

**Belen Andrada
Narrator**

**Lita Malicsi
Interviewer**

**December 1, 2010
Richfield, Minnesota**

Belen Andrada - **BA**
Lita Malicsi - **LM**

LM: Today is Wednesday, the first of December 2010. My name is Lita Malicsi. I'm interviewing Belen Andrada.

First of all, Belen, I want to thank you for your willingness to be part of this interview process. Thank you, Belen.

BA: You're welcome.

LM: At this time, do you mind if I ask you when you were born and in what part of the Philippines you were born?

BA: I was born on February 7, 1926, in the Province of Agusan, Butuan in particular. It used to be a province; now, it is really a city in the southern Philippines.

LM: What was Butuan like at that time compared to what it's like today? How much of it has changed, if it has at all?

BA: It has. At the time, there was only one Catholic church, one Protestant church, and just one set of public schools, and everybody comes to that school, kindergarten through seven, and four years of high school. The business area is just tiny and the market is small. It really was a small province.

LM: Things have changed since then?

BA: It has changed since after the war. The establishments, the business area has really changed a lot after the war. We have so many shopping centers now. It is a city. It has really become a city.

LM: What dialect is spoken in Butuan?

BA: We have our own Butuanon dialect, except in correspondence, we use the Cebuano Visayan; although, I think most of the reading materials are, also, done in English.

LM: Do you speak it a lot in Minnesota, your dialect?

BA: With my sisters and brothers, we do. Sometimes, it is really mixed with English.

LM: [chuckles] I know there is a term for the mixed dialect.

BA: Taglish.

LM: There you go. Thank you. That's interesting.

Now, please, tell me about your family when you were growing up in the Philippines. You might want to start by telling me what your parents were like.

BA: Well, I have to tell you, I have two mothers. My own mother really was very quiet, very meticulous about cleanliness. She has a reputation that if you go to her house, you can see yourself on the floor. Yes, it is so shiny. She was really a homebody, a good cook. My father worked as an assistant provincial auditor. He came to Butuan city from the north. He was from Laoag, Ilocos Norte. My mother's mother really came from Surigao, but they went to Butuan, and that is where they lived. Her father was a Chinese, so she has mixed Chinese/Filipino blood. Really, I don't remember much about her because I was ten years old when she died. My father remarried a cousin of my mother. That is where we have, also, the brother and sister. I am number five in a family of twelve, but two sisters died in infancy, so we grew up six girls and four boys. That really includes my half sister and my half brother.

LM: What did your dad do for a living?

BA: My father really came as a trade school teacher when he came to Mindanao; however, he ended up in the auditor's office, so he was an assistant provincial auditor.

My mother was the businesswoman. She bought lots of land and really made a business out of it. As a matter of fact, her death was caused by an accident. She was coming home on a truck. In the olden times, there were no buses. Transportation was done by trucks. She fell before the truck left before she was able to get off the ground and she hemorrhaged as a result of that. I can never forget that day when she died. I was rehearsing at school for the commencement exercise program. I was called out by the priest and he told me to go home. That is what I found when I got home.

LM: How old were you?

BA: I was ten. I was ten years old. I was not really graduating that year from seventh grade. I was in sixth grade; however, there was a part for me to speak at the commencement exercises.

At that time, like I said, there was only one public school; however, the Jesuits had their own school. Where all of us children went to school is this private school, grades one to seven. That is really how it is in the Philippines, grades one to seven, and, then, you go to high school of four years. Excuse me. Let me correct that. It's not one to seven; it's kindergarten to seven, and, then, you go first year, second year, third year, fourth year high school. However, when I was in fourth grade, I was accelerated to fifth grade so I just did my eight years of elementary in seven years.

That's why when the war broke out, I was in my senior year. That was December of 1941.

LM: You mentioned something that, to me, is *very* important. You mentioned the war. Do you have some recollection of family or personal experiences during World War II? What was it like?

BA: Of course, of course, of course. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, we didn't even know it happened. We were practicing evacuation already before that. We were already practicing how to evacuate and that kind of thing. On this morning of December 8, now that is a holiday of obligation in the Philippines, because it was the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. We were coming out of church and here was this truckload of Japanese being transported by the Army. Everybody was wondering what is happening. Then, they said, "Pearl Harbor has just been attack. War has just been declared." I will never forget that morning. These Japanese that were on the truck were friends of ours! They were *neighbors* of ours. They lived right across the street at the end of our block. We were wondering what will happen to them.

LM: These Japanese, they were residents?

