

Interviewee: Benjamin Ongoco

Interviewers: Maddy Bullard

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Transcribed by: Maddy Bullard

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Background:

Benjamin Ongoco was born in the Philippines and immigrated to the US as a middle-aged man in 1981. His parents were fish farmers in the Bataan region of the Philippines. Although they were barely literate, they were hard workers and their children, following their example, were able to put themselves through college. Mr. Ongoco also decided to pursue higher education, obtaining an MBA in Manila. He worked in the Philippines government, aiding the poor living in rural areas through well-building, road construction, and other general community development projects. He later worked for the Land Bank of the Philippines. Mr. Ongoco is also writer, and took classes at the Philippine School of Journalism. He wrote on various topics for the Manila Times during the Ferdinand Marcos regime in the Philippines.

In 1981, Mr. Ongoco decided to leave his home country with Marcos's continued imposition of martial law and rampant corruption. He, his wife and two sons first settled in New Jersey, attempting to find work in New York, but then Mr. Ongoco heard of better opportunities in Houston, a city with a near-tropical climate more similar to his native country. He and his family relocated, for the last time, to a townhouse in Houston. After a year of searching, Mr. Ongoco finally found work at Texas Commerce Bank. He admits that he feels he faced some discrimination, probably based on his status as a foreigner and on his age. Mr. Ongoco is now retired, but remains involved with both the

Filipino and Asian communities in Houston, as a part of organizations like the Knights of Rizal and the Lions Club.

Setting:

Chronologically organized, this interview works through Mr. Ongoco's background in the Philippines, from his education to his career and hobbies. The questions mostly focus on topics of labor and capital, with an added focus on descriptions of ethnicity and community within Houston, as well as discrimination within the workplace. Mr. Ongoco provided details not only about his personal life, but also about his country's history.

This interview was conducted in Mr. Ongoco's home. The interview lasted about an hour and fifty minutes. Unfortunately, the recorder had a problem part-way through, so the interview is split into two audio recordings. Mr. Ongoco's unique experience as a middle-aged man choosing to immigrate to the United States, and his experiences in an American workplace as a foreigner, will undoubtedly be a valued addition to the Houston Asian American Archive.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

MB	Maddy Bullard
BO	Benjamin Ongoco
—	Speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...	Speech trails off; pause
Italics	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
Brackets	Actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

BO: I am Ben, or Benjamin, Ongoco, O-N-G-O-C-O, I immigrated, uh, we say we, family immigrated to the United States in 1981.

MB: And—oh, sorry. And this is Maddy Bullard, um, and today is July 9th, 2012, and I'm here with Mr. Ongoco in his home, uh, to interview him for the Houston Asian American Archive at the Chao Center for Asian Studies at Rice University.

BO: That's good.

MB: So, um, to start off, I'd like to thank you for participating in the Archive project.

BO: You're welcome.

MB: Um, could you tell me a little bit about your childhood growing up in the Philippines?

BO: Oh, I, I was born and raised in the province of Bataan, that's, uh, famous during World War II, and, uh, to be exact, my town is Abucay, that's the town, uh, A-B-U-C-A-Y. And, uh, I...you know, we were, once upon a time, a territory of the United States, until, uh, they gave us, uh, independence in July 4th, 1946 just immediately after World War number two. Although, uh, the Philippines recognizes the Declaration of Independence, uh, of the old generals, like Emilio Aguinaldo in 19—in no, no, in 1898, we are celebrating that Independence Day in lieu, now, of used to be July 4th. [Laughs] I think one reason is that, uh, Russia, at the time, they are trying to jeer at us: "How come you are celebrating the same Independence Day, with the United States, when you were already independent?" So, uh, we recognize 1898. Yes, yeah.

MB: So, um, were you aware of that political situation of, um, the US granting independence to the Philippines, growing up?

BO: Oh, yeah. Uh, I read that, uh, in history, uh... Yeah, so I—right now, uh...we are recognizing our Independence Day from Spain, from Spain, yeah. That's not political, that's history. [Laughs]

MB: Yeah. [Laughs]

BO: Okay, uh, some more questions... You just ask me question, and I'll tell answer to you in what manner you want me to do.

MB: Um, could you talk a little bit about your family?

BO: Oh, my family, uh...Yeah, as I told you, I grew up in Abucay, Bataan, and uh, our parents are, you know, they... sorry, but they—they barely read and write. But they, they used to brown (?) and uh, and we were able to go to college, helping ourselves, and help...with the help of our uncles and aunts, and, uh, we were able to finish our education. With modesty, I went to, uh, finish my undergraduate in business and also

the graduate school, a Jesuit university called Ateneo de Manila, uh...I finished my MBA from Ateneo de Manila University. And I'm here, I, I, I ...my last work there, in the Philippines, were the Land Bank of the Philippines and I came here and I work with what's now the JP Morgan Chase, retired here.

MB: Um, what sorts of work did your parents do when you lived in the Philippines?

BO: My parents? Oh, my parents were, with hard work, and uh...my par— my father was, uh, a fish farmer, uh, trying to raise, uh, the staple fish there is called the *bangus*, or *chanos-chanos* in, in, uh, special scientific name, and my mother was selling fish...she was a fish vendor, selling fish to some cities inland, like San Fernando and Pampanga and Angeles City...where, by the way, where used to have the Clark Field of US Air Force. Uh, and, that's what, uh, they did. Sheer hard work.

MB: So, uh, did you own a home or did you rent a home, or...?

BO: Uh, in the Philippines?

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: Fortunately, uh, that was even owned by our grandfather, grandmother on my mother's side, and, uh, we had a home, we had a house. It's modest house, it's now improved by my niece—my nephew and nieces, uh, because they work in Saudi Arabia, and, um, they get some money and improve it, cemented it, uh, two-story house. Uh...we are not so poor, we are not so rich. [Laughs]

MB: Um, did the rest of your extended family—aunts, uncles, grandparents—live with you?

BO: Oh...uh, actually, no, uh, they— my...my uncles, they are pretty good in life. The eldest among the, uh, siblings, on my mother's side, was a lawyer, and another one is an engineer and rose to become colonel in the Philippine Army. And, uh, my other aunt was a teacher, rising to become district supervisor of the public schools. [Dog barking] And, um, we are pretty, uh, you know, my...my mother's side, we are pretty well-provided, and they have their own homes, of course, we had ours.

MB: Um can you describe the neighborhood where you lived growing up?

BO: Oh, growing up? The neighborhood was a rural setting, uh... We almost grew up in the fish farm... fish farm, and it was a little bit of mountains there, and sometimes we

would go to, uh, catching some, uh, birds or fish, and, uh, I... I am nostalgic about those places because, uh, I finished my education in Manila, I stayed there for some time, and I am now in the United States. That's why I, I miss those, uh, rustic, rural places that we have some trees and we have some natural resources. But now, uh, people are destroying those. Uh... our mountains are becoming bald and... During rainy seasons, the rainy, uh, monsoon seasons, uh, we have floods. Unfortunately we have floods, and there were destructions, life and property.

MB: Um, can you describe your early education?

