Alfredo de los Reyes, Jr. Carl de los Reyes Narrators

Sarah Mason Interviewer

March 16, 1979 South Saint Paul, Minnesota

Alfredo de los Reyes, Jr. - **AF**Carl de los Reyes - **CF**Sarah Mason - **SM**

SM: I'm talking to the children of Fred and Nellie de los Reyes in South Saint Paul on March 16, 1979. [The De los Reyes children include Carl, Alfredo, Gene, Nelson, Marie-Rose, and John-Mark.] This is an interview conducted under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society, and the interviewer is Sarah Mason. And the first person that I'll talk to is Alfredo de los Reyes, Jr. Alfredo, could you start by telling us where you were born and the date and so on?

AF: I was born in Manila, Philippines May 3, 1961.

SM: Your parents are both Filipinos?

AF: Yes, they're both Filipinos.

SM: What kind of work were your parents doing or your father doing there?

AF: My dad worked for GSIS.

SM: GSIS? What does that stand for?

AF: Government . . .

Unknown Sibling: Service.

AF: Service Insurance . . .

Unknown Sibling: [unclear] system.

AF: System. And my mom was a housewife.

SM: Yes. How old were you then when you came to the United States?

AF: I was seven years old.

SM: Seven years old. You can remember that pretty well?

AF: Yes.

SM: Okay. And you came first to Seattle?

AF: Yes.

SM: I see. When did you come to Minnesota then?

AF: November of 1969.

SM: 1969?

AF: Yes.

. [unclear]? **SM:** And you came to South Saint Paul then [unclear]?

AF: Yes.

SM: So you were in about second grade?

AF: Third grade.

SM: Third grade when you came here. Did you already know English and so on?

AF: Yes.

SM: So it wasn't too hard adjusting to it.

AF: No.

SM: Was the school system pretty much the same?

AF: It was easier.

SM: It was easier. [Chuckles] I see.

AF: [Unclear].

SM: Did you find the children were pretty friendly or did they welcome you?

AF: Yes, they . . . the teacher welcomed us and then the kids did.

SM: Yes. I see. So how many of you were in school at that time? You and which of your brothers?

AF: Me and my brother Carl were at the elementary school. And then my oldest brother was at the junior high.

SM: I see. So two of you started [unclear].

AF: Yes. And then Gene was in, I think, Kindergarten or first grade.

SM: Oh, I see. Yes. So he's about a year younger than . . . or two of you.

AF: Yes. One year.

SM: I see. Were you sort of worried about starting school?

AF: Yes, because of . . . you have to meet new friends. Have to get along with them.

SM: Yes. Did you find it pretty easy to do?

AF: No, because I was . . . I was a little shy.

SM: [Chuckles] It didn't take too long though did it?

AF: No.

Unknown Sibling: [Chuckles]

SM: Well, did your parents and your whole family take part in other Filipino organizations here in the Twin Cities, do you remember that?

AF: Not at the beginning, but they got involved with the Fil-Minnesotan.

SM: The Fil-Minnesotan.

AF: And then when my dad became president, they were really involved.

SM: Oh, I see. Yes. Did you then see a lot of other Filipino friends, make friend with Filipinos here in the [unclear]?

AF: Yes, there's . . . there was a lot of Filipinos here.

SM: [Unclear]?

AF: Kind of. Because you wanted to see your own kind of boys and girls.

SM: Yes, right. I should think that would help. But you didn't see them at school or anything?

AF: No, they were from different schools.

SM: Yes. But did you see them maybe every week or so? Or just when you went to the organization?

AF: Yes, just unless there was an activity in the organization.

SM: What kinds of activities would these be? Picnics and things?

AF: Yes, picnics, dancing, or plays that they show, we go there as families. Or something that has to do with music.

SM: I see. Did you take part in this, too?

AF: No.

SM: You were [unclear].

AF: Just . . . just a viewer.

SM: Yes, at that time. [Chuckles] I see. Well, does your family subscribe to Filipino newspapers?

AF: Yes. The one that . . . it comes from Chicago.

SM: *Philippine Times* or . . .?