BA: Yes, they were residents. They were residents.

Of course, when the war broke out, we started to evacuate and our training really became real. We went to bed with a bag beside us that has our extra clothes just in case we have to go unannounced. So for the *whole* four years, we went from one place to another, one house that we would rent for a while, and, then, move on because the Japanese were coming. There was even a time when we lived in the school, because that was the only thing available to us. However, we were kids, and this seemed like fun.

One day after our house was burned, the children went back to pick up the pieces and, here, we came home, sat in the kitchen, and we were looking at all the remnants of the fire, and laughing in the kitchen. My father got so mad at us. He said, "What is so funny? I struggled twenty years for those things, and that's all you see right now." But we were kids. When we would go—what do you call it?—on the banca or whatever was our transportation on the water, that was fun.

LM: Yes.

BA: We didn't realize the seriousness of the thing, because everything that we did was just like going on a picnic.

LM: What did you mostly eat?

BA: We had rice and mostly fish was really available to us, especially when we evacuated by the sea. Every morning was fresh fish that they would be getting from the ocean. Again, all of that, when you look back, it was fun for us kids, not for our parents. My father would always say, "Hey, you older ones, you eat less, so the younger ones can have their share." We really learned to share with our brothers and sisters.

It was just one thing after another. Like this one day when the Japanese were coming, I remember just getting ready. We had just gotten the notice that the Japanese were coming, so we started to get ready. I got outside the house, and I think when the Japanese saw me, they wanted to just give us a warning, and they shoot in the air. The shrapnel fell on my finger, and I screamed, "I am hit!" Here, it turned out that it was just my little finger. I looked at the finger. I was hiding and it was just a little tree. How could it protect me? Like I said, you have to put humor into this thing, because when you are scared, you don't really know what to do.

LM: And you were ten?

BA: No, when the war broke out, I was already fifteen.

LM: That was in 1941 ?

BA: Yes. That was 1941. I was ten when my mother died. We were already with my stepmother. My mother was no longer with us during the war. She died in 1936.

LM: So it was your stepmother who really took care of you from then on?

BA: Right. My oldest sister already had kids. My father would break us into two so that two will go help my sister one week and, then, we'd come home and then the two older ones would be there to help her.

LM: What about school? Was there school at all during the war?

LM: No, there wasn't. There was no school at all. The only classes that we had were the Japanese language, Nipongo. They selected a few people to take the class, and I was one of them, so that we can also do the translation for the younger kids. Like I said, I was fifteen at the time. It was nice because we learned the language. We were not really experts but we could speak it and understand it better than we can speak the language. We learned Nipongo.

LM: Do you still remember some of the things that you learned?

[chuckles]

BA: Yes, just regular greetings. *Kumbawa* for what do you mean and that kind of thing.

LM: That's right.

BA: It was fun. And we knew how to sing the National Anthem in Japanese.

LM: Oh.

BA: We taught that to the kids. We were ordered to go to this school. It was not our plan to do that, but we were ordered to do that. So there were probably about thirty of us who had to take the classes. In return, we had to, also, teach young kids or do some translating for the Japanese.

LM: Did your family ever suffer from the atrocities of the war?

BA: No, but we have seen the abuses. Whenever they have to torture someone, the whole town has to come to the Plaza. That is where we watched kids thrown in the air and caught by bayonets. This is how the whole family was tortured. I think the purpose was, don't you ever do this or this is what's going to happen to you. We were ordered to come to the city and into the Plaza and watch the torture. I had a cousin who was killed. My brother, too, I think suffered during their flight from the Japanese. We witnessed the atrocities that the Japanese did. It was just awful.

LM: After the war, what was it like? Was there a celebration? What did people do? Did it change things pretty much?

BA: Well, after the war, of course rehabilitation had to take place. Everything that came down had to go up. The same way that our own family home was really completely down, because the Japanese used it as headquarters. Pretty soon, the buildings that were coming up were really nice, nice buildings, nice business places. Everything just developed and that is when Butuan became a city. It was just really nice and the schools, too.

LM: Yes, of course.

Before we go to a different aspect of your life, do you have any additional thoughts about the World War that you would wish to express ?

BA: I think it is something that I would not wish on anybody. Even if I was young that was still hard for me. I used to have nightmares about all those things that I saw in Plaza. That is why when I came to America, I could not stand to see a war movies. At that time, there were no television sets. You just listened to the radio, and that was all that you got. I would not wish it on anybody.

LM: When did you come to the United States and why?

