SL: Oral history interview of Mrs. Edna Thompson at Rice University, in Houston, Texas on February 27th, 2011. Interview conducted by Sunkyo Lee for the Houston American Archives of Rice University’s Woodson Research Center. Yes…uh we’re ready [laughs]. Um…can you introduce yourself a bit?

ET: I’m Edna Thompson. [SL: Mhmhm.] What else do you need to know?
SL: [laughs] Um…maybe a little bit about your childhood?

ET: I grew up uh Manila, Philippines. Umm…very exciting childhood [both laugh]. I’m always been…like…since I started going to school. First grade, I just want to hurry up and finish. So I can go to work [SL laughs]. And um when I went to college, I was chosen to be, um I got a full scholarship, wanted to be an engineer at first—chemical engineer—but Mom didn’t agree with that. So I had to take nursing.

SL: Mm why did your mom…?

ET: My mom… I don’t know. Well, back home, if you’re engineer at that time, if uh even though you have an engineering degree from a good school like almost like Rice that’s my school where I graduated from, you will not land a good job. You might get a department store job like a sales clerk that time, but if you become a nurse, you will land a job right away back home or abroad especially U.S. That’s…my mom planned my life like that [laughs]. So even though I don’t want to come here, I was, my mom told me I had to come here.

SL: Come to the U.S.?

ET: Yes [SL: Oh.], to work.

SL: So when you decided to um study nursing at university, you already had in mind coming to the US?

ET: Nope.

SL: No?

ET: No, that’s my mom’s plan. [SL: Ohh.] My mom’s plan. Um because I wanted to be an engineer. I wanted to be a chemical engineer. I liked mixing stuff, even in high school. I blew my lab table [SL laughs]. My project. Crank up the gas… um I made like a, I bought my. It was like actually a contest or something and my…I created almost like a methane uh gas from cow’s manure, pig’s manure. Well, I was not happy with a little flame. I cranked it up to blew my thing. I was always amazed mixing things. But the nursing is the one my mom chose for me and I got into nursing and came here. My dad used to work here at California so my mom got me to come here. Even though I don’t want to at that time the only choice I have is go to nursing school or don’t go to school. I mean, it’s not like here back home during that time. You can’t get a job when you turn fifteen or sixteen. You have to have a degree. And you might not even land that… uh
whatever you studied or graduated from. But even though you are just going to be working at a department store, they want to see the degree. I don’t know why.

**SL:** If you had stayed at home um you would have—you could have started working at fifteen?

**ET:** No. It’s not like here. You have to be actually what they called grownup. It’s like at least twenty-one before you can have a decent job during that time. It changed now. I mean, they adop—adopted the American way. We have some kids at sixteen or fifteen started working part time. And work their way to college. But during the time—that time when I was growing up—I’m not too young, [laughs] so—nobody will accept you. [4:58] So your parents have to send you to school or you don’t go to school. But I have a full scholarship so I don’t have to pay anything. They—they, even paid for some of my uh, pens, books, all those… I got a full scholarship that time.

**SL:** That’s impressive. Um…okay. So, um…when—can you describe like the process of coming here? All the application for visa or—

**ET:** Okay. Well for me, I think I just got lucky, unlike the rest. They have to um wait for what we call an agency back home. There’s like a certain agency that will have a contract here from one of the hospital and you will apply to the agency and you need to spend a lot of money. In my case, I didn’t have to do that. Um…when they have like a fair, um several hospitals from, actually from Texas, came to the Philippines and when they saw my credentials and transcript, um I was accepted, I didn’t have to spend anything. And um, but to get here, my visa, they processed everything. I didn’t have to worry about it. All I needed to do was to get my passport and make sure that my criminal—I pass the criminal record to get out of the Philippines. And um all I need to do was spend for my passport and my pictures, the rest they paid for it. So I guess I got lucky. Somebody like me? [laughs]

**SL:** What—what was the visa? Was it like a working visa or…?

**ET:** It was a, um I came as a H1, it’s a working visa for a Ben Taub hospital—the Harris County hospital here.

**SL:** Um…what year was this?


**SL:** November ’88.
ET: Too long.

SL: So, did you come straight? Like did you fly straight from Manila to...Houston?

ET: No, I had to do Manila, um stop by Honolulu, then go to I think I stopped by Detroit, then Dallas then we took the little plane coming here. Like forty-five minutes flight from Dallas to here. There’s only two of us. Usually um if you’re in the agency, there’s like a group, um group of nurses.

SL: Oh, two of you?

ET: Two of us, but we still had to go to the agency. Because we can’t just fly, the two of us, so they have to attach our visa with the rest of the um nursing—nurses that applied in the agency. But I don’t have to pay the agency. The rest um paid. You can spend a lot of money paying.

SL: So did you come alone? Did you fly alone? Or with some other…

ET: There’s two of us, another nurse that I don’t know. We—I just met her at the airport.

