Benjamin Arriola
Melissa Arriola
Narrator

Sarah Mason
Interviewer

January 13, 1979
Richfield, Minnesota

Asians in Minnesota Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Sarah Mason **-SM**
Benjamin Arriola **-BA**
Melissa Arriola **-MA**

SM: I'm talking to Benjamin Arriola and Melissa Arriola, the children of Benjamin G. Arriola and Ophelia Arriola in Richfield, Minnesota, January 13, 1979. This an interview conducted under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society. The interviewer is Sarah Mason. Ben, maybe you want to start with when you were born, where you were born?

BA: I was born on February 26, 1961 here at Saint Mary's Hospital in Minneapolis.

SM: And you were the first child?

BA: Yes, ma'am.

SM: Alright. [Speaking to Melissa] And where were you born and when?

MA: July 20, 1963, in Golden Valley Health Center.

SM: I see. Were you living here in this house then?

MA: No, we were living across the street.

SM: Living across the street. Had your parents been here for a while or had they come rather recently when you were born?

BA: Well, they'd come, I think, one year . . . about a year and a half before I was born.

MA: [Laughing] I don't know.

SM: [Chuckles] Well, you were born a few years after him, right. [Chuckles] What about all the time you were growing up? Did you go to a lot of Filipino organizations' activities or . . . were

your parents more interested in going or did you really enjoy that quite a lot, or do you, or . . .?

BA: Well, it's mostly our parents that went. We occasionally went to some.

SM: I see. But you didn't always go with them.

BA: No.

SM: What about you, Melissa?

MA: I don't think we went to any. [Chuckles]

SM: [Laughter]

BA: We went to some.

MA: Oh, maybe just a couple.

SM: I saw you at one of those. [Chuckles]

MA: Oh, but . . . yes.

SM: But maybe you were reluctantly there, I don't know [chuckles] at that Cultural Society banquet.

MA: Oh, yes.

SM: Yes. Oh, also at another one.

MA: Oh that . . . this one. Yes.

SM: Yes. But you don't take part in the high school student . . . the high school activities or anything?

MA: I don't.

SM: So you feel more at home in activities with your other schoolmates and so on?

MA: Yes.

SM: [Speaking to Ben] What about you?

BA: Also I just hang around with my friends.

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SM: I see. What about the things your parents feel are really important in Filipino culture, such as the family, and religion, or whatever else, you know, might be the case? Have you absorbed that or do you identify with that?

BA: You know, we go along with it.

SM: [Laughter] You go along with it. Do you think if you picked and chose [unclear] maybe that some parts of it you do identify with and some parts you don't or . . .?

BA: Oh, I'm not sure about that.

SM: Well, what might be the American values that you would . . . that you would choose for yourself most? By values I mean things that you or your family believe are the important and the good things in life.

MA: [Chuckles] I don't know.

BA: I don't know.

SM: Kind of [unclear] subject, but if there's anything you could put your finger on, you know, it's kind of hard sometimes. Well, to begin with, a very simple thing. What about foods? [Chuckles] Do you like the American foods better or . . .?

BA: Oh, well, I like both of them.

SM: You do like both of them.

MA: I like . . .

BA: Yes, there are some we do and there are some we don't.

MA: I like the American food better. [Chuckles]

SM: You do?

MA: Yes.

SM: What about like bringing your friends home? Isn't that important to Filipino families that their children would bring their friends to their house? Do you do that or . . . or maybe your parents don't feel that way?

BA: Well, I don't think . . . they don't *tell* us to bring our friends here. I mean, sometimes we do.

SM: Do you, too?

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MA: Yes. I don't think they would . . . I don't know if . . . they've never said anything about it.

SM: Yes. But have you ever gotten the feeling they would like you to or . . .?

MA: [Chuckles] Yes, I suppose. I don't know.

SM: Do you think they're more protective than many American families or do they let you go to all kinds of social activities, slumber parties, or those kinds of thing?

BA: Yes.

MA: Yes, they do.

SM: So they're pretty much like your American friends . . . [chuckles] other American friends families.

BA: Sure.

SM: What about trips back to the Philippines? Do you enjoy going back there or have cousins that you enjoy being with?

BA: Yes, we . . . it is fun to go back. I don't know if I'd want to live there, but . . .

MA: It's too hot. [Chuckles]

SM: [Chuckles] That's what the Andradas said, too.

MA: I know.

SM: You have cousins about your age there?

MA: Yes.

SM: Yes. But you wouldn't want to go there for a prolonged time?

MA: No.

BA: You know, we'd miss TV, and hamburgers, and hot dogs, and . . .

