

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

Interviewee: Violeta Panis

Interviewers: Lorenza Haddad Talancon (Junior); Hodson Harding (Sophomore)

Date/Time of Interview: April 4, 2014, at 10:30AM

Transcribed by: Hodson Harding and Lorenza Haddad

Edited by: Chris Johnson, Sara Davis, and Patricia Wong (8/5/16)

Audio Track Time: 0:30:43 (Audio Track #1); 0:26:41 (Audio Track #2)

Background:

Violeta Sison Panis was born in Agoo, La Union, Philippines. The oldest of six siblings, she stayed at her grandmother's house for some years. As a young adult, she came to the United States through a travel agency that was bringing nurses in. She was brought to Texas on a two-year visa in 1998. Her fiancé and future husband Rolando also moved to America, but to California. He found a job in Houston through a friend and they then got married. He sponsored her, and both were able to settle and live in America as permanent residents. They went on to have five children.

Although facing a little adversity at times, Violeta worked with some of the most respected doctors in the world and enjoyed her career. She retired in 2012 after 42 years and began to devote her time to some of her passions. She has had the opportunity to travel with her family and visit the Holy Land of Jerusalem. Today she likes to help out with her church and babysit her grandchildren.

Setting:

The interview centers on the areas of daily life, culture, and labor to develop a working history around the context of life experience, immigration, and family life. Much attention is given to her role as a working mother.

The interview was conducted in a study room at Rice University. The interview lasted two hours. Violeta Panis recounted several stories of her childhood and her life in the U.S. as a nurse. She gave us very insightful information on the role of the Filipino nurse and her family culture. Her daughter, Christie, sent us many pictures of her mother and her life.

Interviewers:

Lorenza Haddad Talancon was born in Mexico City and raised in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico. She moved to Houston to begin her studies at Rice University. She is majoring in sociology with a business minor. Her areas of interest in research include immigration, health, and the consequences of the drug war in Mexico.

Hodson Harding is a sophomore student at Rice University who is currently studying sociology. He was born in London, England but currently resides in Vancouver, Canada. Hodson is currently studying the effects of suspension and its potential harmful effects. He is also an NCAA track and field athlete.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

VP	Violeta Panis
HH	Hodson Harding
LH	Lorenza Haddad
—	Speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...	Speech trails off; pause
<i>Italics</i>	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
[Brackets]	Actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

HH: Okay, so my name is Hodson Harding, and I'm here with, uh, Lorenza Haddad, my partner with Rice University's Houston Asian Archive, uh, project. And I'm here today with Ms. Violeta Panis in Fondren library, located in Houston, Texas. The date is, uh, Friday April 4th, 2014. Would you please tell us your full name, age and place of birth, please?

VP: Okay, my name is Violeta Panis. Uh, my middle name, Sison. Uh, well I am aged—I am 66. What was the other question? My birthday? [laughs]

HH: Your *place* of birth.

LH: [overlapping] Place of birth.

VP: Place of birth. I was born in the—the Philippines, uh, specific would be Agoo, La Union. It's this, uh, little town. Uh, northern part of, uh, Manila. Yeah.

HH: And who were the family members you grew up with and, uh, what were there relationship to you?

VP: The family member I grew up with?

HH: Yeah.

VP: Well, I have, uh, brothers. Two brothers and, uh, three other sis—uh three sisters. And, uh—actually I did not grow up with them. [laughs] I—my grandma, uh, since my aunts—you know, she has seven children, uh, who were leaving for college, and, um, they requested me to stay. Well, requested my parents that I should stay here, and you know, be with them at their house in the province. And I think I was about 9 or 10 then. 10 years old.

HH: Mm-hmm.

VP: And I helped—I think she expected me to help with the house while I go to school. In the evening,

help, uh, her cook and, you know, with the chores of the house. It's, uh—it's, uh, very good. I enjoyed it. And, uh—although I missed my brothers and sisters because only then when I—you know, I only see them when I'm off school or vacation, summer, stuff like that.

LH: Was it far away from where you...?

VP: Uh, it's like eight hours. Well, they had a train then. eight hours. Right to the city. My parents were, uh, in Manila then. But, uh, you know, their family was growing! Or, you know, I think when I went there we were already six. They have six kids already. [laughing] "There's only one kid with me!" my grandma said.

LH: [overlapping] Oh, wow.

HH: Did you find it difficult?

VP: Did *I* find it difficult?

HH: Mm-hmm.

VP: Well, missing them. Uh, I have a cousin who stayed with me too, uh, in that house. And they have, uh, another, uh, well it's—it's just—more just a relative who stayed and helped at their house—at their housework. And uh, it was difficult? It wasn't difficult. It's just, I wish I was with my [laughing]—

LH: [overlapping] With your parents?

VP:—siblings! But my dad comes like maybe twice a month. Gives me some, um, some pocket money and, uh—and, uh, stuff that I—he said sell this, and if you sell, uh, it's like ball pens (?) or...I can't remember the other stuff he would bring me. And, uh, "If you sell this, this is your money." [laughs]

HH: Mm-hmm. Do you remember your daily routine as a kid?

VP: As a kid? Um, uh, I have to wake up early, because I have to walk to school. Um, I don't know. I can't remember. Maybe school is like about eight, um.... I think that's not very much I can remember. Uh, you know, go to school, go home, help with the chores.

HH: Mm-hmm. Did you enjoy it? You know?