SL: And when you came here, um where did you live? Like at the beginning?

ET: At the beginning, the recruiter, the um, that Harris County put me with took me and the, I met the rest of the nurses; there’s like a several nurses that he recruited in the Philippines. I met them when I got here. About a week after I got here. They, we live all the way to I-10 East.

SL: I-10 East?

ET: Mmhmm. And that’s—I didn’t know how to drive. I didn’t drive back home. We have a driver. So I have to pay. We have like what we call a vanpool. We have to pay the driver monthly. I think I have to pay like if I’m not mistaken almost two hundred dollars.

SL: A month?

ET: Mmhmm. Two-hundred or two-hundred-fifty dollars a month. Come to realize that’s too much. I thought that’s good at the time. And they have to drive us back and forth to work, and we have a scheduled day to go to the mall, scheduled day to go to, um to go do
your grocery and go to church. And if you make extra trip, you pay extra. [10:00] About twenty-five? I think at that time like twenty dollars? For extra trip.

SL: So just—can you just like describe your work experience or like what you felt at that time when you first came or just anything?

ET: Well, surprisingly when I came, because before, when I graduated um…on I worked about almost three years back home. The hospital where I came from, all our equipment comes from here actually. It’s um and it’s not so different from Ben Taub and Hermann where I work. So, where—when I came, to work at Shatom (?) I work at Shatom (?) at first and then Ben Taub most of the things they have um I’ve already seen it, I already worked with it. And actually, here, y—they have respiratory therapies. That, back home, during my time, we take care of all the ventilators so that’s kind of one load off my shoulder—that I don’t have to take care of ventilators. Somebody takes care of it. And the first week that I started working, I didn’t work right away. What happened—I don’t know what happened—somebody, um what we called the um blue card or the temporary uh permit that I have, it disappeared. That’s what the um recruiter said. And um, so I didn’t work for about maybe three weeks or four weeks and my aunt from uh Florida at that time have to send me everything I need, um including coats and my boot. When um when I started working, my very first day, the preceptor I have—the uh the nurse that’s assigned to me to train me—it’s known to be, what do you call the term, somebody that eat their young? [both laugh] And when I was doing assessment of my patient, she started screaming across the hallway from the other side of the room because the Ben Taub is like, it’s open, but it’s like divided by walls like each ten beds you have a wall partition but it’s open all the way.

And she started screaming like, I look around, is she screaming at me? Because she was like, ‘Do not pull that, do not pull that! It’s the ET tube that hook up to the ventilator so the patient can breathe.’ And I’m like ‘uh…is she really screaming at me?’ So I just went on go do my assessment and she came running at my bedside and like, ‘Do you know what this is?’ And I’m like ‘Yeah…are you screaming at me?’ And um she said, ‘Do you know what’s going to happen when you pull that?’ I’m not pulling it. I’m just assessing, looking at the size it’s supposedly that’s what you need to do. And I started telling her, ‘You know, I know what this is, I know a ventilator I used to run this back home.’

So I was kind of embarrassed because she’s still kind of screaming. She got to the bedside like I’m a stupid Asian nurse. So I told her: can you excuse me for a few minutes? I got out of the ICU, walked straight to the education department, talked to the um head of the education and said I demand a new preceptor because there is nothing she can offer me that’s gonna to help me. The next day, then I came back to the bedside and she was quiet, I think they talked to her. The next day I have a new preceptor. I think
she did not expect that from somebody who was new. I think I was like twenty-three or twenty-four when I came here.

**SL:** So, um…I heard, while I was doing research, I read something about how some Filipino nurses feel that um they’re not, they’re kind of being discriminated at work, a bit. [**ET:** Mhm.] [15:00] Or like they’re not p—getting as much wages as white nurses. Or maybe they’re not getting the um—what they deserve. Or like the work condition something like that. And sometimes they went on a strike. Have you experienced anything similar to that kind?

**ET:** Um…I think you’re talking like. That happened in California.

**SL:** Mmhmm like L.A. or something.

**ET:** They cannot even speak their own language even though they are on break. And that um I think they won on the case. But and when I came here yes, we felt like—cause we’re new, we’re from a Third World country. And here you are came to America. And um even my own kind, that’s my own people, actually after that incident, um the next day, I was passing by one of the bed um and I saw the patient arrested. And it’s not my patient um and um I’m the one who initiated the CPR, resuscitate the patient, that my new preceptor was so proud of me. And my own people is the one actually that gave me problem.

