you could see somebody in New York eating ice cream on the streets or eating fruit like anywhere, here it's like everybody was more formal, was more- you could not see those kinds of behaviors just on the streets. It's of until lately. Um the other thing that's different here is there's no public transportation. I remember the apartments where we used to live in Hillcroft Avenue. Took about an hour and the first house that we bought is like half a mile away from my school from a bus station; we're on Hillcroft and South Main. So I have to literally from the bus stop to my house. I have to literally walk back from my house; there was no transportation. Uh in New York, there is bus every two minutes, the subway; there is buses, public buses. Here there was not. There's more buses now. Before it was very scarce- that's when I started to drive. I never drove before. Parking itself is expensive, and um but here you almost have to- you have to drive because you cannot get anywhere without a car. So more necessity here. In New York it's not really necessary to have your own private transportation, but here it is.

AK: Um you're saying how people seem more formal here. Did you see any other differences in attitude or um perception between New York and here?

EP: um the people in New York are more- are more vulgar. They scream at each other anywhere. Even in the hospital, I remember when I first started in the hospital in New York, one of the nurses aids would scream "Mrs. Voss, get this thing!" I said "oh my god" so I would say come down, slow down here. People here are more courteous, more polite. That's even in the hospital, that's what I noticed. But people are- on the other hand, people are more friendly in New York too, they talk to you everywhere, here people will- are not as open to to um. But later on that changed. People are more open and talking to people on the streets now. When we first moved here,

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it's like people would just stare at you and not really converse unless you start the conversation. Um diversity, I think it's changed through the years. In the beginning there was not a lot of different people here.

AK: So can you describe how you got your first job in Houston?

EP: um I had friends already that worked in Hermann so I just interviewed and I guess they put them as references. Then I was hired. It was not hard. At that time there was a lot of vacancy so this is the time when there was working visa, they were getting nurses from the Philippines because there was a lot of nursing shortage at that time also here in the United States. So you can almost walk into a hospital and get a job right away and then that changed later but at the time its easy to get a job, it was.

BX: Um you eventually, you became the chief nursing officer eventually

EP: At the end before I lost my job now. Renaissance hospital, 19- I was there, I moved there in 19- um, god when did I go to renaissance. '97 until 2009.

BX: So before that did you see any Filipinos in high nursing positions?

EP: Um, I have another- one of the nurses that I worked with at Hermann became a chief nursing officer at Hermann. The doctors hospital in Tidwell. I was still in Hermann at that time. She was the only chief nursing officer besides myself that I know of in Houston up to now. Right now there is no chief nursing officer of my position this time. There's a lot of directors in level of nursing and management now but until, when I was a chief nursing officer in the hospital, I was the only one, Filipino nurse in that position in Houston for a long time.

AK: Um, in your opinion what were the effects of recruiting nurses from other countries to come and work in the US?

EP: Like, what do you mean?

AK: like maybe economically or on job availability?

EP: They're recruited because- the reasons why they're recruited?

AK: What were the effects of having nurses come from other countries here?

EP: I guess the reason why they're being recruited is because they were jobs, there were no people to fill the position, there was a nursing shortage. So that's why these problems were developed by the department of justice and immigration and um so they were getting these nurses from all over the world, mostly from the Philippines, some from India, some from um, I think most Indian, I heard some people when I was in Hermann I worked with some

nurses from Ireland also but mostly from the Philippines and India that I see. Now they have some nurses from Nigeria and some other from Africa they were recruited because there was nursing shortage at that time so the effect is I guess the care is better because there's nurses at the bedside, but you mean economic, how did it affect the United States?

AK: Or maybe just the diversity in hospitals.

EP: the hospital became diverse and that's why um diversity was offered as a course in college now in nursing schools and the other thing that we used to do or it was required especially in Texas was a cultururation course. When the nurses come here, they're required to take a course in cultururation so they could- they could practice the profession better, so they could be um- they could work with patients better they learned the culture, so there were some courses offered to these universities so they can at least know what these patients are,

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what the American culture is, 'cause it is hard. The the problem even with us- even with us, going back to Philadelphia, there's a lot of American slang that we don't use that we don't know in the Philippines, that was almost- now when we talk about it, its fun but at the time its like for example when a patient, I had an experience when a patient was looking for a pocket book and I was looking for a pocket book to read. She was looking for her purse. And the patient was getting irritated because I kept saying "I didn't see your pocket book, I have never seen one" and then she found it. I had put it in the drawer to keep it and she thought that I was trying to steal it, so I was keeping it. But I didn't know that it was a pocket book, that word was- so we had courses in colloquial expression in Exchange Visitors program and later on to the acculturation courses, I think those were brought up too because it really affected care of patients when communication is broken down.

AK: So when the United States is bringing all these nurses from different countries- Ireland, Philippines, India- was there a common educational or entry level standard for all the nurses?