Unknown Sibling: Herald.

SM: Herald.

AF: Is it? Is it the *Philippine Herald*?

Marie-Rose de los Reyes: The Philippine Herald.

AF: *Philippine Herald.*

SM: I see. So you almost always subscribed to that.

AF: Yes.

SM: I see. And have you been back to the Philippines?

AF: No.

SM: You haven't. But you have cousins and so on there?

AF: Yes, cousins.

AF: No, not them.

SM: They haven't been over. But you're in touch with them?

AF: Yes.

SM: Write to them?

F: Write letters, over the phone.

M: Oh, you talk on the phone?

': Some . . . if we can afford it. [Chuc''

: Have any of

SM: Have any of your family been back?

AF: Yes. My mom, my dad, and my little brother, for a funeral.

SM: Oh, I see. That was a few years ago or . . .?

AF: That was last year. January of last year.

SM: Have some of your other relatives been over to visit?

AF: Yes. My grandfather most of the time. My aunt.

SM: Yes. And you have relatives in the Twin Cities, too?

AF: Yes. West Saint Paul.

SM: Your mother's sisters?

AF: Yes.

SM: I see. Well, I suppose you also take part in Filipino holidays and celebrations?

AF: Yes.

SM: What do you speak here at home?

AF: I speak English with my dad and then Tagalog with my mom.

SM: I see. [Chuckles] Well, it seems as though your mother knows English. [Chuckles]

[Laughter]

AF: Yes. [Chuckles]

SM: So you all speak Tagalog, too, then.

AF: Yes. Except my little brother and my sisters. They can understand it except they can't speak it

SM: Oh. They probably could if they [unclear].

AF: Yes, if they tried.

SM: If they tried. [Chuckles] And do you usually have Filipino style food or . . .?

AF: Yes. We eat rice and . . . yes, but now and then we have hamburger helper. [Chuckles]

SM: I see. Do you prefer Filipino food, usually?

AF: It's . . . it doesn't make any difference. In school I'd eat American food but here it doesn't make any difference.

SM: So you eat both pretty frequently.

AF: Yes. Yes.

SM: I see. Did you have any kinds of problems with language when you first started school?

AF: No.

SM: You already could write and . . .?

AF: Yes.

SM: So that was helpful. Well, one kind of thing I'd like to find out, it's a hard thing to ask questions about, but it's how you identify yourself or how you think of yourself. Do you think of yourself as both Filipino and American?

AF: Yes. I'm Filipino here at home and I don't seem . . . well . . . let's see. How do I say this?

SM: It's a hard thing to describe.

AF: Hmmm. Well, I know I'm Filipino, but when I'm in school, I don't even think about it. I just blend in with the kids.

SM: Yes. So you feel just like a regular . . .

AF: Yes.

SM: Everybody else. [Chuckles] Do you think it's an advantage to have two cultures you can draw from?

AF: Yes. Yes.

SM: Well, if you can put your finger on . . . you know, what kinds of things Filipinos think are particularly important that might be different from say the parents of your American friends. Are there any special ways that show their Filipino culture?

AF: Yes. Like us, we pay more respect towards our parents and anybody older.

SM: I see. And you say that's different from some of the [unclear].

AF: Yes. Like we stress manners, like entering and leaving the house, your friend's house. And it's more . . . our family is more close together rather than free-going, like them, you know, my friends. I mean, if they're going somewhere, they can just leave without telling their parents. But when we have to leave, we have to tell my mom and dad where we are going or what time . . . what time we're coming home, around there. Just because they care, you know.

SM: Do you think that's important to you, too?

AF: Yes. It's a good example. Because if I have a family of my own, then I can do that to them, I can show it in that way.

SM: Yes. Are there any other ways you think that . . . think of that are particularly Filipino that are important to you?

AF: Hmmm.

SM: What about like your attitude towards education as a value?

AF: Oh, education is valuable.

SM: And can you elaborate a little bit more about how your family is close or how they help each other or [unclear]?

[Telephone rings]

CF: I got it.

AF: Well, if there's a family crisis, we all help each other, try to consult each other.