Because after that and then the uh management saw that um I had a potential to be trained what we have, they have open-heart. They do b—um crack the chest they do open-heart and um I’m new, I’ve only been there about a month or two they’re going to start training me to start taking those patients so that I bypass all my senior nurses which is mostly, um at night you go to Ben Taub at Harris County, they’re mostly Asians. And mostly came from my country. So mostly Filipino and um I think I kind of um…some of them did not agree with that one, that’s ‘Why this new young nurse can be trained before us?’ So at first, they gave me a hard time. But um…I don’t just take things. If I’m right, I’m right. I mean, I don’t mess with anybody. And I always, I mean, if I’m right I mean I have to, I don’t just sit and take it. So, and I told them, you have a problem with it I don’t think it’s something they need to discuss with me. It’s not my—it’s not my fault. Might need to talk to the management. If they think I can do it, and I think I can do a good job so you go take it to them not to me. Yeah.

**SL:** So, there—um…did you say that they were mostly, the nurses were mostly Filipino?

**ET:** They’re mostly Asian. Yeah uh at that time when I came, and actually, a lot of them still there, where my unit used to be. Um…they’re mostly Filipino, um they’re not,
they’re—I think there’re like some Nigerian. But at that time, it’s mostly mix of Asian but in that Asian population it’s high percentage of Filipinos.

**SL:** So…so um a lot of Filipino nurses that were trained back at home decided to come to the U.S. at the time.

**ET:** Mmhmm. Because, that time, I guess even now, that’s your ‘easy exit’ from the Philippines. And you’re always going to have a job. Whether you come here, you come to Europe, you stay in the Philippines, you’re going to have a job. You’re not going to have a problem. It’s one of the professions back home that you’re not going to be jobless. You’re going to have a job always. Whatever you study, you’re a nurse—you’re going to have a job as a nurse.

**SL:** Um so you said that you had—you had family living here before you came.

**ET:** I have an aunt um which I found out when I got here and I think she called my mom and then my mom gave her my number and she called my apartment which is a blessing during that time, Houston um like freeze [20:00] and I don’t even have a coat. I don’t have the money to buy the coat. Be I didn’t realize that I won’t be able to work right away. So I’m like, ‘I’m not gonna take a lot of dollars…I’m like I’m not going to need it because I’m going to have a job in two weeks cause they told me you get paid every two weeks, so I’m like in two weeks I’m gonna have a dollar, to pay whatever I need, or buy whatever I need’.

**SL:** But did you say you lost your blue card or something?

**ET:** My—my um the agency that I got hook up with so I can come here when I got here told me the board of nursing haven’t seen my permit. I called the board of nursing and I found out even before I got here, weeks before I got here, my permit was sent. So, um since a lot of those nurses, the Filipino nurses where I stayed, they’ve been here like maybe few months before I got here, because I was like the new kid on the block with them. And I don’t have a phone that time at my apartment, so I had to use, go to somebody’s apartment and use their phone, to call the uh Austin Board of Nursing and they didn’t like the…that…I have, for me not to believe the recruiter, because I think they really like her. But uh when I called Austin, they said you have your permit like how many weeks before you got here. So I called the owner of the agency, hey you have my permit? Where is my permit? Is somebody using my permit? Then later on, when I was not with her anymore—because as soon as I got my license um I left that apartment—I learned that somebody used my permit. [**SL:** Oh.] Yes. Mmhmm. She actually handed it to somebody, and I’m like ‘you’re going to need to get it back because that’s not me,
whatever she do, it’s my name and it’s my number in there’. And they didn’t like that. I guess I’m too assertive or aggressive. Not a lot of Filipinos like that at that time. And uh I got—I got the permit about three weeks after I got here.

SL: Does that happen often? Like per—somebody else using your…

ET: Well, unfortunately I heard she’d been doing that. She did not um she did not really say she did. But I just heard it uh from somebody after I left.

SL: Uh…so from back home, did a lot of your friends that—from nursing school came to the U.S. or…?

ET: Uh my best friends. I have best friends they went to Europe and um some of them went to Dubai um and I have several friends—several classmates that’s here. Actually there’s not a lot of us that graduated. Because it’s a very, the school I went to, they’re very rigid. You need to maintain certain grade and they kick you out, no mercy, so. We started two groups. We graduated uh on nursing—nursing school only twenty of us. So there’s not a lot of us. And then some of them stayed put back home. Um yeah but most of us are here.

SL: What was the name of the school?

ET: It’s, in English, it’s called University of City of Manila. Or, um…in my language, gosh, I don’t know if you… for short, it’s PLM. It’s *Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila*. And most of that time um the only students who can get in there—it’s all like scholars, like chosen. Um when you’re like scholar, the city pay for everything.

SL: Um do you still like keep in touch with family back home?

ET: Mmhmm! I haven’t been home for, gosh…about nineteen and half years. [25:00] So I might not recognize the place where I grew up. My mom’s still there. And um I’ve been planning to go home, just didn’t have a chance. I can’t believe it’s that long. But um I talk to them. We videoconference and everything.

SL: Um so when was the last time you went? Nineteen and a half a years ago?