EP: there- there since 19 um I think it was in the 1980's, when the United States changed the rules everybody who comes to practice has to take the board exams. Even if- when we first came, we didn't have to take the board exams. There was called reciprocity of licensure, but then that was changed um unless you work in the veterans hospital until now when you work for the veterans administration you can transfer from different states and your license is okay but if you work outside of the veterans administration hospital you have to take the boards from state to state to state so there was one board, everybody takes the same NCAT? Board, they call it NCATS? And then you can practice all over the United States so this standard is the same. The boards require you to take the same exam that the American nurses are taking when they graduate from here, so it's the same board offered to the us graduates, it's the same board given to the foreign graduates.

AK: So um the fact that it wasn't required when you came here, did you find that to be a problem?

EP: Um, not-not really. The curriculum, the nursing curriculum in the Philippines was based here. Its almost the same subjects that the nurses take here were offered in the Philippines because our, like the curriculum in the Philippines at the time was mostly based on the American curriculum in schools anyways so the it was not, the difference, the, I guess the problems in the practice that I saw and I think most of the nurses, were in communication, in language, and then the equipment, there's not a, there's a lot of um technical equipments here that are not available in third world countries like the Philippines, but the practice itself is almost the same, so its not, so that's why most of he hospital offer orientation or residency courses when you come in because of that. Um. And I guess the advantages of me going through the exchange visitors program because we have some classes from [inaudible] in the university to- and then um and then we go to the hospital and practice so we had that, the other nurses that came with a working visa have to go to work directly, they didn't have to go take courses like we did. Um in um to prepare them, they have a longer orientation period. Some hospitals put them, like when I was in Hermann, we have residency programs for nurses, new grads. And the people from the Philippines coming in are considered new grads because they have to to really learn the culture, learn how to take care of the patients, so they are in orientation longer and they work with a preceptor. So and some mentors with them before they, they can practice.

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BX: So you've been really active in the nursing community, you've joined a few organizations. And also um you once campaigned for the Bonita house of hope um.

EP: Yes, I was in the um when I was in renaissance hospital, the Bonita house of hope needed covered parking. So the um the their manager there solicited help from the neighboring community, the neighboring businesses and the hospital was neighboring to that. So they came and they came to me and asked if I would help them so I spoke at the city council with them, with the owner of the Bonita house of hope, and then um and then the manager, carol. So we asked for them to- and then the councilman, they got it. Because we went there twice, two years in a row, and then we went back again and asked for it. So that was good, so that's one of the things I did in that hospital um in Hermann, um when I was in Hermann I was more active in the American heart association. That's where I met Linda Toyota from last night and then Dr. Gor, Beverly Gor, we used to do a lot of health fairs for American Heart. At one time I was the chair person of the outreach community- outreach um person for the special populations, meaning um women and children and the senior citizens for American Heart, so we did programs for these people, health fairs and teaching them access to care and um I had a lot of fun working with the community.

BX: Um do you think there's still a nursing shortage in Houston today or in America?

EP: Uhh, right now I don't think so but the uh there's a lot of- there's a lot of jobs that are open now that are very selective qualifications but its not as short as they seem to be...there's a lot of graduates that can not find jobs. Because the openings are so specific qualifications like if you there- most of the hospitals do not- the medical center especially

now, the hospitals in the medical center will not hire nurses with no baccalaureate degree. Before you can practice as a diploma nurse like an associate's degree, you can practice. Now they're looking for that, so specific qualifications- um you have to have computer skills now and some people don't have that so but the- I don't think in a few years from now when all of these baby boomer nurses, like me, I'm like in the verge of retiring, and a lot of people in my age group will be retiring- there will be a big nursing shortage again, but I guess not right now. Because of the economy, everybody that was not working went back to work so that's- that's I think the reason why the jobs are filled.

AK: Um do you think a lot- do you know a lot of nurses who have joined a nursing union because they feel like they have a limited voice with hospital management and low support from them?

EP: There's- there's no nursing unions in Texas. Texas is the (inaudible) state, so there's no unions here, except the post office because it's a federal organization, but there's no unions per say in Texas.

AK: um so do feel that one of the issues in nursing today is that a lot of nurses say that management doesn't support them as much as other professionals in the hospital. Do you think that's true?

EP: um I don't think so. I think because of the nursing shortage in the past- the nurses, the advantage to the nurses is um the hospitals are more aware of their needs and the salaries for nurses have gotten higher because of the shortage in past. And in order for them to attract good people they've had to increase salaries,

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benefits, there's flexible hours, there's hospitals that even offer daycare for kids. There's a lot of benefits that weren't there in the past but its now there. So um I think for the most part the management listens to the nurses. The nurses is the largest group of professionals in the hospital. There's more nurses of all the other professions in the hospital. You need more nurses there than any other professionals so I think their voices so I think they're heard better uh and I think that's true now that before.