VP: Did I enjoy it? Or what? The work? [VP and LH laugh]

HH: [overlapping] Your childhood. Your—your childhood back then?

VP: It—uh, noth—nothing I can say that's—that I did not enjoy. And my grandparents were very nice, very good, um, very loving to me, and, uh, vacation time everybody comes there. You know, to see each other.

[0:05:08]

LH: So that was good for you?

VP: It was good. Yeah.

LH: And what kind of profession were your parents in?

VP: My mum, uh, well she stayed at home, uh, while we were growing up. My dad, uh, I remember he works at the pier. I think he's (?) like an inspector there. At one time, uh, they decided to go back to look at the country, or the province and tried out, um—and started a restaurant business. And, uh, I think it did not click because, uh, I found him—well in the meantime he does buy and sell tobacco, also for—to make money for all these kids. [VP laughs. HH laughs]

HH: Now, you weren't the oldest child were you?

VP: I am the oldest.

HH: You're the oldest, okay.

LH: That's why you got to go with your grandparents?

VP: I think I was picked. [All laugh] And, uh, I don't—I didn't hear the conversation, but I know, uh, she's probably requested for me to stay with them.

HH: Mm-hmm.

LH: And, like why and how did you decide to become a nurse?

VP: Oh, uh, I think that was a thing to—just because a lot of the, uh, kids growing up there would dream to go to America. And, uh, my dad kinda encouraged me to take nursing. Because that's—would be easy for you to, uh, you know, apply. And I think nurses were in demand then. Even now. [laughs]

LH: Even now, yeah. [HH laughs]

HH: When did you decide that?

VP: To come to US?

HH: Mm-hmm.

VP: Uh, well I knew when I took nursing that my goal would be come to United States. And uh...and uh, there was this, uh, travel agency that helps, you know, um, bring nurses to the States. And I

happened to be—I happened to select Texas. And they said, “Why Texas? The cowboys are there!” [All laugh] In the—in—in the mind of my friends, they said, uh, “It’s like all farm and all.” You know? They didn’t know about the *huge* medical center.

HH: [overlapping] Yeah. Mm-hmm.

VP: [overlapping] [indistinguishable]—existed then. [beeping in background] Um, well of course, you know, you get paid more. After I graduated, I, uh—I worked maybe one or two years, uh, in our hospital where I graduated. And uh, it’s called the Chinese General Hospital, and then, uh, I worked with my aunt at one time after I gra—graduated. And that was 1968 and then, uh, I came here with a group of 20—21, actually.

HH: Other nurses?

VP: Uh-huh. And, uh, the—the program was—was called Exchange Visitor Program. And, uh, you know, I think we’re just allowed to stay two years. Then we’re supposed to go home. But then, I dunno, if you wanna ask me what happened then? [VP laughs]

HH: Yeah! Yeah, please, what happened? two years? [overlapping] Now—now you’ve been here for 46 years.

VP: [overlapping] You want to know? Yeah, two years. Before two years was over, that’s when Mr. Panis came in. [laughs]

HH: Uh-huh.

LH: Oh.

VP: Well he, um—he also applied to come, and, uh, his—his entry was, uh, in California.

HH: Mm-hmm.

VP: Yeah. So, um, yeah, of course we corresponded. We planned. He was already my fiancé when I came and we planned to, you know, maybe either go home or we see each other here. And we did.

HH: Did he come to Texas?

VP: He came first, uh, to—to California.

HH: [overlapping] To California. Mm-hmm.

VP: And he has—he worked there for maybe 6 months. Uh, I went to see him there, maybe a month after he was there ‘cause he came February and we saw each other in May. And, uh, I have a good friend here: “Why don’t you invite *your* boyfriend to come to Houston? I have a job for him.” You

know? “He’s got a job,” he said. So I told him, and, uh, he joined me here. We got married and had those kids. [All laugh]

[0:10:14]

HH: How did you guys end up, uh, being able to stay in America?

VP: Well, when he came—

HH: Yeah.

VP:—he was considered immigrant—an immigrant already.

HH: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

VP: He had the papers.

HH: Oh. Okay.

VP: But, so when we got married, then I—

HH: [overlapping] You could—

VP: —applied for me.

HH: Okay.

VP: He sponsored me and I applied to be, you know, an immigrant here, too.

HH: Excellent.

LH: And, uh, how did you meet? You said you were already engaged before you came.

VP: Yeah. He is actually my, uh, third cousin. [laughs] Well I—we, uh—we lived in the same area. Uh, not far from my house. Um, how did we meet? I dunno I was high school; he was graduating. And he said he sees me, uh, like a—like a little girl or something [All laugh]. He sees me—but when I was in college, I think that’s when, you know, maybe his eyes was caught [all laugh]—caught his eyes. So this good-looking lady [All laugh]... But, I was still a student when he was—was, uh, you know, visiting in the dorm. In nursing, I was third year I think when we got engaged and planned. [HH laughs]

LH: And you both planned to come to the US together? Or...?

VP: No. I told him, you know, since—since I have other brothers and sisters and I was expected to

help, you know, with their school, uh, you know, for me to go to States and then send money, you know, to help them out. Um, then I said, um, you know I have to leave. I have to go States. But then he didn't tell me yet at that time that he has paperworks already cooking. [VP and HH laugh] And, uh, I don't know. He's just—probably just—what he's just thinking in his head. But I knew he was—he would be coming to the States.