BO: Oh, my education started in my elementary school in my hometown. That's the only school, you have no choice. It was named after the first Filipino printer, Tomas Pinpin, uh... Little bit of history, he, he was, uh, with the priest from Spain, uh, Blancas de San Jose, and they started the printing press in my hometown. And that is, you know, uh, just like Gutenberg in Germany, and they published the first books in, in the Philippines. It was named after Tomas Pinpin, that's my elementary school. And I started there, and I went to high school in the capital, in the next town, Balanga, and, uh, I grew up—I mean, I started there, finished, and I went to...uh, University of the East, that's my undergraduate business course, and, uh, after a while I worked, and I went back to school. Maybe I was too old already to go back to school! [Laughs] Just joking. Yeah, that's what my education about. As I told you earlier, I went to the graduate school of business of the Ateneo de Manila University, and that's a very famous school, they are run by the Jesuits.

MB: Um, what languages did you speak growing up?

BO: Oh, uh, our native tongue is, uh, called Tagalog, T-A-G-A-L-O-G, that's the Manila *lingua franca* and it was, uh, adopted as the basis for the, uh, Filipino, as, uh, in, the Filipino that's the official national language of the Philippines, spoken now throughout the Philippines by some 89 percent of the population. Yeah.

MB: What other languages are spoken in the Philippines?

BO: Oh, uh, yeah Tagalog—we have a little bit of Spanish, uh, many Spanish words are incorporated in the Tagalog or the Filipino, and, uh, although I thought I knew Spanish because we were taught in school, it was a requirement, in college, but, uh, coming here, and there are many Hispanics here, in Houston, I thought I knew, but [laughs] uh, I, I discovered that I really don't know. [Laughs]

MB: [Laughs] Um, so moving on to sort of your later education, um, you mentioned that you moved to Manila in 1954 on the questionnaire?

BO: Oh yeah, 1954 I started college, uh, usually we don't—we didn't have any college then, in the province, now, we got a lot, especially in my hometown. We have there the San Juan de Letran College, a very old school, uh, Dominican school, right in my hometown, right now, but, uh, during my days, our days, we didn't have any college there. So I went to Manila to study, uh, business.

MB: What made you decide to study business?

BO: Oh, that [laughs] that's a difficult question. Uh, I really wanted to study something else, like maybe law, but my uncle who was a lawyer would not allow us to study law, because he said, we are trying to break the laws. And, um, well, I don't know why I went to the business school.

MB: What were your experiences like at college?

BO: In my college? Um... I was working and studying at the same time. Uh...I didn't know how I survived and, uh, it was very difficult. You have to earn your money and pay tuition, pay expenses, and not really...uh...we were able to finish our school—schooling, I'd say, with my siblings. And, uh...not contented, because you wanted to improve yourself, I even went to the grad school. Yeah.

MB: So, did you pay your own way throughout college?

BO: Yeah, I went [laughs] I went through college, I mean I worked through college. And sometimes, I know of some of my cousins who got plenty of money, they were unable to finish their schooling.

MB: And why was that?

BO: I don't know, about them, you know. They weren't uh, happy-go-lucky things, and nowadays, they're all...uh, they are not really well-provided.

MB: Um, so what kinds of jobs or job did you have during college?

BO: Oh, during my college days, I was, as I told, I was working in the, uh, Armed Forces of the Philippines. The exact, uh, section is, uh, the Office of the Chief of Engineers, and I was a P.O. – purchase order clerk. And, uh, we were trying to buy, uh, engineering

materials for the Armed Forces, the whole army, and, uh, I worked through that to finish my graduate—undergraduate. And then I worked for the, there's a group that, uh, I went through, uh, the name of the office is the Presidential Assistant, uh, on Community Development. I worked there for some time. I enjoyed working there. The pay was not so good, but I was able to help some people, uh, in their livelihood, in their health and sanitation, in their education, and many things about the basic necessities of life for the rural, especially the rural community people. And I liked the work, although I—I started business, but that's somewhere your practical laboratory, you're thrown to then, they call the barrio, or community, and...It's happy to see people having their own potable water, see people having their livestock raising, for added income, and health, and sometimes uh, building their own roads. The rural, uh, dirt roads, and many things like that, and, uh, I'm happy to recall that, uh, people needs to be helped, uh, and, uh, organized.

MB: So that was a job related to government?

BO: That's a government job. That's a government agency. Uh, that's uh, the arm of the President of the Philippines, the Presidential—Presidential Assistant on Community Development. A little farming, a little agriculture, a little [laughs] and for their added income, and... I stayed there for some, maybe ten years, until I... [speaking to wife] This is Maddy Bullard, of Rice University...[inaudible side conversation]

MB: Um, ok, uh, so my next question was, were there any differences you noticed, moving from to the capital from your hometown?

BO: Um, moving from my hometown to where—Manila?

MB: Yeah.

BO: Uh, yeah. Manila is the center of population, center of education, center of culture, center of commerce, and everybody goes there, so, uh, I have no choice. There was no college in my hometown, at the time. I have to go to Manila to work and uh, study. Uh... and I lived alone (?). I enjoyed living in Manila, in the capital.

MB: Um, what area did you live in?

BO: Ah, what area... um... in general, you know. When I was in schooling I was in Quezon City, that's a big city. And, uh, then I worked, and I got married to somebody from the town of Parañaque; Parañaque is a suburb—suburb city of Manila.

MB: Did you live in, uh, like school housing from the university? Or were you in an apartment?

BO: Oh, no, I was just living with my uncle. I cannot afford to even, uh, live in—in the dormitory, no. I wish I could, but, uh, I could not. And through sheer determination... that's why, maybe some students, they have plenty of money, plenty of money, uh, much money, but does not mean that uh, money can make you push through your education. Sometimes, uh, it's sheer hard work, sheer determination, uh, that you can finish your schooling.

MB: Uh, so what year did you graduate?

BO: Oh [laughs] oh, well, you can deduce my age.

MB: [Laughs]

BO: I, I finished my college in 1968, I think, and I worked, as I told you in that, uh, organization, I went back to Manila, I said, "Oh, I need to—to grow," and, uh, studied some more.

MB: So you moved to Manila, and then you moved back to Abucay, and then you came back to Manila?

BO: Oh, that's it, yeah.

MB: Okay.

BO: Yeah, from, after finishing my undergraduate, I joined this organization, it's by my own, nobody helped me there. I—I passed the, the different exams, and, uh, by the way, that was originally run by, uh, partly, by the US Agency for International Development, USAID, there's some offices still here in, uh, where they started also called maybe—they know more about the, those people working, students working abroad? The...what do you call this now? The...[After interview remembered Peace Corps]

MB: Exchange students?

BO: No, the...they were founded by J.F. Kennedy. Uh...uh, the...I got some mental block.

MB: Oh, sorry. Um, so you were working for an organization. What was, what was the name of that organization?

BO: Um, officially, in the Philippines, they called that Presidential Assistant on Community Development. That's, uh—they started with that and it grew up, and we have, uh, people in the rural Philippines.

MB: And that was different from the organization that you were working for in Manila?

BO: Oh, yeah, different, yeah.

MB: Different? Okay. Um, so was the rest of your family still living in your hometown at that time?