ET: It was ‘89 or ‘90? I think it’s ni—about nineteen years I haven’t been home. At least nineteen years.

SL: Why do you not go? Or I don’t know…
ET: I don’t know. I was planning to. Like every year, I was planning to, then um, it just didn’t happen. And my dad goes home every two years. But since my daughters when they were growing up, I mean if my dad goes home so I can’t go home because my, me and my husband—my husband work days I work nights. So somebody will be with the kids.

SL: Um how was the transition from single life to marriage?

ET: That’s fun. [laughs]

SL: Fun?

ET: Interesting. I never planned to get married. All my life, growing up, it’s like I’m not going to get married. I’m not going to have a kid. It’s just: I don’t need a husband. I’m like pretty independent. I’m doing good by myself. I don’t need anybody. When I came here, I think I came here ’88; I married my husband um September 29th, ‘89. Not even a year I’m here, right? [laughs] I met my husband at work. I mean, and actually, we were, actually we’ve been seeing each other at work and then um one of my friends that’s a manager, oh, a director at the burn ICU, she said, ‘Edna, I want to introduce you to somebody.’ So when she did, she’s not Filipino. Most of my friends back then, they’re not Filipino.

SL: At work?

ET: At work that time. Because they were like, [snaps] kind of like didn’t like me since of that incident I have to be trained. There was two of us and we came from the same school. We met here. My, my senior um she’s senior. She’s my friend back home, too. And we were introduced, um it was so funny when we went out, actually we didn’t go out together. It was like a group. And then the next time we went out, it’s with my friends because we need to go buy some scrubs. So he took us to buy some scrubs. And then we were just talking. And he was like ‘you want to get married?’ And I am like, ‘Fine. Whatever.’ I mean, I’m not kidding.

This is like within the two weeks, less than three weeks span. And I said ‘let me go tell my dad because my dad is coming’. So told my dad. My dad’s cool about it. I’m like, ‘Okay, I’m going to tell my mom.’ I called my mom on the phone and was like, ‘Hey, I’m getting married.’ My mom freak out. She was freaking out. She said, ‘You know you cannot live with anybody because you’re crazy.’ That’s the exact words, the words came out from her mouth. And I’m like, ‘well, this is America. You sent me to America. They have divorce. It don’t work out, you get a divorce, why will I stay with
somebody—I mean they work out.’ But after now I’m married even my kids won’t believe we had—the only time we went out is with chaperone and with other people, and we got married. When we got married, I worked the night before, I didn’t tell anybody, I work a night before, I’m off—both of us off the next day, woke up, went to the courthouse, and got married. And we’re still married. Uh we’re going on what? Almost twenty-two years, this September.

SL: That’s amazing.

ET: I know. Um everybody at work, where I used to work at the Ben Taub, um that’s one of the reason I left. [30:00] Because they’re kind of nosy. And it’s, I don’t know, if it’s like a taboo to them that I married—cause my husband is black. He’s not Filipino. I didn’t marry a Filipino. I didn’t marry my own kind. I guess that’s…they’re having hard time with that. And I did not deny. I did not. Every time they asked me questions, I’m like, I did not say ‘yes I got married’. Because even though we are married, I go to my own apartment, he goes to his own apartment and they’re being so nosy.

They would call my house and call my husband’s uh condo. So my husband quit first. I stayed put because I’m hardheaded. Why will I leave? I like my job. I know they’re not going to run me out of here, cause they’re nosy. But pretty soon, I mean, I have to quit. Because they just keep calling my—the apartment. [laughs] I know. And they thought it’s not going to last. But it did. I didn’t even believe it’s gonna last, to tell you frankly. [both laugh] It was hard for me to adjust. Because from being you don’t answer to anybody, you just pack your bag, go wherever you go, it’s not like you do bad things, I’m like nobody will ask you where you’ve been, that’s like you can go home anytime you want, or go anywhere you want without explaining to anybody. That’s one thing um it’s kind of hard for me to adjust. It took me a few months to adjust, but after that we set the rules. Um and I’m pretty easy. I mean as long as he tell me the truth, I don’t find him with anybody, I’m cool. Once we got adjusted, so I guess that’s how it lasted.

SL: Mm…in terms of like work and adjusting, like you know having all the work. You—I mean, you work and then you come home and then you have to do the chores as well. Was that kind of difficult?

ET: My husband cooks. [laughs] When we got married, I’m not a very domesticated kind at that time. I am now. I learn. My husband will cook. And he will wash the clothes. But I will fold it. I will iron it. It’s like—and then, since we both work nights at that time, we will cook like for a whole week’s work and freeze it so that it won’t be. Like you don’t have to cook everyday, and you can just go to sleep and microwave your food when you wake up.
SL: That’s nice.

ET: Yeah, we got it all planned. [laughs]

SL: Um…this feels like going back a little. But, so the reason that you came to U.S., was…did you want—did you just want to leave Philippines, or…?