LH: That's really nice!

HH: Did you guys move around a lot while you were living here?

VP: Did I what?

HH: Did you guys have to move around a lot [overlapping] while you were here?

VP: Oh, okay! No, not me. I—I was stayed—I was staying in a, um, dorm when I came, you know, with the 20 other girls. Uh, and then everybody decided to go to another states. And, no I stayed here in, uh, in Houston. All—all 42 years. [laughs] When he came, we did not go anywhere else. We probably just visit friends in other states, but that's it.

HH: Do you guys like Houston?

VP: Yeah, of course! [All laugh] Uh, we moved from different houses. Uh, we were at Missouri. Ad then, uh, can't remember the area...Chasewood? And then we moved to Sugar Land last.

HH: Oh, okay.

LH: And why did you move to different houses?

VP: Hmm, well the first house was a little older and, uh, small. Um, well, it has 3 bedrooms. We just, uh—lot of—I had friends also were moving that—leaving that area. And then, we moved to Chasewood, um. It's not from, uh—from we—where we used to live, but, uh...I dunno, we just moved! [All laugh] Uh, a better—a better area probably, a better school for our kids.

HH: Now, Christy is not your only child? Correct?

VP: She's my oldest—

HH: [overlapping] She's your oldest?

VP:—daughter.

HH: Okay.

VP: I have a, uh—a son—two sons! And Christy and Judy and Gina (?).

HH: 5 kids.

VP: 5 kids.

LH: So a big family!

VP: Yeah, all this time I was working evening shift. My husband would work in the morning. In between, uh, you know, the hours, I have—for a while I have friends who would watch my [laughs]—watch my kids, and then, yeah.... Now somehow I didn't have nursery. But I didn't bring them to nursery. But we just shifted, you know, took shifts. Um, in the morning with my kids. And then when they would go—go to school, I also bring 'em—oh, yeah! I—uh, Christy was brought to a—it's like a school nursery place. Yeah, and, I dunno, I just became a mom and worked, and... [laughs]

[0:15:30]

HH: Did you guys plan on—

VP: [overlapping] juggled my time and all that.

HH: Did you guys plan on having a lot of kids? Was that always the plan?

VP: What? Did we plan to have kids?

HH: No. Uh, a lot of kids. Like five.

VP: A lot of kids?

HH: Mm-hmm.

VP: Well—five wasn't—four was—was the plan, I think.

HH: Yeah.

VP: Two boys, two girls. But when we had Christy and when we had a boy and then we were—then we were expecting, well, then we had a *girl*. And *then...another girl!* So he said, “Well, we need another boy!” [All laugh] So, uh, that made 5 'cause the the last one was Joey, so...

HH: Lucky!

VP: Lucky! [laugh]

LH: He would have been like, “More!”

VP: Still quit anyways, I think! That wasn't easy, you know? 'Cause you get them ready for—before I

go to work, I have to get 'em ready and all that stuff.

LH: And working as a nurse.

VP: And working as a full-time. All this time.

LH: And how was it working as a nu—nurse here?

VP: Uh, oh the first—you wanna hear about the—

LH: [overlapping] Yeah.

VP: —first few days? [laughing] Well we spoke the dia—I mean English already, right? Books in the Philippines they're all in English from grade one to, uh, in college, you know, all in English. But of course when you come here, uh, people—I couldn't understand the—the slang or the locales or whatever you call it. Uh, it was not easy. Like being a nurse, you have to be accurate with the.... Plus I'm in the medical center and that was, you know, a big thing [HH laughs] with Dr. DeBakey and all this big surgeons. Uh, communication was little difficult for me although I spoke English. Um, like we had foreign doctors too, you know? They—uh, they're from Israel. Particularly this doctor, he would phone and, you know, ma—give you orders. And, you know, I—I avoid the phone! [laughing] I run away from the phone! [laughs] Uh, but, I was a—like what were considered graduate nurse? Although I'm already an RN when I came, you know, from the Philippines. They expected you to—they want us to take the boards right away. Um...

LH: RN is?

VP: [overlapping] Since we work, uh.... The registered nurse.

LH: Registered nurse.

VP: But I—we were considered GN, which is like—just graduate nurse.

LH: Mm-hmm. [overlapping] So you had to do it all over again?

VP: And of course.... Uh, yeah, the—the boards, the exam, which is, you know, just fair. We're not familiar with the US. [VP and HH laugh] Um, I took the exam I think at that time Christy was—well we have review, and.... My daught—first daughter was gonna get born and I can't remember now. But anyway, I worked on reviewing. The first time I took the test, I failed because I failed, uh, the subject of psychiatry. [laughs] I had to go to, uh, like have another—more classes for that—review classes. And, you know, luckily I went back. It was okay. Passed it. And so, that goes with the, you know, you—you're RN now. Then you get paid better. But don't ask me how much [all laugh] I can't remember.

HH: Was work ever stressful for you?

VP: *Very* stressful!

HH: Yeah?

VP: You know, like, uh—well, I have a very nice, considerate head nurse. Um, well like I said, you know, you can—you can—I can do the work. We learn how things are done. Um, maybe the communication. Um, it's a little hard. Plus, you know, uh, when I became an RN, and they would say, "You're in charge." Maybe that's after a year. It's—it's—I'm not still comfortable with everything. Then I work with some LPN. They're—they're not—they take lesser, uh—less a year to become licensed, certificationed (?) nurses. They know more [laughs], of course, the routine, and—and the procedures and stuff. Uh, and they're kinda jealous of me because, uh, they say, "They're putting you in charge?" Well then I don't know much still. Uh, and there's that, you know, little conflict there. Give you a hard time sometimes. [laughs]

[0:20:43]

HH: But they were under you guys?