BO: Yeah, my, my parents were still alive at that time. And I went back, and helped, uh, some people, and they even, well, with modesty, they even wanted me to run for mayor, because if you help the people, uh, in their livelihood, you give them, uh...some piglets, you give them some, uh...cow, cows, and uh...different things, uh, like, uh, as I mentioned about artesian wells, where they get the clean, potable water. Those are improvements in life, and now, uh, they have that now anyway.

MB: So you didn't run for mayor?

BO: Ah, no, no, no, I did not. I— uh, it was not part of my ambition actually, although it's nice to be mayor of the town. But, uh, people are asking for—from you, something to eat, something, anything, you know, and that's not my...my cup of tea [laughs].

MB: Uh, what did you have in mind for a long-term career at that point in your life?

BO: At that point of time? Ah, maybe, uh, yeah because I started business, actually, I wanted to go into business, and, but you know, I instead work, for a business, business organization like I mention, a few banks.

MB: Um, so you also mentioned, um, on the questionnaire that you attended the Philippine School of Journalism, is that right?

BO: Oh, yeah, I forget that. [Laughs] Actually I always, uh, maybe it runs in the family, uh, my brother wrote some ten books, and he was also writing for some newspapers, and, uh, I, I came to go there too, although, that's not a degree course, for me, the Philippine School of Journalism, I attended there, and I wrote for a very powerful

newspaper at the time, which was shut down by Ferdinand Marcos because of its criticism of the martial law, or um, even before martial law, uh... And I wrote for the, the people there, they know the Manila Times, that was a very powerful newspaper, even before.

MB: Was it an English-language newspaper?

BO: Yeah, it is, it was an English-language newspaper. Oh, by the way, we had also there a journalist named Benigno Aquino Jr., that's the father of the present president.

MB: Oh, wow.

BO: Benigno Aquino, uh, the third. So, at that point of time, well, I didn't, I was not a friend of Aquino, he was already a politician, at the time, he was governor, he was senator, and, uh, really, that was a good experience, too, writing and, I, uh, I was a correspondent, uh, and... I'm still writing right now. I'm writing for the local Filipino-English newspaper called Manila Headline here in Houston. And, going through Texas, you know. Throughout Texas [inaudible].

MB: So when you were at the Manila Times, what sorts of things did you write about?

BO: Oh, yeah, I, I...my...I don't know, I wrote everything, mostly community events, uh, to encourage people to do some community, uh, work... Sometimes politics, too, sometimes, uh, police reports, too, uh, but mostly community, uh, development.

MB: Um, would you consider yourself politically active, during that time?

BO: Oh, I don't think...A little bit. I was not really on the surface, I—I working with, uh, some politicians, just for the... Maybe for the, uh, betterment of the town, the province. Fight corruption, something like that.

MB: Um, where was that school located?

BO: Oh, that is located in Manila.

MB: Um, and were there, like, costs associated with taking the classes there?

BO: Yeah, I went to classes.

MB: And you, you paid for that through...?

BO: Yeah, I was already paying for that, I got some money to, to pay for that already.

MB: Um, so you also have an MBA, um, that you got in Manila, could you talk a little bit about that degree?

BO: Uh, that was, that came later, uh, when I was already working, uh, in Manila, uh, what is then the Land Bank of the Philippines. By the way, that is now a big bank, that's the official depository of the Republic of the Philippines. Because the other bank was already privatized, the Philippine National Bank was privatized, and then the Land Bank became the official bank, uh, I was there and I study also, during the evening, you know.

MB: Um, so, what were your, uh, duties when you were working at the Land Bank?

BO: Beg your pardon?

MB: Oh, sorry, like what sorts of things, um, were part of your job when you were there?

BO: Oh, describe my work? Uh...I started with the corporate planning, and then I, I was shifted to, uh, build operation, where we established some branches throughout the Philippines where there... We are also—we were also—we were also a commercial bank. So we established branches to get business, you know, deposit the money, and we loan to the farmers, uh, because the agrarian depuram (?), uh, we call it the la depuram (?) in the Philippines was started by, uh, the Land Bank of the Philippines by giving loans to the farmers.

MB: Um, did, uh, like the, um, advent of the Marcos regime affect your work at all?

BO: Oh, actually, at that point of time, since I was in the government, there's no, uh, way that you cannot be a part of the Marcos government. But, uh, oh, that's one reason, maybe, why I, I immigrated to the United States, because I didn't, I didn't see good things anymore, at that point of time. That was 1981, there were some killings, there were some, a lot of corrupt—and corruption, and uh, you know, uh, when there is a martial law there is a dictatorial—dictatorship. You cannot, uh, stomach any more, and you have to move out, you know. So, in 1981, that's the height of the martial law, it was, it fell down, I was no longer there, in 1986 that's, uh, the, they call it EDSA, that's the name of the street where they massed the people, en masse, you know, they, they tried to... uh, in one way or another, they protected the—the rebels, you know, from, uh, the Armed Forces, the Philippine Army. And that was a peaceful revolution, because, uh,

there was no killing, because, uh, the civilians, uh, went out to join the, the rebels, and...it was good, also, Marcos didn't kill, uh, those people. 1986 I was already...

MB: Um...so you also indicated on the survey that, uh, you moved to the Paran—Paranque? I'm not sure how to pronounce it.

BO: What's that?

MB: Paranaque area of Manila?

BO: Oh, oh. [Laughs] That's the, the town, uh, now city, of Parañaque.

MB: Sorry, yeah.

BO: That's where my, my wife live, you know? And they have a house there, in Parañaque. And we, we joined them there, and then we moved to what is now Mirabelle (?). This a new subdivision.

MB: Uh, so what year did you get married?

BO: Yeah, when I got married, we were in... Oh, by the way, can I offer you something to drink? Coke?

MB: Oh, I'm fine.

BO: No, no, no, I, I, we can do that—we're not in a hurry anyway.

MB: Well I'll just have water.

BO: Water? Or Diet Coke?

MB: Water's fine, thanks.

BO: Water. You know, Filipinos are noted for being hospitable [laughs] I joke, in my writing, that, uh, we are being hospitable to...typhoons. You know, hurricanes. We call that typhoons there, we call it hurricanes here.

MB: Uh-huh, yeah.

BO: We have twenty, twenty typhoons coming to the Philippines every year.

MB: Oh, because of the, hospitability?

BO: Yeah, we're hospitable!

MB: [Laughs]

BO: [Laughs] That was a joke. ... [Thunder from outside] Just like that. [Laughs]

MB: Yeah. That's great, thank you.

BO: I have some cookies here, just in case, uh, you want them.

MB: Thank you.

BO: I have to [laughs] do something for my throat. [soda can opens] ["Ah."]

MB: [laughs] Just let me know if your throat's getting sore or anything.

BO: We can continue, we can continue.

MB: Okay. Um...so you moved to the Parañaque area?

BO: Oh yeah, I lived there because my wife stays there. We have two sons born there, they are now grown up. Uh, one of them is married, and I am happy to see my grandchildren, they are twins, uh, one girl, one boy, and age now, ages now—oh, they are born the same day. Difference of two minutes, and, uh, yesterday, I went there, we went to Chuck E. Cheese, you know, they like to go there and play [laughs].

MB: So, uh, does that son live in Houston?

BO: They are living here, you mean? Yeah, they are living here, somewhere, they are in Copper Lakes, in the Copperfield area, in West Houston, and, uh, I see them maybe, used to be once a week, but now you know, they are busy and we are busy, you know.