BX: Uh you said you didn't go back to the Philippines until the 90's, so did your children- were they aware of their heritage. Did you tell them about -

EP: Yes, yes. My mother, when I had my third child, Emily, she was- after I had her, I had cerebral- cerebral- bell's palsy. My face was paralyzed for six months, I was out of the job for six months, I stayed home for six months so my mother came and at that time helped me, so they have their grandmother at home so that helped us a lot with all the customs, traditions, heritage, and all that with the kids so its not common here that grandmothers stay with you know, not a lot of Filipino families have grandmothers in their house. In the Philippines, there are no nursing homes, so our old people staying at home until they die. They stayed- we lived with our grandparents, there's no nursing homes so that's a common

practice and tradition so by having my grandmother- my mother at home taught the kids to see that and they liked it. My mother died in 2001 and my kids grew up with her, so they were aware of all those...

BX: Did any of your other family members come to the United States?

EP: I have a sister who came- she's a nurse too, she went to the same school as me, she came here and lived with me until she got married. She's here in Houston. Um so work determines- she almost did the same thing I did, and got married. She's married to an American- Caucasian, she has three kids. And then I have another brother who works with here too. He was an engineer in the Philippines, but when he came, the engineering jobs were scarce so I tried to help him get a job in Hermann. He works in the cath lab as a technician. He's also married and has two kids. So the two of them are here in Houston with me.

BX: You mentioned your sister married a Caucasian man. Was your family surprised or what was their reaction?

EP: um, they were surprised but because my mother- my mother was here already at that time. And actually the guy that she married was one of my employees, one of my staff. So they met, he's a nurse too, so they met at Hermann hospital so the staff used to tease me "you hired terry", he's from buffalo New York, "you just hired him so you could have a husband for your sister," you know they were just teasing me. So my mother met him when he was a staff for me so they um they welcomed him.

AK: In general, what do you find the attitude is of um immigrants from the Philippines towards interracial marriage?

EP: Um I think of all the Asians that I know, the Filipinos are more open to interracial marriages. They're not a cliquish or clannish as other Asians are. That's my opinion. There's more intermarriage in the Filipino culture I think. And um because there's a lot of- we were under- the Americans went to the Philippines, we were under the Spanish for 300 years. That's why we have Spanish names. And then there was the Spanish-American war and then Americans stayed in the Philippines, so we were very uh acclimated to American culture also.

BX: So what have you been doing lately, since you said that you don't have a job at renaissance anymore?

EP: um, I had been- um I was helping a friend who owns a home health agency market, her business to other places. I have- I have- I had renewed my activity with the Filipino nurses association. I sat on their advisory council because I was one of their past presidents so uh I do other community activities, conferences. I'm very active in the church where I go and I do a lot of fundraising, we have this program where I um-the-its like- it's like feeding the poor and helping the needy stuff for the church. Um I have a friend who owns the- who used to be a physician who used to be my boss, my ceo, in renaissance. He has his own

practice. I help market his business or help with uh- lately the project that he's doing is doing testimonials with his patients. I do interviews with patients and then do a testimonial for him, so I do a lot of stuff like that. Um I was telling Linda um it might be by next year, I might go back and a lot of people are actively recruiting me to work for them and all those so I might just go back to work again.

AK: um what do you think the portrayal of nurses is like in the media? And do you think it's changed from when you came here in the 70's to today?

EP: I think so. The nurses are more- are seen as more important, significant people in the hospital or in the care of patients now like before, in the 1970's, in the early years, the nurses are just looked at like high maidens for patients and all that. Its like we don't even think, we work. But now I think the perception has changed a lot. There's a big campaign for Johnson and Johnson. I don't know if you've seen it on TV, they always have those ads running all the time about nursing, like if somebody is dying, a nurse is there to help you. There's a lot of campaigns about nurses. I think it has changed a lot. Um like I said the nursing shortage had really become an advantage to the nursing profession because they have to- the hospitals and all the health care companies have to do something to get nurses in because nobody was taking nursing before. Because they always think that I'm just the maid to these patients, but then it become a- the people are more aware about what the nurses do and then the profession itself has changed. Like now, they require you to have a baccalaureate degree to work in some places and people are being encouraged to go back to school, so it's more looked at as a profession up there, than before. Yeah, it has changed a lot, positively.

AK: So you feel like, in public image, nurses are more respected today?

EP: Yes, I think so. I believe so.

BX: Do you have any more questions?

AK: I had a question going back to your childhood. You lived in a- kind of a rural area, was it common for people from that area to go to college?