SM: [Laughter]

MA: Air conditioning. [Chuckles]

SM: [Unclear] everything. [Chuckles]

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BA: Yes.

SM: What about at school? Have you . . . obviously, you've gotten along very well. But can you put your finger on any . . . any little incidents of discrimination or any little remarks people have made or has it all been just as though . . . you weren't different from anyone else or . . .?

BA: Well, I don't think I've had any . . . [unclear] remarks that I know of.

SM: Or on the other hand, have you maybe been made more of because you were a Filipino or of Filipino heritage, I should say?

MA: No. [Chuckles]

SM: What are some of your goals or ambitions for work when you're older? And are these influenced by your parents? And would they like to be professionals, or say it's your own choice or . . .?

BA: Well, my dad wants me to be a . . . to work in computer . . . computer math.

SM: Yes.

BA: And I've kind of decided on engineering as my field. I'm going to try to major in it at university.

SM: Yes. I see. How did you get interested in that?

BA: Just . . . just kind of my interests just kind of grew as years went on.

SM: Yes. What about you, Melissa?

MA: I don't know. I think maybe something to do with medicine.

SM: Oh, yes.

MA: Like a nurse.

SM: Why is it there are so many Filipinos interested in that? Do you two know or . . .?

MA: Oh, I don't know. [Chuckles] My aunt was a nurse.

SM: Oh, she was?

MA: Yes. And she lived with us.

SM: And lives in the Philippines?

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MA: No, she's in California.

SM: Oh.

MA: And she lived with us for a while.

SM: Oh, I see.

MA: And she stayed in my room.

SM: Oh, and she influenced you on that or you just admired her or . . .? [Chuckles]

MA: I don't know. I . . . I just think it would be fun.

SM: I see. Do you speak any Filipino languages at all?

MA: No.

BA: None.

SM: [Chuckles] And do you identify with your roots in that culture at all?

MA: What do you mean?

SM: I mean, do you . . . are you interested in Filipino history or culture or . . . in terms of your own . . .? You know, whether you're conscious of that as being part of your background. You know, this rage now of roots—because [the television miniseries] *Roots* was on the TV—and people are pretty interested in how important it is to know your roots and [unclear] your reaction to that whole thing? [Chuckles] Whether you . . . maybe you don't think it's that important.

BA: Well, I'm kind of interested. But, you know, I've never really . . . I've never really looked or studied back into our history or anything like that before.

SM: But you've maybe absorbed from . . .?

BA: Yes. [Unclear].

SM: Relatives and . . . [speaking to Melissa] What about you?

MA: I don't know. [Chuckles] I don't understand the question.

SM: Oh. Well . . . did you see *Roots* on TV?

MA: Yes.

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SM: Yes. And since then, there's been a [unclear] at the Minnesota Historical Society. A lot of people have come in looking up their lineage and . . . And had that stirred a great deal of interest in your roots, in other words, in your ancestors and your beginnings and so on.

MA: Oh. Well, kind of. Not really. Just a little maybe.

SM: Well, let's see. Do you take any Filipino newspapers here at your house?

MA: No.

BA: But we get . . . we get a newsletter.

SM: A newsletter from the organization? Would that be the Fil-Minnesotan now?

BA: Ah, yes.

SM: Do you read it? [Chuckles]

BA: I've browsed through it sometimes.

SM: Because they have quite a lot, it seems to me, a lot of history of the Filipinos in that . . . or at least the couple of issues that I have seen. [Speaking to Melissa] Do you ever read it? [Chuckles]

MA: Sometimes.

SM: Well . . . let's see if there's anything else that can....

[Noises – brief recording interruption?]

SM: Or also, how do you see the role of the second generation in terms of the first generation? Who are the leaders of the Filipino community, for instance? Is that the first generation or second generation? And do you feel you are really on the road to breaking away entirely from the Filipino community or . . . how do you see it?

BA: Well, I don't . . . you know, since we grew up . . . we've grown up here in the United States, you know, predominantly, I think, we try to consider ourselves Americans. But we always . . . we always know that we . . . you know, we have that Filipino heritage. And I don't think we'll totally break away from it.

SM: [Speaking to Melissa] What do you feel about it?

MA: Well, yes, I don't think will because, I mean, they just came from the Philippines and they haven't . . . they influenced us, kind of.

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SM: Yes. So you don't think you will break away completely. Well, thank you very much for pondering some these things.

MA: [Chuckles]

BA: [Chuckles]

SM: If you think about it later on, let me know if you have any thoughts. [Chuckles] Thanks a lot.

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