MB: Does your other son live in Houston?

BO: Oh, the, the other son is still here. He is not here right now, uh, he work in a store.

MB: Um, so can you describe sort of the the neighborhoods that you lived in while you were in Manila?

BO: Oh, the neighborhood? Well, uh, Mirabelle (?) was then very near the center of population, but now it is expanding, and, uh, if you want to live in the subdivision it is too far, there is an expansion of the metropolis. And, we were in a very good, uh, community, mostly living there are expatriates, those working in some US or European companies, uh, their branches in Manila, and it was a decent, uh, they call it subdivision, or neighborhood.

MB: Um, and where were you employed at the time that you were living there?

BO: Oh, yeah—I was employed with the Land Bank of the Philippines.

MB: So you were still allowed to move around a little, even though you were employed at the same company?

BO: Uh, what's that question again?

MB: Oh, you were, I was just asking if you were allowed to move around, like where you lived, despite being employed at the same place.

BO: Yeah, yeah.

MB: So how many, how many years were you working there?

BO: Uh, at that time? I worked for the Land Bank previously for ten years. I cannot figure out now, how I...I survived those years, you know, working and working, and have family, and we have also the political situation at that time, uh... Well, I cannot, I cannot, uh... account to you the number of years, or what I did, you know.

MB: Um, if you don't mind me asking, what sort of wages did you make at that job?

BO: Very good, uh, salary, because, uh...in the Philippines, the banks there are good employers. But not here, in US.

MB: Um, what made you decide to leave that job?

BO: Oh, leave that job? The coming here, coming here to the United States. Everybody...their dream, uh, dreamt of coming to the United States, because they see on

television, all the color and, uh, pictures, and they thought that, uh, America is paradise, something like that. Because, uh, we were educated, also, about America, as I told you, the Philippines was a territory like Hawaii and Alaska, uh, but we declared our independence. We should have been a part of the United States, ahead of Alaska, but, uh, they decided to, to be free, and by the way, uh, we had President during the, the American regime, named Manuel L. Quezon, where Quezon City was named after him. Uh, he said this: "I'd rather see Philippines run by Filipinos like hell, rather than run by the Americans like heaven."

MB: [Laughs]

BO: And he, he is, he was right. We are a lot of, you know, I don't like to tell this, but, uh, we are still poor. The population is growing, we have soon will be (?) 100 million, in a small country, and, uh, we cannot provide services and give resources to the population, to the people, that's why nowadays, all over the world, we have some 18 million Filipinos working abroad, I mean, in the US, Europe, Australia, Japan, China, everywhere. And there is something many other Filipin— that's the, the money that we have there, the Filipinos working abroad, they are sending money to their relatives, and, uh, that's what, uh, the economy's all about, uh, because, uh, we don't have that much, uh, resources there in the Philippines, small country, basically agricultural. But later on, they decided to have mines, uh, and, but, as I told you, we are a—still a Third World country.

MB: So, um, do you think that there were any differences, uh, in the Philippines, from the American regime to, like, independence?

BO: [side conversation] Uh, please repeat? Sorry I got distracted.

MB: That's okay. Um, any differences in the Philippines from the American regime to independence.

BO: Oh, that's a good question, that's what I was trying to drive at. Uh, if we were maybe under American or became a state, we will be just like, uh, Alaska or Hawaii. Not mentioning Puerto Rico, it's part of that scheme. We were formerly Spanish territories won by the United States, uh, and then I think Puerto Rico is a better, uh, economic situation right now, maybe, than the Philippines, uh, we have a bad economy, although it's growing now, maybe we are better than some European countries like Spain, formerly our colonizer, uh, better than Greece, better than Portugal, better than Ireland, or Iceland. Uh, the Philippines is, is growing right now. I read that their, uh, GNP is—Gross National Product—is uh 6.4 percent, so, they are better now

economically than some countries, usually the European countries are better, but not really right now.

MB: Um, so that quote that you mentioned from that president seemed to, um, have some pretty national, like— nationalism tones and, uh, you know, fidelity to your country. Do you think that that's common among Filipinos?

BO: You mean, uh, quoting President Quezon?

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: Yeah, I...some people now regrettable...about being independent, although, of course, there is the so-called Filipino pride, they, they want to be independent, although, uh, because we cannot compare—the Philippines versus America, America is very big, as a matter of fact to tell you, we are now in Texas, [inaudible] mention that, their, uh, geographical territory, we maybe, we can put four, four Philippine land mass into Texas.

MB: [Laughs]

BO: Well, we are inversely proportional things, you know, it's like, the population of Texas may be 20 million, and, uh, we have there 100 million, so, it's inversely proportional because, uh, the land mass there is, uh, we got four of—four of that land masses to Texas, and Texas the population is, one-fourth, uh, of uh, 100 thousand—92 thousand, they said, in the Philippines.

MB: So um, obviously some pretty big differences between Texas, living in the US now, and the Philippines. What made you decide to move to the US?

BO: Oh, yeah—my my wife told me, oh by the way, by that point of time, we were comfortable with our economic family situation, but, uh... My, my wife had some properties there, and we are, we are quite comfortable, I got the big salary, and but I said, oh, it's for the kids. We had already two sons at that time, growing up, maybe one, five, under the school, you know, one four. And, said this is for the children, who, who can study here in the US, uh, can work here. Uh, I think, uh, it was right, that we came here. We—we bettered our situation. But, uh, we could have stayed there too, you know.

MB: You mentioned that you lived in a neighborhood where a lot of expatriates were working?

BO: Oh, that's what, uh, now called, uh, Mirabelle Park (?), some Filipinos, they know that, it's one of the first, uh, big subdivisions, outside the uh, we call that Makati, we have Folks (?) Park, good subdivisions there, uh, and uh, we were very happy in that community, until we moved here to the United States.

MB: Did living around, um, people who were in regular contact with the US at all influence your decision to move here?

BO: Uh, in our situation?

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: Oh, uh, I got, the sister in, uh, in what's the city of Bethesda, near Washington.

MB: Oh, Maryland?

BO: Maryland. Uh, they, actually, my, my brother-in-law worked for the State Department. Uh, they were assigned in Africa, and he retired there, he was the rank of (?) ambassador, uh, although coming here to the United States, we were not helped by him. He does not like to help any—anybody. Uh, it's not because my brother-in-law worked for the US State Department that we were able to come here. We applied through the process, uh, of immigrating. At that point of time, uh, they need some, uh, they call it third preference immigrants, mostly professionals, but now they, they stopped that long time ago. We have a lot of immigrants here, we, we as a matter of fact, we have a lot of illegals here.

MB: [Laughs]

BO: Eleven million, they said.

MB: So what was that like, you know, going through the process of immigrating to the US?

BO: Yeah... we, through the US Embassy.

MB: Uh-huh.

BO: And we were interviewed there, we, we did a lot of requirements, and at that point of time we were required to have somebody who can sign your, uh, immediate support. I don't know if they're still doing that now, my—I got a first cousin, who is a doctor of

medicine, married to another doctor, and he signed for our, uh, when, when you get no work here he can come and support you, they call it affidavit of support. And my, my un—no, no, my cousin signed the affidavit of support, so maybe that helped too, you know.