VP: Yeah.

HH: But—but they would give you a hard time?

VP: Uh, they're supposed to be under *me*. That's why they're jealous! How come I'm...? But then, they could have been in charge, too, but.... I don't know, maybe because you're, um, a registered nurse already. So...

LH: And were you the only Philippine for a while? Or no?

VP: In my unit?

LH: Mm-hmm.

VP: Uh, no they are other nurses. Maybe I worked in a surgical post. The surgery patients, the open heart surgery patients. But, uh, next unit would be the same unit. Then they have other Filipino nurses. You know, because, uh, we were 20. We were assigned different floors. Uh, I think the nurse that, uh, worked after me there is a Filipino nurse. Uh, actually she was my roommate. And she's been here for—for a long long time. And she's good. Showed me the ropes. [All laugh]. Tells me things that I need to know. Uh...

LH: Did it make it easier working with people from your same culture?

VP: Of course. 'Cause, uh, what's difficult is when—when people would speak the same dialect while at work, and that's—that's always a no-no. [LH and HH laugh] Even now.

LH: Yeah?

VP: It's still hard, you know? We see each other in the unit. You can't help but speak the dialect. I mean, although, you know. I mean that's understandable. You—you—because, you know, although you're not maybe speaking about the patient. [laughs] You're around the patient or around the nurses, you know. You're not talking about *them*, but it's just I think polite. [laughs] It's harder to speak the English while your friend is there. [laughs]

LH: Yeah.

HH: So would you say you've enjoyed your career overall?

VP: Oh yes! Overall, yeah. I stayed in one place. I mean one hospital.

HH: Wow.

VP: Um, although I worked in different units, you know. [bird chirping] But first I was, um—but I—I remained staff all this time because, um, when—when they, uh, given me a position to be in charge. But with all my kids and I'm on call, [laughs] I couldn't have done it. I said, "No. I'm—I—I need the—I'll just be ordinary staff nurse." Which I think, you know, I did my best and, uh, uh, a lot of the mean, I mean [indistinguishable several words]. My patients liked me. And I do—I did good job.

HH: Did you see a lot of traumatic events as a nurse?

VP: [sigh] That's the only.... Traumatic, how traumatic? [laughs]

HH: People dying maybe or something.

VP: Oh, ah,

HH: [overlapping] Horrible injuries.

VP: Once in a while. Not—not often. But, if there's death or a cardiac arrest, you know that's—that's a hard thing, too. That's a scary thing when it happens, too. [laughs] Yeah like that was a post heart surgery unit I worked with and then somehow, um, I grew—go to another unit, which is like after stroke patients. Those who had stroke and—and be in a rehab area. Um, I've found it, uh, just, you know, the progress of your patients in the post-operative area would be, you know, get them well and then they go home. You see them walking and, you know, moving well.

Then this—this area where I worked after the stroke patients, uh, are trying to recover. It was—it was like—takes a long time for them to recover because you have to—to.... The main thing that they tell us, "Let the patient help themselves." And, like in feeding and, you know, that type of activity of the daily living that, uh, you teach them so they'll be more independent when they go home. 'Cause, you know. They get—they're paralyzed, and, you know, everything or—mostly done for them in that unit. I—I found it like it's dragging and it's.... Um, I didn't stay that long, maybe couple of years.

[0:25:32]

And then, um, I decided to go to a pre-surgery unit, which is getting patients ready for surgery. And, um, I liked that better. [All laugh] And it was really fast. I wanted a fast—a more faster pace—uh, pace, and then that was really fast. Especially during my—towards—towards the end because I stayed in the pre—pre-operative unit. Um, in different cases, and at one time, yeah. And then, uh, pain management. And, uh the latest I worked with was with the big shot surgeons [voices in background] like Doctor Mathis, you know, is one of the greatest, uh, orthopedic surgeons. And, uh, of course they're all perfectionists, but, uh, you do your best.

And when the computer came in [laughs] that wasn't easy for me, too. I mean, you know, I know a little bit, but, uh, uh, they taught us instead of, you know, just writing your chart and notes and everything, uh, we learn the computer, um.... It's, you know—once you learn it's—make life easier actually. And, uh—and then I'm getting old. [All laugh] I was getting old, and then, uh, I decided to do—resign, uh, when I became 65. [laugh] I mean, you know, retire.

LH: Retire. Yeah.

HH: What year was that when you re—retired?

VP: Uh, which unit I was working? It's a...

HH: No. Which year did you retire?

VP: Oh, 2012.

HH: 2012? That's pretty...

VP: [overlapping] Yeah, I just retired about a year—last January, yeah.

HH: Okay.

LH: And how...?

VP: And then that was 42 years! That's enough! [hitting table] My husband retired and, you know, he was counting like, "Oh, I've worked like 37 or 39 years? 37 years already." And then he said, he'll re—"I'm going to retire now," he says. "But you—you're—you're—only 37! I'm working 42! I—it's better—I—I—I better retire too!" [All laugh]

LH: And what did he work in?