[Telephone rings]

CF: Hello.

SM: Are most of the decisions made by the whole family or . . .?

AF: Yes, most of the time. Or if we can't make up our mind, my mom and dad . . . we kind of go along with them because they know more or . . .

SM: So they are the main decision makers?

AF: Yes. But we help in now and then, you know.

SM: Yes. Would you like to visit the Philippines with them?

AF: Yes, just for visiting. But I wouldn't want to live there.

SM: Yes.

AF: Because I wouldn't fit in.

SM: You don't think you would fit in.

AF: No. Well, it would take time, but right now I wouldn't, because I'd rather stay here.

SM: Yes. And you've lived here most of your life now.

AF: Yes. Yes, over half my life here. I really don't know, you know, what it's like there.

SM: But if you went back, do you think you could fit in with your cousins pretty well and interact with them or would it . . .?

AF: Not that soon. Like we'd have trouble understanding each other. Because, you know, slang words or . . . we haven't seen each other. You know, we don't know how we're going to react with each other. You know, how to act to your cousins, do you have to put on a show or . . . or just act normal.

SM: [Chuckles] Yes. Hmmm. Do you read the Filipino newspapers? [Unclear] books [unclear].

AF: Sometimes. Most of . . . well, sometimes. When I have free time, I just take it and read it.

SM: Are you interested in the history of the Philippines and the culture, like the Filipinaña and er cociety all that?

AF: Am I interested?

SM: Yes.

AF: Yes.

SM: Well, is there anything else you want to add to your explaining your experiences as a Filipino American? Have you ever had any bad experiences with discrimination?

AF: Yes.

SM: Oh.

AF: See, they didn't know what nationality I was.

SM: This was at school?

AF: Yes. Around third grade. They didn't think I was a Negro or I wasn't Indian or Chinese, so they didn't know. So they just started calling names, because they didn't know what to call me. And that caused some trouble.

SM: How did you react? Or what did you do? Or did your parents give some help with it?

AF: Well, yes. My dad . . . my dad said, just try to avoid them. But if they hurt you or something, you know, protect yourself. But most of the time it would be my older brother fighting up for me, because I didn't want to do the fighting.

SM: I see. So your brother was usually around or something?

AF: Well, I'd tell him about it and then he'd come along with me and show up.

SM: I see. Then they would stop usually?

AF: Yes.

SM: Yes. Were you worried about that or did it just [unclear]?

AF: That time. Yes, that time that . . . just that time. But now I don't even think about it, because it doesn't matter that much.

SM: Oh.

AF: If they don't like me that's it, you know.

SM: [Chuckles] What kind of work do you want to do or hope to do sometime?

AF: Well, something in the field of medicine.

SM: In medicine?

AF: Doctor or something like that.

SM: There are quite a few Filipino doctors.

AF: Yes, that's why. [Chuckles]

SM: I see. Why is that? Do you have any idea?

AF: Well . . . since my uncle and my aunt are doctors, it kind of influences your thinking.

SM: Oh, right.

AF: And they say that we have the capability to be doctors.

SM: What was that?

AF: Capability, you know. You can be a doctor.

SM: Oh.

AF: You know, we have the chance to become a successful doctor or anything in medicine, so take advantage of that. I mean, if you can be a doctor rather than a janitor or a mailman or . . . take the best job.

SM: [Chuckles] I see. Is there anything you think of that you'd like to add to that or . . .?

AF: To what?

SM: To talking about your experience that I haven't asked you? [Chuckles]

AF: Experience . . .

SM: If you have any insights into the experience of the second generation Filipino Americans, what it's like.

AF: Oh, they are . . . they are more Americanized.

SM: They're more American than Filipino, would you say, or both? [Chuckles]

AF: Yes. Yes, because not that many kids of my age or Filipino kids speak Tagalog fluently.

SM: Oh, yes.

AF: They speak more English and it sounds weird if I'm talking to my brothers, like I'm with my brothers and other kids are looking at us talking in our language.

SM: Yes. You mean you know the Filipino language or Tagalog more than other second generation [unclear]?