MB: Um, how did your wife feel about moving to the US?

BO: Uh, she, she was the one who like to come here. [Laughs]

MB: She wanted to come?

BO: She, she, uh, she wants to get chocolates. [Laughs] You know the, uh, in the Philippines we don't have that much of, uh, Hershey's, we don't have much about the, uh, M&Ms, and she likes...chocolate.

MB: Um, did your wife work when you were in the Philippines?

BO: Oh, she was working. She—by the way, she is a Certified Public Accountant, and uh, she work for the, the Central Bank, that's the Federal Board there, and I was working for the Land Bank.

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: The bank there—they are paying very good money. And...she also practiced real estate there, before we came here. She practiced real estate because, uh, the, the work is adjustable, you know, raising the kids, and sometimes she had to find time for the kids, you know.

MB: So, um, where were you employed when you first moved to the US?

BO: Oh. Uh, they call that Texas Commerce Bank. Do you remember? There was Texas Commerce Bank all over.

MB: I'm not actually from Texas.

BO: Ah, you're not from Texas. I'm sorry. By the way from where are you?

MB: I'm from St. Louis, Missouri.

BO: St. Louis, Missouri. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Everybody came here from other places, I think. [Laughs]

MB: [Laughs]

BO: Uh, yeah, that was Texas Commerce Bank, before it became, uh, Chemical Bank, and then, uh, it was bought by JP Morgan Chase, and you know, the companies here in Houston, the—there's some mergers, there's some, uh, uh, how do I call this different, uh, names... Yeah, next question.

MB: [laughs] So they got bought out by JP Morgan Chase, or it was a merger?

BO: I think we were bought by JP Morgan Chase, because that's a bigger organization, just like the Bank of America [**MB:** Mmhmm.] and other banks, Citibank. So they keep on buying banks, or merging with other banks, uh, we were bought by JP Morgan Chase, a New York bank, a bigger bank.

MB: Mmhmm. Um, so uh, from what I understand, you first came to New Jersey, when you came to the US?

BO: Oh, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. For a brief period, we, by the way, yeah, that's what... When we came here, we—we targeted the New York, New York as our domicile, our, our, uh, place to live. But, uh, we were not able to—I was not able to get a job there, so we were told to come down here to Houston. Because, [phone rings] at that point of time the oil [to wife: Can you get that please?] at that point of time there is an oil boom here.

MB: Mm-hmm. [Mrs. Ongoco answers phone; side conversation ensues]

MB: So you were talking about New York and New Jersey?

BO: We, we wanted to start ourselves out there, in New York, because, uh, we went back, we had a friend who was there in New York, and not knowing what is the United States, so, we—we tried to settle in New Jersey, near New York City, but, uh, we—we were able to come down here to Houston. Uh, actually, it was not easy to get work there also in New York.

MB: So how did you come across Houston as a better place to settle?

BO: Better place? Yeah, mostly we were attracted by the climate. The climate here in Houston is, uh, almost tropical, and, uh, we came from a tropical country. Uh, maybe, I

cannot survive this now, we did not—I did not see much snow until we went to Toronto, uh, some time ago we went to near the, uh, the Canada-US border of the Niagara Falls. Wouldn't you believe, I saw Niagara Falls in winter! [Laughs]

MB: Really? ... Um, so how did you get the employment opportunity at—at the bank?

BO: Here, in Houston? Uh, which—which bank?

MB: The first one.

BO: The...here, in Houston?

MB: Yeah.

BO: The Texas Commerce Bank? Oh, it was a big bank at the time, the biggest here in Houston. Well, uh, I tried applying to all places, and luckily, I was, uh, taken there, I got a job there, not a very big job, but uh, hopefully, I got an employment. Because, uh, it's not easy to get a job also if you are a foreigner [**MB:** Mm-hmm.], coming here. Uh... they always ask you for local experience when they knew that, uh, you came from abroad.

MB: How was your English at that point?

BO: Oh, English. Uh, actually my English is just like today [**MB:** Mm-hmm.]. In the Philippines, we speak English there, too. Uh, it's one of the official languages, the medium of instruction in the schools is English, and we speak English uh, in the Philippines. Maybe we, we speak more English than Spanish, uh, so... But, uh, our English there is called Filipino English, our diction is different.

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: Just like the English, the King's English is different from the American English [**MB:** Mm-hmm.], and uh, some, some Americans they are hard time with our English, but, uh, we can write better than speaking English.

MB: Um, so can you talk a little bit about, um, your career, starting, uh, at the Texas Bank and then continuing?

BO: Oh, it was really...getting a job took me one year before I landed a job there. And also, growing up where you work, is very difficult because, uh, there's uh, competition,

and uh, [phone rings] people are, you know, they put you down, uh, they, uh, some people call it discrimination.

MB: Mm-hmm.

[Mr. Ongoco picks up phone; conversation ensues]

BO: [returning from phone call] That was my sister in Washington, D.C. [**MB:** Oh!] They have, uh, bad weather there last week. They got the trees tumbling down, they had no electricity for so long [**MB:** Mm.]. Uh that's why (?) I read in the papers and I called her, I emailed her, no response because there was no electricity! [laughter] [**MB:** Wow.] And maybe he will—she will tell me what they're experiencing there. Briefly, she was able to tell me that, uh, they had to live in the basement because the elec—there was no electricity and there was no air conditioning. [**MB:** Mm-hmm] It's cooler there and they cannot cook their food, they have to go to their—I don't know how they survive, you know, and you don't have any electricity. Sometimes it happens here in Houston, too. Uh... it's difficult. I remember when there was a big storm here, there was no electricity and we used to go up [laughs]...

MB: Well, I'm glad she's okay.

BO: Yeah, we—maybe you were here already. It was typhoon—I mean, Hurricane Ike or something?

MB: Yeah.

BO: Yeah. There was everywhere (?)...some bad weather here in Houston too.

MB: Mm-hmm. [laughs] Um, so could you talk a little bit about, um, describe your work experience, um, first coming to Houston? You said that it wasn't a great reception, first coming here.

BO: Oh, yeah, uh, because, uh, there are a lot of, uh, people also, wanting to go to work. [**MB:** Uh-huh.] And, uh, maybe, Houston, uh, had a better... We had a recession at that time, I think, 1981, 1980...1981, 1982. And, uh, there are always, uh, discrimination, whatever you say. I think thirty years ago, and today, I do not know if I'll be uh, discriminated today, maybe not so much like that time. Because we have, uh, I know some, uh, Filipino younger people who can get good jobs nowadays, but during that time, you know, that's not too far away from the, uh, 1960s, where we have this, uh, civil

rights problem. And, until, uh, well, something I'll just say it. This is their home.
[Laughs]

MB: What kinds of discrimination did you encounter?

BO: Oh, yeah. About your growth, about your promotion, the, the, I am sorry, uh... Mostly the white guys, white people, they don't like you to grow. Because, uh, they wanted the—the job too. They want to grow too. And, I do not know if it's still existing, today, but that was that time, 1982 until 1995 and, uh, there were some, they cannot avoid that, I think. Jobs are getting scarcer. It's not only about the, the immigration, it's also about automation, you know. The, the jobs now, I want to believe during that time when I was with, with the Texas Commerce Bank, we did not have any computer yet.