VP: He worked with, uh, uh, Steward Stevenson. It's like diesel mechanics. He would be an inspector there or I don't what other, uh, part of the department he went to. But then, uh, Steward Stevenson was bought out by GE. And he—he still stayed. He said they gave him pension from Steward Stevenson and then he gets pension from GE too. [LH laughs] And he said—when he quit, he said, "Oh. I'm

getting more money when—[laughs] than—[LH and HH laugh] more than when I was working!” He was happy. So, um, and after retiring, I just wanted to travel. Spend that money.

HH: Where did you guys visit?

VP: Uh, last three year, um, three places—main places—you know, it’s actually with the, uh, pilgrimages. Uh, sponsored by the church.

HH: Okay.

VP: So it’s mainly religious area, like in Portugal where the blessed virgin, you know, appears. Place like that. We’ve been to Spain. But mainly you visit all these huge churches.

LH: [overlapping] The pilgrimage?

VP: [overlapping] You don’t know how—how they built these big churches then.

LH: [overlapping] Which—which one in Spain?

VP: Uh, Santiago?

LH: Ah, yeah.

VP: That huge church.

LH: De Compostela?

VP: Yeah!

LH: Yeah. There’s a really big pil—pilgrimage every year. To Santiago de Compo—

VP: [overlapping] There is. It’s a beautiful church. [beeping] I could see all these branches (?) and gold plate—I don’t know if they’re gold plate. [laughs]. But it’s beautiful. And then, uh, we also were able to join a pilgrimage to the holy land.

HH: Okay.

VP: And, uh—and Paris, France because the—there’s a saint there. Labouré? And, uh—and, uh, she’s not—how do you say that? Her body was still—did not deteriorate. Yeah, you get to see that. And, uh, we enjoyed traveling. Although maybe we go to Alaska someday.

[0:30:19]

LH: Yeah.

HH: Why Alaska?

VP: Everybody says it's beautiful! It's a must have—must, uh, see place.

LH: I also want to go to Alaska.

VP: Yeah.

LH: And did you go back to the Philippines a lot? Or...?

VP: Oh after...what, um, Christy was two...

[Short intermission due to technical difficulties. Audio track #2 begins.]

LH: My grandmother was from Italy, but from my mom, they're all...

VP: Oh, you're a mixture.

LH: Ah, yes. I'm a mixture. [laughs]

VP: That's a good mixture. Lebanon, Italy.

LH: And Mexico.

VP: That's, uh—that's—well nothing's far nowadays.

LH: Yeah.

VP: [laughs] The world's so small now, especially with the computer.

HH: [overlapping] Very small. Very small.

LH: Yeah.

HH: Do you like to travel on planes?

VP: Uh, uh, do I like it? Well I just go [LH laughs] because you have—that's the best—fastest. [laughs] No, I—I'm scared, uh, to go in planes.

HH: Really?

VP: I mean there's that nervousness. You know, and well, even in the car you never know. Oh! That's a nice drink. You just concocted that? [LH and HH laugh] Made that drink?

LH: Yeah! Just water and a little bit of strawberries together.

VP: You should put lemon! My, uh, husband likes to garden, we have a lot of lemon in the backyard. And Christy has a lemon plant, and, uh, her husband always make a jug—big jug of lemon juice. No sugar, he says. That’s supposed to be last year’s slim fast. [All laugh] Lose weight. UH, anything else you need to talk about?

HH: Yeah, uh, what do you do during your days now that you’re retired?

VP: Oh, you have to know that [All laugh]? Well since, um, um, I’m active in church. I love to, you know, walk. And I go to church every day, uh, if I don’t have other plans. You know, attend mass. And, uh, uh, I was telling her, uh, at one time, um, my brother, uh, brought, uh, Pr—Protestant friends and we became Protestant. Um, my dad became, uh, an elder in—in the Church of Christ. And I just—I just joined them be—just for his sake actually. I didn’t know much about it. Uh, but when I came to States, um, and—and, uh, my—Roland—we got married. Uh, this—the priest said, “Well, you have to convert. I cannot marry you, you know? Convert.” [laughs]

HH: Oh.

VP: He—he says that. I don’t know if—if that’s still true. I think they can marry anybody, even if you’re not the same religion now. But he’s—he’s Philippine. Actually, he’s from our town. And so, y husband said, “Well, you need to convert.” “Okay.” [VP and HH laugh] [indistinguishable several words] I did. And so I started joining, you know, the—the Catholic again. And all my children, you know, we go to church and been Catholic ever since. And I love to, you know—well, being Catholic, I didn’t have a chance or with the family growing—no chance for the Bible studies and stuff like that. Now I like—you know, I love to go to Bible studies and whatever activity in church they have. Or maybe prayer groups I joined with. Um, I don’t know if you’ve heard about Carmelites.

LH: Mm-hmm.

VP: Um, I’ve been professed Carmelite. Uh, um, we, uh—mainly we study the spirituality of Carmelites, and there are rules you follow. And, uh—and we meet—we’re required to meet every month, and I’m in the counsel so I see the counsel for—once a month too. And what we learn, we are expected to teach the other people who come join. Carmel—it’s late Carmelite so it’s not like they have nuns who are [laughs] in [indistinguishable] with. They say they’re supposed to be barefooted. Um, so you’re familiar with it?

LH: Yes.

VP: Yeah, uh, they have one in New Caney, but they are like the monks. They—they’re inside a convent. When you visit they have these railings where you can speak to them there. But, um, mainly it’s—it’s, you know, prayer. And, uh, try to juggle time so Roland won’t be left out. [LH and HH laugh] He doesn’t wanna join me when—if they have meetings.