ET: No, my mom made me. [laughs] Let me put it that way, my mom made me.

SL: Why—why did your mom make you?

ET: Well, my mom, as I told you at that time it’s your easy exit. And you’re always going to have a job. It’s a dollar, if you get out of the Philippines, a dollar or a euro, wherever you go, or dinar, if you go to Middle East or, and since my mom told me just go to U.S., before you can come here, you need to take an exam, you need to pass, what you call CGFNS and the English exam. To tell you frankly, um I joined the military, the air force so I won’t come here. I joined without my mom knowing it. But when my mom learn about it, she freaked out. She called my dad and told my dad I’m going crazy and my dad have to come home ASAP. My dad thought I’m really going crazy. And I cannot stand my dad crying. And my dad got home and my dad said, ‘If you don’t want to work, you don’t have to work, I will give you money,’ because he is working uh back and forth California and Europe.

SL: What did your dad do? [35:00]

ET: He worked in the uh shipping. And um since my dad talked to me crying, I told my dad, okay. What do you want me to do? My dad said, ‘Why don’t you go to the U.S. and do what your mom says?’ I said I need to take the exam and the exam is coming soon. I have just barely enough time to process and submit my paper so I can take the exam going to US. My dad said well, why don’t you do it tomorrow? Uh I have dollars, I will pay for it. I’m like, ‘good, I hope I fail.’ Because, you know, I have a reason to fail because I didn’t review. And unfortunately, I passed [both laugh]. Yeah, and I guess I have that ego. I mean, I can’t fail and get embarrassed, even though I want in the back of my head, I want to fail. Really. So bad. I was not really happy when I got the paper that I passed. It means I’m going to be coming here cause I don’t have a reason not to. Cause I passed all the exams.

SL: Right. Um okay so, so it seems like your parents wanted you to leave Philippines…
ET: My mom.

SL: Was that for just living standard or for a better life, or jobs?

ET: I guess so. I guess he—she figured out; if I come here, I make dollars instead of pesos. And I will have a better job if I get out of there. But you know right now, if you’re an engineer, and when I went into engineering and stayed put, I could actually have a better.

SL: Back in the Philippines?

ET: Philippines or go to um Middle East. I have friends from high school. They’re like presidents of big companies back there. [laughs]

SL: Because they majored in engineering?

ET: Mmhmm. They’re like chemical or mechanical engineers. Some of them in the newspapers back home.

SL: Engineers are in great demand, I guess. Um okay…did you so I don’t—probably not but did you have any reservations about raising a family in the U.S.? Like maybe your kids not knowing any Filipino culture or…

ET: No, not really. Actually, when they were growing up, Khia, my eldest, she was able to speak the language because I was teaching her until my dad got here. And my dad keep talking to her in English. So she totally forgot how to speak. But she can understand some. And um I always just told them or you can go to the Internet and see the culture. They even know those crazy stories about ghost and everything. Cause they look it up at the Internet. So that’s not really a concern. I just don’t want them running around crazy. So um I just very—I’m a disciplinarian more than my husband, since he’s from here, so he’s kind of lenient. But not me, because my mom is like that back then. Like a rigid discipline back home. I can’t even sit like this [hunching her back] I have to sit like this [straightening her back] yeah, so that’s not really an issue.

SL: Because I heard a story about, like when some like some Filipino Americans um find that their children are really troublesome walang hiya and then they sometimes…

ET: Wild. I know some people that their… I cannot even believe they let their kids talk to them like that, that you cannot even, not even spank, you know? You will just like, kind of, you didn’t even pinch them and you just kind of act pinching them and I think
the boy was like ten at the time [40:00], or eleven, and he said if you do that I’m going to call 911. And I told my kids, ‘if you do that, when the door opened, I’m going to give the police officer a choice to raise you, to get you out of here because I’m not going to have kids that’s out of control.’ So they know. I think some got so, what they—what we call Americanized [laughs], so, but no I make sure my kids don’t grow up like that.

**SL:** Um…so, do you live in a neighborhood where there—where you have a lot of Filipino friends?

**ET:** Um…there’s Filipinos in there. But I chose to live on a part of my subdivision away from them cause some of them can be…not good. But some, I mean, I have some Filipino friends that’s really good. But during that time, since my experience from my first job, that they’re very nosy, they stick their noses where they don’t belong. Uh when I was looking for my first house, my first question is just: Take me to the street where there’s not a lot of Filipinos. I don’t care who is on that street, as long as there’s not a lot of Filipinos. Based on my first experience from Ben Taub.…

**SL:** It’s just better to…

**ET:** Yeah, to stay away.

**SL:** Do you like celebrate any Filipino um like national holidays or anything like that like?

**ET:** Um…just the Christmas and the New Year. Because um most of the holidays we have back home um it’s not in here. We have what we call fiesta. Actually, we got that from um Spaniards. Because we were under Spanish, like for three hundred and thirty-three years, a lot of our cultures are based on the Spanish culture. Um they don’t celebrate that here. I know, um and we have what we call Flores de Mayo during May time. They have like a parade, with a lot of flowers, um they have, they wear, like gowns and they parade on the street. Um they mostly do it for the whole month of May. But I think here at Houston, they only do it like once or twice on that month. But it’s only on certain part. Not…so I’ve never been to one. I only read about it—cause by the time I read about it in the Filipino papers, it was already done. Cause I don’t usually pick it up, pick the new, uh the Filipino paper every week.