MB: But then, over time—?

BO: I work overtime, a lot. Because, uh, I was entitled to a time, uh... that's one way to add income, and uh, it's not also easy to live in the United States. You have to work hard to, to stay afloat. You know that?

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: Yeah, you cannot just live here and don't work. You have to work. That's the difference, uh, sometimes that my relatives and the people don't understand that. They thought America is rich, I'm rich too. [Laughs]

MB: So, um, what was uh, sort of your trajectory, in um, the business world? Like, when were you—were you promoted eventually, or?

BO: Here? Uh, from—that's what I'm telling to you. I was never promoted. Because, uh, people, the local people, maybe like you, they want also to be promoted.

MB: So there was a lot of competition for your job?

BO: Lot, lot. [**MB:** Mm-hmm.] Yeah. They're more people wanting to, to get a job, or to stay on the job, than the jobs. [**MB:** Mm-hmm.] As a matter of fact, I think, uh, nowadays, I'm not politically motivated by saying this, I think, uh, the, the issue in the elections, for this uh two twelve [2012], is about jobs, about the economy. And, uh, what I can say is, the more people we have, the lesser jobs we have. And at that point in time, when I came here, maybe we have 200 million Americans, we have you know, 300 or

more, 300 million. So, the competition is always there, and the, uh, as—as the population grows, the resources are getting smaller. That's easy to comprehend. [laughs]

MB: Um, can you describe a little bit, uh, what sorts of things you did at that job? What were your duties?

BO: Oh, my, my kind of work? I was assigned in the, uh, it's no longer there they, they made some reorganizations, uh, they called it trust department. And I was in the oil and gas section, um, my kind of job is trying to, uh, try to partition the, uh, what, what the trust—trustors, they, they give them some rich people, I read their names, like the Fondrens, uh, the Bakers, they put their money in, uh, in trust, and we invest that to different, in my case, oil companies, [**MB:** Mm-hmm.] Exxon-Mobil, etcetera, and they got their royalty, and we have a formula dividing—

[Recording stops; recorder's memory was full.]

MB: ...recording again. So I guess we should probably, um, take a couple steps back. Um, we were talking about, um, discrimination in the workplace. If you wouldn't mind, um, sort of recapping what you said about that?

BO: Uh, maybe it's not specific to other jobs. Other people, they have different experiences. But, uh, as, uh, I told you, that was 1982, '83, until '95 and, uh, sometimes when the economy has fallen down, there's some problem about jobs. I told you, again, the issue now in, in the election, national election is about jobs. Uh, jobs are always scarce, because, uh, companies, they automated, you know, instead of, uh, people working they're using the machine. And the economy, of course, is, uh, the, the source of joblessness. When the economy is bad, of course, uh, just like we have the, uh, to me, that was even a depression, not a recession, you know, my barometer there is like, uh, Lehman Brothers. You've known this—you've known this company? It survived the Civil War, it survived the two World Wars, and [laughs] during the time of Bush, it fell down. And Obama took over, and I don't believe the, the economy will be better, because, uh, the economy cannot be, cannot be turned around by any president, [dog barking] um, because it's even worldwide. So, when talking of the jobs, nowadays, during my time that I came here to United States, jobs were already scarce too. Because, uh, the oil prices going up, and there are some recessions, too, during the Reagan times, the Reagan time, and...it's always a problem. And overpopulation versus jobs, is, uh, the concern too. We got more people, we—we are, uh, uh, by the way, they said, during the time of the Bible, "Go ye and multiply." There were only two people at that time, and now we have seven billion, maybe growing to eight billion in population. So, that's easy to comprehend, that when the population grows, jobs are lesser. And coming in, I, I wish

I could be promoted, but I was never because, uh, there are other people there who want your job. Uh...and the billionaire (?) said, who are you? You see...you're a foreigner. What will you be doing here? They reminded you, you studied in good schools, they never, they never thought of that. I am sorry to say, that was, that was my experience. But, uh, we were able to survive, were, uh, decent living right now, uh, we—we lived in apartments before, before we built this house.

MB: So um, what neighborhood were those apartments in?

BO: Oh, neighborhood? Uh, not, not the bad neighborhood. We, we stayed in good neighborhoods too, and, uh, I'm very happy to say, that, uh, very good neighbor.

MB: Um, you were talking about the location of the townhouse where you first settled?

BO: Yeah, it was not too bad. It was not too bad.

MB: Do you recall the address?

BO: Oh, the...?

MB: Or like, the street where it was?

BO: The street, the townhouse, we lived in Richmond and Fondren, almost corner of Fondren, uh, I cannot remember the exact address right now, but, uh, I think the name of the apartment is Woodbridge. I don't know now if it is still there. And then we, we moved to a house in, uh, Inwood Forest, it was a good, uh, subdivision at that time—point of time, until the, sorry to say, until some of the colored people came over. And I think, uh, I read that there's some shootings there, there's some killings there.

MB: Oh wow. ... Um, when you first came there, was that neighborhood ethnically diverse?

BO: Yeah, always ethnically diverse. Uh, as I told you, when the, uh, some people came in, they, they made the community bad. They, sometimes they, they have their, uh, music in the street, they close the street, uh, for dancing or something. [**MB:** Mm-hmm.] And, you know, the, the, I can say that the white people left, they, they went to other subdivisions, maybe farther from the city—the inner city.

MB: What made you decide to leave that neighborhood?

BO: Oh, uh, we did not, we did not really want to leave that neighborhood. Maybe we did, but, uh, we, we had the, uh, a complex here in the, in Westview, in the Spring Branch area, and we decided to, to stay there. So, for the facility, you know, of work, running the, uh, complex, the apartment complex. Maybe that was the reason, and then, uh, we, we transferred another bigger—bigger complex, and until it was bought by some people from California, and that's why, uh, we, we left that kind of neighborhood, and we were able to build our own house here.

MB: Um, would you say that your socioeconomic status, um, changed when you came to the US?

BO: Oh, yeah, maybe. Better.

MB: Better?

BO: We, we bettered our quality of life, kind of house that we stay, and, uh, the kind of food we eat [laughs]. My, my wife wanted American food, you know. I like Filipino food. Anyway, uh, yeah I think, uh, I just came from Manila last year, and, uh, I don't know if I can still stay there. [Laughs] Too crowded, too, uh, unhealthy, because of the people, the more people we have, the more sanitation problem we have, and, uh, even the mobility. The traffic is terrible. And, uh, maybe I cannot endure the traffic there anymore if I drive—I could not even drive there. There are some bad things there, going on there, uh, in my native, uh, country. It's better here, especially here in Houston, uh, in Texas. Uh, we have a wide, wide, uh, territorial uh, atmosphere here, good, good atmosphere. Although we have some, uh, refineries, I think it's still better, you know. We have smogs [sic] there in Manila, and, sometimes, uh, there is, um, pros and cons, maybe the cost of living there may be cheaper. You can hire household helps, maybe you can hire poor people, very cheap labor. And...I still don't know. But, uh...right now, I am thinking, I—I want to stay here in the United States. I am now American, so...But, uh, for added information, uh, I acquired my Philippine citizenship, uh, because we, they open up you know the dual citizenship, uh, status. So I can vote there in the Philippines too, national elections.