HH: So what does he do in his free time?

VP: In his free time, he loves to garden!

HH: Yeah.

VP: Yeah. He has vegetable garden and fruit trees at the back of the house. Well, he probably wishes he has a larger area where he could, yeah, plant stuff. Like tomatoes and eggplants and all sorts. Bigh, uh, you know, pomelo?

HH: Mm-hmm.

LH: [overlapping] What's a pomelo?

VP: It's like a version of the grapefruit. Yeah. Yeah, it's good. You should come later when it's harvest time. [All laugh]

[0:05:23]

LH: I would love to! I really like...

VP: We have a lot of the lemons. It's always a lot. We give them away. Um, okay, direct me! I'm mm think—I think I'm going off subject. [laughs]

LH: No!

HH: I mean do—do you have any particular events in US that affected you? You know, your family as a whole? Maybe 9/11? Or...?

VP: Oh, uh, 9/11.

HH: Mm-hmm.

VP: Um, we—we maybe have, uh, friends—we're just acquaintance with somebody or know of somebody well, we don't know anybody or probably.... Yeah. That—that's a shocking event for me. Or, I think all the world I think. Um, I hope (?) [loud thumping noise] I (?) have (?) one more chance to do something like that again. (?)

HH: Yeah, apart from that, do you have any particular family in Houston that you—I mean any best friends you spend time with a lot? Or is it you and Roland?

VP: Well right now, it's, uh, I'm—I'm with him a lot now. [All laugh] Uh, he loves to go fishing.

HH: He does?

VP: Yeah. And, uh, because he does, then I have to—I have to, you know.... I said, “I have to make—I wanna learn how come—I wanna *know* how come he loves fishing! [All laugh] But, you know, he was a—when—ever since he was a little boy, his dad would take him to the ponds, or—or even the grandpa he remembers. Yeah, they go up in the ponds or, you know, rice fields where they would fish, using the...

LH: In the rice fields? [HH laughs]

VP: Yeah, when it rains!

LH: Yeah, then it gets all flooded.

VP: It gets flooded fish would—uh, somehow they're there!

LH: Wow!

VP: And then they have this gadget which they can catch them.

HH: Wow.

VP: Yeah. Catfish or the other. I don't know the name in English. [HH laughs] Uh, so anyway, uh, he'll take me fishing, too. We've gone, uh, deep-sea fishing, when he was—at work they sponsor them, you know, to have a fishing out there. You have miles far off and you can catch the big ones.

HH: [laughs] Speaking of fish, what do you think about the food of America? It's very big, huh? Especially in Texas.

VP: Uh, the food?

HH: The food.

VP: Well, it—since everyone's here, the Italians, the Mediterraneans, [laughs] it's great! I go to Canada. Uh, not much—well it's Regina. It's, uh—it's still growing.

HH: Yes.

VP: It's not like maybe where *you* came from.

HH: Mm-hmm.

VP: Uh, it's pretty simple over there. When they came here, we brought them everywhere. “Try the Mexican food!” [HH laughs] “Try the Vietnamese food!” It's—it's like really rich. But, I don't know if I should tell you. [All laugh] But, my doctor, um, the cardiology doctor, uh, one time I had some kind of palpitation, uh, and—and I went for a check-up for—uh, to see what's going on. You know, um,

you're getting old. You don't know if you creep (?) can be creeping (?) on. [indistinguishable several words] [VP and HH laugh] I might have high blood pressure. So anyway, my doctor said, "You're borderline with a high blood pressure." Uh, I'm not diabetic, but, uh, the advice he said, "Lay off the Filipino foods!" [laugh]

LH: Really?

HH: [overlapping] Oh! He said that?

LH: Why the Filipino food?

VP: Well, um, mainly it's more, uh, starchy food.

LH and HH: Oh.

VP: More carbohydrates, I think. It's a lot of greasy. It's a lot of...

LH: Like fried?

VP: Yeah, fried.

HH: Those are the best.

VP: Those are the best.

LH: That's the best. [All laugh]

VP: So he said lay off those foods because, uh, you know, you don't want your blood pressure go—go—uh, go worse.

[0:09:57]

HH: Did you listen?

VP: Uh, I tried. [LH and HH laugh] My—you know my daughter, she's into yoga. She's in—the one in New York. Um, and then she bought me this book, uh, something about beauty. You know, everybody's eyes ca—is caught when they see beauty in something. And, uh, they—I've been reading it lately and it tells you—well it tell you what to avoid, food that, uh, you should avoid because of the toxin. Like in, you know the—the—we have a lot of fish at home 'cause he—he's a good fisherman. Um, the, um—it's—the is book saying that the toxins—there's a lot of toxins already, uh, in our, you know—the pollution in our—especially they had that spill...

HH: Mm-hmm.

LH: In the ocean.

VP: A couple weeks ago. So lay off fish. [laughs] Don't eat any. This tells you specific what better fish or less toxic. [HH laughs]

LH: Yeah, because of the mercury? Or...?

VP: Yeah, the mercury.

LH: Mercury in the water.

VP: In the waters, and...

LH: I love fish.

VP: I mean, you should, uh, eat the Alaska versus the—the farm one.

HH: Alaska? Okay.

LH: Yeah.