AF: I guess so.

SM: Because you were . . . you had a start in Tagalog.

AF: Yes, and we still speak it here at home, we just don't speak pure English here.

SM: I see. Yes. You're glad about that?

AF: Yes, because it's nice to have a second language.

SM: Sure

AF: Some of my teachers say it's important that . . . oh, you're lucky that you have a second language.

SM: Yes.

AF: You should be proud of that.

SM: Yes. I see. So they support you in this dual heritage.

AF: Yes.

SM: Well . . .

AF: Because you didn't have to learn it. It's natural, you know.

SM: Yes.

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Minnesota Historical Society **AF:** And then what we had to learn was English, which is easy now, so we're lucky we still have that second language.

SM: So you studied English in the schools in the Philippines?

AF: Yes. I think it was required to have English.

SM: I see. Well, thank you very much.

AF: Sure. Okay.

SM: Maybe we should go to . . .

AF: Carl.

Unknown Sibling: Carl.

SM: Carl?

CF: What?

SM: [Chuckles]

AF: Your turn.

Unknown Sibling: [unclear].

[Brief recording interruption]

SM: Now I'm talking to Carl de los Reyes. When were you born and where?

CF: April 26, 1959.

SM: April 26, 1959.

CF: Quezon City.

SM: Quezon City?

CF: Manila. [Chuckles]

SM: Where was it? [Chuckles]

CF: [Chuckles] Manila, Philippines.

SM: Manila, okay. And how old were you then when you came to the United States?

CF: Mmmm. I think nine years old.

SM: Nine, I see. And so you were in about, what, third or fourth grade?

CF: Yes. Fourth grade.

SM: Oh, yes. And was that in Seattle or here in . . .?

CF: Seattle was fourth grade.

SM: I see. And you stayed there a year and then you came to Minnesota.

CF: Yes.

SM: Did you find it hard to get used to going to school all in English or with American children?

CF: Mmmm. No.

SM: Were they pretty friendly?

CF: Yes.

SM: So you didn't find it a big problem to make friends?

CF: No.

SM: Were you homesick at all? [Chuckles]

CF: No, I wasn't really.

SM: I see.

CF: I mean, like my relatives was for a little while.

SM: Oh, yes. You have relatives in Seattle. Were you unhappy to leave Seattle and come here or did you like it here in Minnesota? [Chuckles]

CF: I didn't really, you know, I didn't really care where we moved.

SM: You just followed along.

CF: Yes. I didn't make, you know, any friends or anything that much.

SM: Did you enjoy taking part in Filipino activities here?

CF: Yes.

istory Project **SM:** Which ones did you like the most that you remember?

CF: Dancing for a presentation.

SM: Oh.

CF: For the Filipino Minnesotan.

SM: For the Fil-Minnesotan. Were you in the dance group then or . . .?

CF: Yes.

SM: Oh. Are you still in it?

CF: Yes.

SM: I see. Were you in that Filipinaña

CF: Yes.

SM: Oh, so you're going to be doing that again in May?

CF: Yes, in the summer.

SM: I see. Did you . . . when your family would do things together with other Filipino families, did you look forward to that and enjoy that or . . .?

CF: Mmmm. Yes. Like, you know, getting together again and stuff.

SM: Yes. Did you feel more comfortable with those people or more relaxed or . . .?

CF: The Filipinos, yes.

SM: So you speak Tagalog?

CF: Yes.

SM: Like your brother does. And it's just as easy as talking in English, I suppose.

CF: Yes.

SM: At this point. [Chuckles]

CF: Yes, it is.

SM: Do you read the Filipino newspapers or are you interested in that?

CF: Yes. Once in a while when . . . you know, when I read.

SM: Once in a while. [Chuckles] Do you read the American newspapers, too?

CF: Yes. More.

SM: You haven't been back to the Philippines then.

CF: No.

SM: Would you like to go back sometime?

CF: Yes, for a visit. [Chuckles]

SM: For a visit. But you look upon yourself as an American that would live here [unclear]?

CF: Mmmm, not really an American, but an American citizen, yes, but not an American.