MB: Have you been back to the Philippines?

BO: Yeah, I was there, uh, 2-0-1-1. Last year. I was there, uh, February to March, and, I like, uh, living there too, because my, my friends are there, my—many relatives there, too, but, uh, as I told you, the traffic is terrible, uh, coming from one section of the—

especially in metro Manila, uh, coming from one part to the other part it will take you no less than two hours. Used to be, travel would be 30 minutes.

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: So, and... there are plenty of mosquitoes, plenty of flies, because the sanitation is a growing problem, because the population is growing too. There's no president, there's no mayor that can solve that situation, because, uh, people are unruly, you know. They, they want what they want. [Dogs barking] That's our early warning device. [Laughs]

MB: Oh [laughs]. ...

BO: They just bark without any [inaudible]

MB: My dog does that too.

BO: You have dogs?

MB: I have dogs at home, yeah, in St. Louis.

BO: [shushes the dogs]

MB: [laughs] Um, so you were already, uh, middle-aged, you know, an adult when you moved to the US.

BO: Oh, yeah. I don't know how old I was, maybe, maybe that's also one reason why your sellability as a job-seeker, you know, uh, but the, I think the basic problem is you're a foreigner, and then, uh, you may be older at that time, and maybe the economic situation at that time was, uh, not so good also, and by the way, when we came here, I don't know to add any discrimination too, there was an exodus of the Vietnamese immigrants, because uh, the fall of Saigon, uh, they, they have to, serve some of these immigrants, uh the refugees, from, from Vietnam. So our citizenship was affected. Even the, the INS at that time apologized, sorry, we were able, because we were delayed, in getting our citizenship, used to be five years, it ran to seven or eight years before we were able to, uh, get our citizenship. We were legal residents when we came here. And, uh, there's always a problem about, uh, population growth and resources, they always seem [inaudible] that jobs are resources.

MB: Mm-hmm. ... Um, just 'cause I didn't think we caught it earlier on this recording, um, could you go back and talk a little bit about um, what you did in your job at the Texas Commerce Bank?

BO: It was not recorded? Uh, I, I, as I told you, I was in the, we were trying to divide the royalties, of, uh, trustors. Uh, I was with the trust department, uh, asset management, uh, the department, oil and gas section, and particular to my work, I was, uh, they call it Trust Accounting, and, uh, I was trying to distribute, uh, the income of those people who have money investing in some oil companies, like Shell, like, uh, Mobil, and name it, there's a lot of small oil companies, oil drilling companies, like Apache, at that time it was small, and they are now bigger companies, they are now bigger companies. After thirty years, I read that in the papers, uh, we have several of those used to remember the, well I distribute the royalty income for the, um, different, uh, trustors, in, in the city.

MB: Um, we just have a few more questions to go.

BO: Okay.

MB: Um, are you involved in the Filipino community in Houston?

BO: Oh, yeah, very much. [Laughs] With modesty, uh, some two weeks ago, I was, uh...given the award of—in Dr. Jose Rizal Excellence Awards for community service. Dr. Jose Rizal is uh, or was, a man, a great man, was the national hero of the Philippines. Uh, the reason for naming it after him because, uh, he was just like us. He was an expatriate—he was in Europe, and, uh, Spain, in Germany, all European cities. He studied there, he worked there, and he came back, and led the people for a reform, and, uh, it ended up in a revolution, this way we were freed from the Spanish domination. It was Rizal who wrote the, uh, some books to open up the eyes of, uh, the people there, because education was not given to us by any colonizer. Spain did not, uh, institute public education. People were, uh, ignorant, people were illiterate, you know. And ...but, uh, uh, there was a revolution against Spain, and, uh, we declared our independence in, on June 12, 1898. And then the Americans came. And uh, with uh, Admiral Dewey in Manila Bay, uh, they have the cannons and all of those things, and Filipinos were having only a machete, [**MB:** Mm-hmm.] so that was the situation at the time.

MB: Um, so, what, like organizations are you involved in?

BO: Oh, uh, by the way...uh, with modesty, I was all over, that's why, I, they, they gave me that award—community service. I was the Chairman of the, uh, umbrella organization, uh, the name is Filipino-American Council for South Texas, uh, the

acronym is FACOST, F-A-C-O-S-T. But I did not start with that, although I was one of the founders. I started with, uh, I didn't like to be involved because I was writing, too. Uh, I started with the Tagalog, T-A-G-A-L-O-G, Association of Texas, well, uh, we, uh, with modesty, I started the Miss Rizal Day, uh, contest. Until now it's going on, uh, we, we raise funds for scholarship in the Philippines. Uh, during my time we had 20 scholars, I do not know now, maybe more, maybe less, uh, helping the poor, but deserving students to go to, uh, we, we prepare the technical college education, because it's easy to get job now, with technical education, and people are... we are beneficiaries of, of this, uh, program. And I started with that. And also, I started what's still going on, is the Christmas Lantern Festival of the Filipinos. For your information, uh, a lantern is called *farol* in Spanish. And this was a, a Christmas lantern, usually in a star shape, and they developed now different kinds of, uh, designs, so we have a contest in that, and with lights, flickering lights. We do that in December, and it's still going on, uh, I think, last time I was there. There's some contests, who will win and one, two, three prizes, and, and, uh, yeah, you asked me, um, uh... I was with the Lions Club. I founded the Lions Club here, called Millennium Lions Club, and after that, uh, I founded the, uh, Knights of Rizal Chapter—we didn't have here in, in Houston. So, I am still with that, but I am no longer the, the chapter commander or the president. I am still attending their meetings. That's one way to get involved.

MB: Um, why do you feel it's important to be involved in the community here?

BO: Uh...tell you frankly, when I came to the United States, I vowed not to be, uh, involved, because, uh, it, uh, tax your, uh, energy. But, uh, that's not happened, it did not happen. So, getting, attending those meetings, they get you elected you something, and, well, I... I think that's a better way to spend your spare time. Instead of playing, uh, mahjongg, you know, you know this, what's mahjongg?

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: It's a tile game?

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: Chinese game. And, uh, also going to casino, or drinking bout (?), or, anything that is, I consider, some vices. Uh, I don't have those. Uh, I do it with the clean, uh, fun, which is, uh, going into this, uh, community organizations, they have their projects like, as I told you, we have some scholars who graduated already in the Philippines, they are now engineers of, uh, they got jobs, something else. So... uh... I was trying to drive at, that maybe I don't really go to these organizations because of payment, or whatever, but

I have the pleasure of seeing them, uh, do some projects, like, uh, scholarship, like, uh, building something, uh, I cannot detail to you what they are doing, but mostly, like the, by the way, like the Lions Club: we got involved in the Katrina, Katrina victims here, you know that, in the New Orleans coming here, uh, we, we got involved in some hurricane victims in, in the Philippines. And I—I have the pleasure of knowing that, of thinking about that. People who we help, from, uh, disasters, you feel gratified, and some psychologists, they call it ‘psychic income’. We don’t have the money earned, but the trying to help others is a psychological income to you.

MB: Mm-hmm. Um, so I just have a few questions about, sort of like, how you identify culturally. Um, so I mean, you’ve spent the last 30 years, uh, here in Houston; do you still identify, uh, primarily as Filipino?