EP: No, um as of- when I went back in '96- my whole family went to college, my brothers and sisters, all of us went to college and then there's a - maybe, even high school, some of them don't even finish high school. They get married and have their own kids or work in the plantation or be farmers. But theres maybe like 5 families with college kids. A lot of them don't, so uh, but but now everything has changed. Everybody tries to go to school, be in college, all of that.

AK: So do you think because your parents were teachers, is that why they pushed you to go to college?

EP: I think so, yeah, I believe so. My father believed in education. We used to- I think at the beginning, we used to have a land that was a sugar cane plantation. But my brother was not

interested with it, he wants to go to school and be a teacher. And he was vice president of a university until he retired. He just retired recently. Uh actually he's here visiting um, I was going to bring him to the party last night. Um he was not interested in going and doing, tilling the soil and all that, so my father sold that land and sent us to schools where we wanted to go. And he said that's – he believed in- he believed in education. He always taught us that everybody has to be educated because whatever you have in your brain, nobody can take away. He said that this property you can lose, but whatever you know, whatever knowledge you have will never be taken away from you. He believed that and I believed it too. He instilled that with us, so everybody went to college so uh...

AK: In your- in the Filipino community, was there kind of a following, that the children would do the profession that their parents were doing, so they would become farmers? Was that the expectation?

EP: No, the Filipinos as a community, they would want their children to be better than themselves, so all the parents tried to work hard so their kids can go to college. So most of these kids are better than their parents. A lot of the nurses- a lot of the Filipino nurses and physicians that are here, a lot of us came from middle class or poorer backgrounds. Our parents were poorer than we are, so a lot of them became nurses, teachers, doctors, engineers, and got out of the places where they are to be better, came here to be better. So for a while, the economy in the Philippines, 1/3 of the economy of the Philippines is coming from the money from the overseas foreign workers so people sending money back to the Philippines contributed to the economy in the Philippines.

AK: Do your children speak your native language?

EP: No, that was my misgiving- that I never- even with my mother there, I did not pursue teaching them how to- I taught them, but its not really like- just one word here or there. I wish I did that when they were smaller because my daughter, when she was five years old and my mother took her back to the Philippines, when she visited, she took them. My second daughter and my older son. And when she came back, she was very fluent. You know, kids pick up language very easily. And for two months, she was speaking my dialect, like native Ilonggo. But then nobody was- you know her friends and those don't speak this, went back to speak English. And I regretted that I never really push her to do that. I really wish I did.

BX: Were there schools available here to teach them-

EP: courses, but not schools. There used to be, like organizations like the university of the Philippines alumni association. They have a project to teach Tagalog to kids and we could send our kids there, so they can learn. And that's how they can pick up but there's not a school here that teaches Filipino. I gave them dictionaries, but I should have done it more personally. I wish I did. I really did regret that. That's one of the things. Even my son until now is blaming me "mom, you should have told me". I said "I know". It's kind of late.

AK: Now that they're grown, do you feel that they themselves feel that it's a detriment that they're not as immersed in Filipino culture as maybe you are?

EP: Yes. They're not.

AK: Do they try to-

EP: They do now because they have been to the Philippines and they like it and they-some of my my-like my niece, she's here now- I have two nieces that came as nurses and those are their cousins and they like. So they wish- that's why they're blaming me, you know, "you should have taught us!" and then my daughter, my second daughter is in Hawaii now. She moved there four years ago, she lived and worked there and a lot of the Filipinos are in Hawaii. There's a lot of Filipinos in Hawaii and that's what she was saying. "You should have to taught me how to speak their dialect, now I cannot speak to them." So uh it is, it is uh, I wish I did that too.

BX: Do you think it's because there's so many dialects in the Philippines and it's hard for anybody to establish a school here to teach?

EP: Maybe. That-that, even in my household, one of the reasons why I did not teach them is because my husband speaks a different dialect than me. I speak a different dialect. And they were- the kids were confused when they were small. Because I would teach them my dialect, my husband would teach them his dialect, so I said "forget it. They'll just be confused." So we just stopped. But we should have tried anyway, but we did not

AK: Do you find it hard to keep your culture alive?

EP: Mm, maybe not me personally, but the general feeling now with our age group is the second generation. Our kids will not have the same kinds of customs and traditions like we have and the Filipino community is trying to do that with all the cultural organizations that we have here. We used to- we have all these affairs and a lot of these organizations sponsored some of these activities related to culture but even that- we feel like the kids may not be as interested as we were to continue those cultural heritage activities. So we hope the organization of- we call it PCC: People Caring for the Community is sponsoring a project to have a Filipino community center here in Houston. And we hope that by having a community center like the Chinese community center, that we will bring cultural activities together and that people- Filipinos can go in and maybe still revive the- continue the- the kids can learn the same culture and traditions like we did. We hope to do that, so-we hope it doesn't die (chuckles).

AK: Do you have any other questions?

BX: No, I don't think so. Thank you for your interview.