VP: And trout is better than the other fish. But then, if you like sushi...

HH and LH: I love sushi! [laugh]

VP: Ah! Lay off sushi! [laughs]

HH: They said that, too?

VP: Because—yeah, the—they have tuna, right?

HH: Yeah.

VP: Sashimi.

LH: The tuna is the one that has.

HH: Ok.

VP: And then the salmon.

HH: Salmon rolls...

VP: And they're, they're not cooked.

HH: Okay.

VP: That means—

HH: [overlapping] It's raw.

VP: Yeah, that means, uh, whatever bad stuff is in there it's not eliminated through cooking.

HH: Ah, okay.

VP: So I said, "Oh okay, no more sushi for me." [VP and HH laugh]

LH: What part of like your culture do—do you preserve the most when you're here—like when you came?

VP: Uh, like in Church they have—we have a lot of traditions that, uh, they handed over—mainly it's the Spanish influence. Yeah, Spain, you know, they—they stayed in the Philippines for like more than 300 years. So a lot of the traditions and cultures are—are in the Philippines. Um, so, like, we have a Simbang Gabi, which is like a novena, nine days novena in church. Uh, well novena means nine. Uh, there's that dawn mass, for nine days before, uh—before Christmas? And they have, uh, also different traditions about Easter. Um, what is that tradition with family like I think—I—I'm proud to say that the Philippines are more close—real close, close-knit family. But—although different cultures has that, too, you know? Italians very close. [HH laughs] Uh, although, um, you know, um, probably depends, but then I see a lot of people.... Uh [pause] it's—it's probably just how you're brought up. Uh, if you have a good relationship [beeping sound] with your family, no matter where you're from.

LH: Yeah.

HH: Is there a strong Filipino community here in Houston?

VP: They have, uh, a lot of different groups, [indistinguishable] different associations. But it's still—you see class—classes [laughs]. Sometimes they're not in unity. But, you know...

HH: Why is that? Would you say?

VP: I don't know. I mean because they're from different area in the Philippines. They want to be in this—their own group, their own like they call them [don't know the word].

HH: What is that? Different, you said different groups?

VP: Yeah, like, uh, if I am from Ilocandia region...

HH: Okay. Yeah.

VP: And maybe they're in the southern region, they probably prefer to be with their people. Yeah. But, uh, which.... Uh, when—I think when I first came here, there's not a lot of Filipino yet—Filipino people yet. And, uh, everybody's know most of the people who are her. They're real close. Now it's gotten so huge. You don't know a lot except maybe in your own neighborhood or not even my neighborhood! I don't know all the Filipinos that are there. But, but [laughs] you know, those who are in church you see a lot.

[0:15:24]

HH: Now, having been here for a long time in Houston, how would you compare that to, you know, somewhere like Regina, where a lot of your brothers and sisters are?

VP: How would I compare it?

HH: Yeah, how...

VP: This is huge! [laughs]

HH: Houston is much bigger huh?

VP: Yeah! And then there's a small town and then growing. Although, you know, the first time I went there, not a lot of traffic yet. But now, you know, even though it's the freezing winter they have, uh, still people move because, uh, they find that Regina's lesser standard, uh...

HH: Cheaper to live.

VP: Yeah, cheaper to live than—than in Vancouver or Toronto. People move there. They're all moving now, they say. But then, they're—they find it that all the prices are going up, too. That's why I told her—they—when my sister and brother—my sisters were here, they were shopping to the outlet in Ross. [All laugh] They love that store. They would be there like maybe three, four times.

HH: Oh, wow. [laughs] Would you ever go and move out to Regina or would you...?

VP: [overlapping] No! No way! [All laugh] I—I've visited—when I visit, it's summertime.

LH: Ah.

HH: [overlapping] So it's nice.

VP: Only one time I went there in December because that's when my dad, uh, passed, uh, on December 15th. It was cold.

HH: Cold? [laughs]

VP: I couldn't you know, two socks still not working. [HH laughs] And I said, maybe she's trying to save money, my sister. You know, I lived—I stayed with—maybe she's trying to save money, and, uh, it's not hot enough for me. But somehow I couldn't get—get comfortable and—and warm in her house? But I find it here, too. I—I, uh, maybe it's because I'm getting old and get cold a lot. [VP and HH laugh] It's cold.

Then—then, they're saying, “Can we come to your place?” Now that, you know—now that they know the weather. And they, you know, they're always welcome to my house, and, uh, they enjoyed it they loved it. They said, “Come on every year.” And, “Your winters are really bad, come on down.”

HH: Do you enjoy your grandchildren? Spending time with them?

VP: Uh, yes! But, uh, the last one I have—I have—I didn't have much opportunity to babysit with him. But I'm taking care of mostly my oldest and Jacqueline, that's, uh, Christie's older daughter, the—the first daughter.

HH: Do you have a favorite grandchild?

VP: Do I have a favorite?

HH: Yeah.

VP: Well, um, you don't call “favorite” but Heaven, my oldest, uh, was born, uh, you know they—she was—my daughter was at my house and think only when she was fourteen when she left my house. So she's like one of my daughters. [All laugh]

HH: Oh, wow. She's—how old is she now, then?

VP: She's 19 I believe.

HH: Wow.

VP: She's now in college.

HH: Really?

LH: Wow.

HH: Is she, uh, studying here in Texas or..?

VP: Yeah, U of H.

HH: Oh, wow.