BO: Oh [laughs] I hate to say that, when—when I was dreaming, I always dream like I was in—a Filipino. Uh, of course, uh, you cannot stay here if you are not a citizen, I mean, legal. So I, I am now an American. And I’m proud to be an American too, you know. Just July Fourth, I like to watch the TV about the American Revolution, but, uh, mostly, maybe, I am more about the helping the people there, because they are poor.

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: And, uh, we are trying to help our countrymen, because they need some help. Uh, and, uh, I’m happy that, uh, if the progress there, I’m happy about that. Of course, I’m a dual citizen, as I told you [laughs]. I’m partly American and partly Filipino. And, uh, and our culture, especially me, I’m more of a cultural divide, you know? I am, I am, uh, I like Filipino food, as I told you, uh, I, I like the Filipino costumes and traditions, and we want to keep that, because, uh, being an American citizen does not mean that you abandon your culture. It was a, there was already a decision of the Supreme Court. It happened when the Sikh, you know, the Indian, uh, tribesmen, they wear their turban, and, uh, some early Americans, they did not like that. But they went to the Supreme Court, and they can keep that. So, in the same light, we want to keep some of our Filipino ways. The good ways. [Laughs] And, we like our folk dancing, our songs, and whatever you, you do, as I told you, last week, we have a community event, and, uh, it’s about Filipinos.

MB: Um, so within your family, is it important to you to continue to have the cultural connection to the Philippines?

BO: Oh, that’s a difficult question for me, because, uh, my sons, uh, they were educated and raised here in America. They are Americans. They like American food, which I cannot, uh, survive with American foods. Uh, I look always for our dishes,

you know. If—if I may, I did not know how to cook before, but I'll be forced to cook for myself, uh, some of our local dishes, which, uh, Filipinos like. And, I don't know, if I'll, uh, I'm a citizen, but I'm a national of the Philippines, and I still sting—stick with some of the ways going on there. So we have some cultural divide. My sons, maybe that don't like Filipino dishes, and sometimes they say “Yucks!” and [laughs] but, uh, that's the way it is. And they survive on sandwiches, ok, and... uh, we have a cultural divide. That's difficult. Because we...elders, maybe, are different from, uh, the younger generations.

MB: Mm-hmm. Do your sons speak, uh, Tagalog?

BO: Barely. Basically, they forgot.

MB: Uh-huh.

BO: I mean, uh, maybe they can understand, but, it's difficult. Sometimes if they are holding a cup of coffee, steaming cup of coffee, and you talk to them in Filipino, maybe they, they'll drop the, [laughs] the cup, because they don't understand some of the, the words now, they don't understand. I believe so. Uh, uh, because, uh, they were born and raised here, they speak, we had no time to teach them the Filipino national language, because we were working, we were busy, and... and, uh, maybe they understand, but they could not speak.

MB: Mm-hmm. Um, just my last question. Um, do you feel like, uh, any connection or do you identify at all, um, with the broader Asian-American community?

BO: Oh, the American community? Uh, I do. As I told you the, the Lions Club—

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: Uh, it's international. [**MB:** Mm-hmm.] And, mostly Americans. We have the district, and, with modesty, I am an officer of the district, [**MB:** Mm-hmm.] I am a cabinet member, the District Governor, and I am in charge of international relations, I connected, uh, some Lions Club with one another, we call it twinning, just like the sister cities, [**MB:** Mm-hmm.] you know, uh, I was able to do that for some time, but it's really difficult, because, uh, you know, international communication, it needs, it needs so, it need to travel, which I could not afford, I think, uh, I could not do that, going to one country to another, because of money. But, I was able to connect some Lions Club, and, uh, I have to attend the district meetings, the governors meeting, and I meet there, not Filipinos only, I meet the—every American. Mostly white.

MB: Mm-hmm. Um, have you interacted a lot with other Asian communities in Houston?

BO: Yeah, I am very proud to be an Asian. I...I was, uh, in the, as a matter of fact, I started with the Asian community, before I joined the local Filipino community, I was with the APAHA, uh, APAHA is A-P-A-H-A. That's called the Asian—Asia Pacific Heritage Association [Asian Pacific American Heritage Association]. Oh, by the way, even before that, I founded the Asian Press Club, and, uh, that's where I met many Asians, and then I joined the APAHA, the Asia Pacific Heritage Association. And, uh, with modesty, I were Chairman there, I was a board member, who became, uh, who became a, a, city—a councilmember, the name is Gordon Huang, I don't know if you, if you are one year here, you maybe you don't meet him. Gordon Huang was a councilmember, city. And he, he was there for some time. Until term limited. And also, we have, uh, who became councilmember, and also assemblyman, uh, state representative, name is, uh, Martha Wong. Those are Chinese, and became associated with them, and not only with this people, but I was, uh, involved in Asian community events. And, like the...uh, uh, the River Boat Festival, the racing... Yeah I, I got also some, uh, Asian press in the city.

MB: Well, um, that's all the questions I have.

BO: Oh, okay.

MB: Is there anything else that you wanted to cover?

BO: Oh, maybe, we didn't talk much about, uh, the Asian community.

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: Uh, as I told you, I started in the Asian community, I felt that, uh, I am an Asian, uh, my, my color [laughs], my looks, uh, as a matter of fact, uh, Ongoco, that's my last name, it was derived from maybe a Chinese guy who immigrated in the Philippines. Which I did—wee did not even know, we did not even, recognize that fact, because, that was a long time ago. And, uh, my father was even darker than me, usually the Chinese are yellowish. Uh, so, uh, we are Filipinos through and through. Uh...but, uh, some Asians, because of my last name, they might consider me as a Chinese, or an Asian of course. And, we need to have an Asian recognition in the city, we are not that, uh, big, or popular, but I read that, uh, the Asians, they got, we got more increasing in population than the Hispanics, nowadays, maybe you read that. Uh, we, we beat the Hispanic immigration. We got a lot of Indians, a lot of Chinese, a lot of Vietnamese, uh, in the

community. And...if you, if you travel, if you see the group, the Americans now are not the Americans, uh, in Americans everything is America, American. The, the color, you see them, everybody, you will meet the Vietnamese, you will meet not even the Vietnamese, we—we have some, uh, Middle Eastern people, because of the trouble there, they came here. We have, uh, Iraqis, or Afghanistan, uh, Afghanis who came here, uh, you name it, we got a lot of, uh, Asian population, especially in Houston, I think, uh, we are—we are not as big as Hispanic community may be, but we are going there. Uh, I don't know the, the percentage maybe we have 12 percent, 18 percent, of the, the community.

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: And I believe, I am an Asian. [laughs]

MB: Mm-hmm.

BO: Although, if they called, they asked me for my citizenship, I am an American!
[Laughs]

MB: [Laughs] Well I think that's about everything that I wanted to cover.

BO: Uh, yeah, can I ask my questions?

MB: Sure!

BO: Yeah, I, I am not very, although I have read about that before, I think, uh, if I remember, I also filled out some, some forms, uh, for the same project, [**MB:** Uh-huh.] uh, my sister called earlier, knows about the Chaos. [**MB:** Mm-hmm.]

1:22:02

[The recorder is turned off, the interview ends]