**SL:** [long silence] Did you find any hardships or struggles when you first came to the U.S. you felt like? Other than the like conflict with colleagues or anything like that?
ET: Well, since um I didn’t have a job for about three weeks to about four weeks, almost a month. And I don’t have dollar. Then I learned that when I—we came here, each of the nurses is supposed to get money from um the hospital which nobody saw any money, so I approached the owner of the agency. And I’m like ‘hey uh I learned from the hospital we’re supposed to have this so and so amount of money’ and it’s not a small amount of money um during the time. I think it was about two thousand almost. I said I didn’t see any. I said, ‘you know I don’t have a job because you say you don’t have my permit. Um…it’s like you’re going to have to give me a loan’.

And I found out with a group of nurses that came here before me, I’m not the only one who supposedly have a missing permit. [45:06] There’s like about four of us. So they out of job too. And some of them don’t even have relative here. So I ganged them up together. [laughs] I’m like a renegade. I ganged them up together and I told them ‘hey you know you got, you’re supposed to have money… did you guys see any money? Because you—you were here before me. You guys…’, they’re out of job like for, how many months? They were ahead of me. They just sit there and believe what the owner of the agency said, which I’m going to need to find out. So I’m the only one who found out. So we went to them and like ‘hey, we’re running out of money. We need a loan’.

And only one of us, we—the youngest one, and the one with the angelic face on that group, four of us, um went to the office and said ‘we need a loan’; there’s how many of us and we’re going to split it up so she got the money and we told them whatever they say don’t sign, it’s bad, don’t sign any paper. And she did not. So we split it up so we can buy groceries. And when the time that they’re asking for the money and we’re like— [recording cuts off]

SL: Do you feel that um you know being a Filipino American like or maybe before you became a citizen, like an immigrant uh working—im—uh working immigrant, working immigrant like that has influenced your life in any way like in the U.S.? Not being like the, I guess mainstream like Americans?

ET: Not being American? [SL: Maybe, yeah.] Because you’re not born here or something? [SL: Mmmmm.] Um…at first, it didn’t take me a long time. Actually at first when I came here, my first thing is I have to survive. I didn’t want to be here in the first place and then, um most of the food. I only eat certain food. Up to now, I only eat certain food. I don’t eat—I don’t even eat hamburger. So, I have to adopt, if I want to stay here. I’m going to stay here and um it—it didn’t take me long, except for the food. And some of the ways they do. I mean, I’m still not wild wild with the nightlife.

And I don’t know, it didn’t take me that long to adjust. Once I get the job, um I kind of learn my way around the hospital. It’s just like being back home. I’m just speaking a different language. So [laughs] it didn’t take that long that whatever, I am back home.
SL: Oh, okay. That’s nice.

ET: Yeah cause my school where I came from, we were really encouraged to speak up. I mean, if you have something to say, um if you want to be heard, you have to speak up cause nobody’s going to learn what you want unless you speak up. And that’s how I am when, after a few months when I got here, I’m kind of like psyching my environment [laughs] how the people are.

And we’ve always been taught to be assertive. I mean, you cannot be push around. So that’s why I most probably didn’t took me that long, it’s not that hard. Except for the food, to tell you frankly, I cried. That’s the one that made me—made me cry. It’s not even with all the things going on. Because I can fight it and everything. But the food. Because I don’t know how to cook when I came here. It was hard on that part. I have to learn how to cook the food I eat, and um when I came here I was really, really hungry from long flight, and when they said I’m going to take you, we’re going to go to the a restaurant and I was imagining Chinese food like noodles and rice, they took us—took me and my—the other nurses—to the Fuddruckers.

I cried when I saw the hamburgers. [50:00] I came, I went home, I didn’t eat. I went to my apartment and called my mom that night and I’m like ‘I hated you.’ They eat rabbit food here. It’s like all those… anything I eat back home it have to be cooked. I don’t eat, even vegetables, I don’t eat anything raw. The only raw thing I eat back home is the fruits. And here I am I have to eat all these trimmings that’s raw. And I don’t eat hamburger. That was really shocking for me. That’s a big adjustment. It’s the food for me.

SL: Other than that though, culture-wise, it was okay?