VP: She's just taking some pre—pre—some—whatever prep.[laughs] But she doesn't know what she

wants to do. She's good in gymnastics and, uh, she was chosen to perform at this Miller Theatre, um, I think it's next month. Out of the 50 kids I think she was one of—one of those.

HH: Wow that's great!

VP: It's a dance, I think. She's—she's been in gymnastics and now I think it's easy for her to do all the moves. [VP and HH laugh]

HH: Do you—I mean, do you have—always have time to impart some of your wisdom onto some of your grandchildren?

VP: Generally, not just them, um.... What was the question? [VP and LH laugh]

HH: Do you have the opportunity to kinda, you know, show them—

VP: Be with them?

HH: Yeah, and kinda tell them your experiences and you know maybe some advice.

[0:19:49]

VP: [overlapping] Well, mostly because Heaven—her name's Heaven, my oldest one—uh, she's grown, and—I mean she's gotten used to—she loves what—my cooking and—and, uh, the expressions and dialect, she picks up like my other kids. Um, uh,...Jacqueline, uh, it seems like she's on the computer more. [All laugh] And, uh, so is the younger one, Reny, he's you know, he could be favorite but he's not—he's distant with me somehow.

HH: Too quiet?

LH: He's shy?

VP: You say, "Come! Hug grandma!" He say, "No." He don't like to hug.

HH: How old is Reny?

VP: He's almost four? Or maybe he's four already.

HH: Oh, okay. He's still young. He's still young.

LH: Yeah, he's at that age.

VP: Yeah, he don't like to hug. [All laugh] But, uh, he behaves better without—if the parents are not there.

HH: Oh.

LH: They always behave better. [laughs]

VP: And he will come talk to me. What he wants—he'll ask for what he wants. He's, uh, more a baby when Andre and Christie are around. I think most of the kids are like that anyways.

LH: [overlapping] It happens. Yeah, and was it hard raising your kids with the American culture and the Filipino culture at home?

VP: Um, what do you mean hard, uh?

LH: Because it's probably...

VP: Uh, well it's, uh—that's true because.... Like, I would say that I'm from the old country [all laugh] where, um.... Plus I'm with my grandparents, right?

HH: Yeah.

LH: Yeah, so older generation.

VP: [laughs] So like, um, I remember when my husband would come visit, and it's already late and he hasn't said goodbye, then I have, um—see that my grandparent—my grandma would get mad, you know, a little mad pretty [inaudible word] would spread it next to you, meaning it's time to go! [All laugh] That's the clue. Or get my, uh—I have a niece who was there at one time, and she would have a pillow. “Oh, I'm so sleepy!” And so that's your clue. [All laugh] You need to leave. Um, so I don't—it's—it's—yeah, there are some—some like, um, being, um, full-time, uh, at work and it was hard—although they—they may be busy with extracurricular activities at school—it was hard for me to, um, follow up what they're doing. My husband is mostly at home, uh, in the evening, but a mom—a mom being at home with the kids in the evening is different. But I know my grand—I mean my mother-in-law helped a lot, too, in, uh, maybe telling some of the cultures or what's expected of them.

HH: Do you—do you enjoy technology, television and the Internet ? What do you think about that? In today's society?

VP: The television is like you could be addicted to that, of course, so as (?) the computer. Um, I'd love to learn more on the computer. I have my iPhone, but I'd like to go up, maybe get me a bigger one, [all laugh] iPad. And, yeah, if you—if you know the technology a lot, that—that would help a lot like if you want—I know if you want to message, um, like a whole group of your, uh, like in—in—in the Carmelite community, if you want to say the same message, you don't have to phone everybody, you know, to communicate that. But, you know, Christie was showing me all this to type their names or their e-mail addresses and then...

HH: Send it.

VP: Send it! [laughs]

HH: Very easy. [laughs]

VP: I—I need to learn more, but, uh, that would take up a lot of your time if you let it. Yeah, because it's a good entertainment. You know, your friends sending you all this, uh, from YouTube. And, you know, like I said, you know, the world has gotten small. You can know what's going on the other side of the world [laughs] in the touch of the button.

[0:25:04]

HH: Do you Skype? Do you know what Skype is?

VP: Uh, yes my—my daughter, well my iPhone has, uh, FaceTime.

HH: Yeah.

LH: Yeah.

VP: Yeah, we do that a lot with, uh—with Gina, uh, my daughter in New York. Sometimes I would do my iPhone with my husband [LH and HH laugh] in FaceTime because it seem like when I, you know, if it's—his phone is like on a—he does—it's on like vibrate only or—he doesn't get it. I mean, or sometimes he has problems hearing it. Oh, I shouldn't say that. [All laugh] He couldn't—he couldn't hear it! Plus when he's driving car, the radio's on, and he can't hear the phone, but if I use the FaceTime, uh, and he—catches his eye sometimes because the phone is right there. He has a little deal that holds it in front. So—I FaceTime. I found that I should just FaceTime when, uh, he doesn't answer the first time. [laughter]

LH: It's easier.

VP: Yeah, his attention—I catch his attention better.

HH: Yeah ... I think we have a good amount of information here to go on.

LH: Yeah.

HH: Do you have any little bits and pieces you might want to add, or—?

VP: [overlapping] I don't know. Like what?

HH: [overlapping] I think we have your story. I think we have your story down.

VP: I just went on without—[laughs] without—well you're directing me.

[0:26:41]

End interview