ET: No, I don’t think I even have a culture shock. I mean, it’s like hmm. This is how they do this thing here. They’re kind of wild, I’m like. But before I came here, I read encyclopedia. We have encyclopedia at home. I know I’m going to Texas so I read and read about Texas. I learned about the Astrodome, history and everything. So, whatever the culture is, it’s not really that shocking for me.

SL: Hm that’s nice. Um…oh! Did you—you—the language that Filipino speak in Philippines is Taglog [sic] Tag—?

ET: Tagalog.

SL: Tagalog.
ET: Yeah that if you’re in the city. I speak two dialect and English and uh Tagalog, the main.

SL: Is English like a major language?

ET: Um… no, it depends on what part of the country you are. Um if you live in the city, about few kilometers from the city—we have like four or five major city—we speak Tagalog. And as you go far, you have all these different dialects. We can’t even understand each other. For one country, we have lots and lots of dialects. My mom speak a different dialect. My dad speak a different dialect, so growing up, I get confused. I get mixed, mix it up. And some words, they can be the same words on my mom and my dad’s dialect, but they’re completely, completely different meaning.

SL: Oh.

ET: Yeah.

SL: But, nobody speaks English?

ET: Um we speak English in the city. That’s the main language when you go to school. Back then, if you go to school, you are divided by sections. We call it section—section one. As the section um, the number goes up, it’s I guess that’s how they measure intelligence. The lower the number your section is, the more intelligent you are. And you get all the attention from the teacher. You speak English all your electives, when you go to high school, you have good electives, statistics and everything. And as the number goes down, you can’t even choose those um subject that’s offered to us on the… they call it higher subject, but it’s the lower number.

So you get offered voca—vocational elective if your sections are higher. Like you’re in the twenties in the fifteen… so we most—if you’re lucky enough to be in that elite group, you speak English. It’s—it’s English. And they pay attention to you during the time. But now it’s different. It’s like here. They adopted the American way. They mix you up all together, which… at that time we don’t agree because if you have a slow learner with a fast learner, the slow learner’s not going to be able to catch up. That’s the reason why they separated us. And that goes—that goes on from elementary to high school, till we graduate high school.

SL: You said that your permit was lost.

ET: Yeah. Mmhmm. Yeah I was told that my permit was lost. Permit to work. It’s like a temporary permit. Because we came here with no… We have to take the board again
here, even though we took the exam back home. That’s just to enter. We took two exam so that we’re qualified to come here. Then, you get here, you still need to take the State board. Yeah you still need to take the State board so that the board of nursing will give you a temporary working permit which is the color is blue, that’s why they call it blue—blue card or something. And that’s your permit. [55:00]

You have… I think you have within a year to pass the board. So um I mean, when I got here, I was told I don’t have the permit. But it takes about three to four weeks and um when I called the board of nursing, they said they already mailed it even before I came here. So it should have been waiting for me. But the agency said, ‘No, he—she never got it.’ But, uh after pushing for it, she called me one day, she got it. And I learned when I left the group that somebody used my permit. Most probably somebody used my permit because that’s what she did to them.

While they were still back home in the Philippines, the permits were already here waiting for them, she let somebody use it who supposedly did not pass the board. So I don’t know how she did that, because they have different names. I don’t know if it’s true or what. I just don’t want my name, and somebody’s holding that paper with my name on it.

SL: And this kind of um using the permit I guess, illegally, life from—by the recruiters and the agencies, does this happen often?

ET: Using the permit. I don’t know if it happened o—often um… but I know most of the nurses I talked to, the ones that came here way ahead of me, I mean, I’m talking way ahead even a year before me. Because I found out from the hospital we’re supposed to get money, but they never get any money. And they’re not supposed to spend anything, they did, back home. Um it’s supposed to be shouldered by the Harris County hospital, which—I don’t know what the agency told them cause they paid for everything. Supposedly when we get here, we have allowance, which we never got… I know I didn’t get it. And most of the nurses on that group I talked to, they never got any money. They didn’t see any money.

SL: So, you—you dealt with that problem by asking for a…?

ET: For a loan. [laughs] I ganged up the group. Some of the nurses that I became friend with—friends with, they’re, I don’t know; if they’re like the first or the second batch that came here, I’m on the third. I got on the third batch. And um some of them don’t have a job. They were ahead of me, but they don’t have a job. They’re waiting for the permit. Um it’s almost….I mean, most of them don’t have relatives here. So I came up with idea: We need to ask for a loan and don’t pay for it because they owe us money. So we had a meeting. We had a quick meeting. Only one of us gonna to face them, ask for a loan, go
to the office and um if they asked who’s on that group, I mean, she will tell them the names, who we are, and she’s not—she was instructed not to sign any papers. Because if you don’t sign anything, I mean, there’s no…

SL: Obligation to pay back

ET: Yes, obligation to pay back. So when we start working, started working, they want their money back and they started asking for each one of us that’s supposedly on that group. And when they started asking it, we were like ‘No, we didn’t ask for a loan, we didn’t sign a paper.’ So when she got to me and her son-in-law, I’m like ‘well we’re even now’. We’re actually not that even because she still owe us money. I’m supposed to get this so and so money and I only got this money. So after back and forth, back and forth, I’m like no we’re not going to pay you guys. And the rest of the nurses on the group said, no we’re not because it’s our money. We settled that. It’s like kind of write off. You owe me, I owe you, we’re even. [1:00:00]

SL: And this agency is still em—still recruiting Filipino nurses?

ET: Um…I don’t think so. Few years ago, last thing I heard they’re not recruiting nurses anymore. They’re recruiting teachers. Since they got in trouble they were investigated, so last thing I heard they are recruiting in the valley. Um where in the valley I don’t know.

SL: So they were investigated for mistreating the Filipino nurses?

ET: Filipino nurses. Um I’m not with that group. These are the nurses they recruited from the province, which is like country here. And they were put in one teeny bitty room. This is what I heard on TV when they were interviewed, when she was interviewed, there was one nurse in there being interviewed with her face blacked off. Um they were put in a room like little sardine,s like bunk beds, congested room. And the apartment was actually, I think they intentionally put them in a far, far apartment so they cannot drive, so they did what, they need to rent the van to get to the hospital or wherever they want to go. So after that the agency was investigated; some people at the hospital got investigated. But I was not there any more. So I have no idea. She called me if that’s me but I’m like ‘that’s not me, I wish it’s me’. But I’m not hiding my face if it’s me. Channel thirt—uh it was Channel 13 investigated.

SL: I think we’re almost done. Um maybe one last question? Or two. Has your—though you said that you didn’t have any like culture shock or any like problems settling in.

ET: It’s the food.
SL: Food—food mostly?


SL: Uh so how—did your like ch—view of America like Americans or the United States—change since your arrival or?

ET: The view?

SL: Yeah, just like American life or Americans.

ET: Well, to tell you frankly, um I really think it—it’s no different than back home. Actually if you have money back home, you get it easy. You can get a maid, get a driver cheaper than here. Here a cook—you cook for yourself, you drive yourself, you clean your own house. If you’re making the same money I’m making back home, and I’m back home, I can get all those people.

We always joke: Everything is voice-activated back home, if you have money. But she will just say ‘hey I want this cook this, I want to go there, drive me there’. That’s why we call it voice activated. Yeah um And I always tell my family, my husband and my kids, if I did not get married and I didn’t have kids, I’d most probably take what I saved and go home because it’s easier back home. Here you have to work work; you know, you spend—you make dollars I mean, but you spend dollars. It only get multiplied if you send it back home. It’s like one dollar’s forty-eight pesos back home right now, which is going to be a lot of money. It’s—I think it’s—if you have money back home, yeah it’s easy, but if you don’t, it’s hell, totally frankly. It is.

SL: So, like do—do some Filipino families send like the one breadwinner to the U.S.?

ET: I sent money back home. Um…I actually have a sister: I sent her to school. She graduated computer science. Then she decided she wanted to go to nursing. So I sent her to school, supported her all the way. She actually had a doctorate degree. She’s at Canada. I help her to go to Canada so [laughs]. It’s just, I think, one of the Filipino culture. [1:05:00] You—you help your family. Um…you don’t see that in Americans a lot. But on our culture, we, we, our arms not twisted, too, but we just do. So a lot of my friends do it, they send their nieces and nephew to college. [SL: That’s nice.] Yeah because if you multiply one dollar to forty-eight pesos, that’s a lot.

ET: Uh forty-eight pesos, yeah, one is to forty-eight, right now. Um it went as high as one to sixty at one time during the inflation, so…

SL: Would you recommend that, like, other family or friends migrate to the U.S.?

ET: If they want to. But for now, it’s only me and my dad here [laughs]. Before, I was trying to get my mom. Um, she actually came here. She didn’t like the life. She liked back home—it was kind of easy. She have her friends, uh amigas what you call. Early in the morning they go outside and chit chat. I mean, she was surprised on weekends, you can even—you cannot see anybody on the street where I live. I’m like ‘they’re sleeping, they’re resting; for five days they work.’ I mean…so, she didn’t last long here. Now that she’s getting old, she want to come here but, um she’s…I think my other sister’s going to petition her to Canada because it’s easier, it’s faster. After the 9/11 it got kind of uh strict. You cannot just get here right away. Before you can come here as a student visa or a visitor. You can get a visa easily. They—they got strict after the 9/11.

SL: Ah okay I see. Okay. Yeah I think that’s it. Thank you very much.

ET: Good. I hope the agency won’t learn I talk about them.

SL: [laughs] No, no, no unless they come to Rice and—[recording ends]