BA: We came in August 1955. Yes. That was something that I never really dreamed of. I never really aspired to it. I was already teaching in the high school. At the time when I was a student there, it was only up to seventh. At this time, there is a high school. There is a very big college. My rector called me into his office and asked me to fill out a form. This was for a fellowship at that University of Chicago and I said, "I never dreamed of coming to the United States." He said, "Go ahead. I'll write you a recommendation. I'll ask one of your math teachers to write you a recommendation. Let's see what's going to happen."

LM: What was your dad's reaction to this?

BA: Oh, he was so pleased. Yes, my father is really a man who believes in education. As a matter of fact, when it was time for us to go to college, he'd always say, "This is your chance to really make the most of what I can leave you. That is one thing I can leave you that nobody can take away from you: education." I guess we never really failed him in that aspect. We all kind of came up to his expectations.

LM: So you were a teacher, a young teacher in the Philippines before you left for the United States.

BA: Right. I was already teaching. In fact, I had a class that I really followed through from first year to fourth year. The Class of 1955, I had them for algebra, geometry, higher algebra, trigonometry, and physics. This was the class that had their fiftieth class reunion in 2005, and they made sure I was there for that reunion. Many of them are already professionals, and some are in the United States.

LM: I would guess that you taught math.

BA: Yes. My bachelor's degree was in mathematics and a minor in physics. Those were the classes that I was teaching at the high school level. I graduated from my bachelor's degree in 1950 from the University of Santo Tomas [in Manila]. I taught for four years. There was an endeavor there because the college [unclear] Manila to work towards my master's degree. When they were applying for a college, they wanted the high school now to become a college. They needed so many master's degree graduates and so many Ph.D.s. So I went for three summers and one school year.

LM: From the Philippines, you went to the United States. Where in the United States?

BA: Yes, I went to the University of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois, southern Chicago.

As a matter of fact, I forgot to tell you that when I got accepted, I was in Manila. I did not really expect, and my father called me. He was more excited than I was. He said, "Go ahead and start your papers. They're here. It says the classes are going to start in September," and it was July! So rush, rush, rush, rush. That is why before I realized it, I was on my way to the United States. My only advice from my aunt was, "When you get to O'Hare Airport, do not take a taxi. Wait for the car that will bring several people to their destination."

What I did, after I heard from my father, was I researched the University of Chicago and found out that they had, also, an International House. So I applied to the International House for board and lodging, but before I could hear from them, I was already in Chicago. [chuckles] Like I said, I was rushing to get in time for the September classes. I walked in the door, got to the reception desk, and I said, "I don't know if I have a room." They said, "Oh, yes, you do, 416." I'll never forget that. I went to 416. I had a roommate, but she wasn't there. All of a sudden, the reality of being alone hit me. I cried and I cried.

I heard somebody in the hallway saying, "Menching, Menching." I thought, God, she sounded Filipino. So I went out, and I saw her, and I knew right away she was Filipino. She looked at me and she said, "Did you just arrive?" There must have been really something in my face that she just asked me, "Have you just arrived?" I said, "Yes, and where do we eat?" She said, "No, don't go downstairs. That's where the cafeteria is. You can come to my room." She took me upstairs, and I found out that she was the sister of the congresswoman from Bataan, Nellie Lacson. Menching, who she was looking for, was a professor of biology at the University of Santo Tomas. We really became close friends after that. She helped me with my shopping and so forth and so on. What a nightmare. I didn't know anybody. When I think back, I say, "I don't even know how I did it."

LM: How long did you stay in Chicago?

BA: Two years. I graduated in May of 1957. June was when I came to Minnesota.

LM: Where did you meet your husband?

BA: Benigno Andrada was a very good friend of my uncle. I had an uncle here in Minneapolis. I spent my first Christmas and second Christmas here in Minneapolis, and that is where we met. He proposed and we got married. [laughter]

LM: Tell me something about *him*.

BA: Ben was one of the Old Timers here in Minneapolis. He had three sons. He was a widower. He really is a guy who just is at his happiest when he is around people, loves to cook, and he would probably give the last shirt on his back for somebody in need. Every now and then, he would come home with some people that he had met downtown, some Filipino that he had met downtown. He would feed them and that kind of thing. He was a very, very generous person. I think that's what attracted me to him—it may have been his cooking.

[laughter]

LM: Did you get married here in Minneapolis?

BA: We got married in Deephaven [Minnesota] on June 15, 1957, at the Church of Saint Therese, which is, now, really a big church, but it was a basement church at the time. That is where we got married.

LM: When you left the Philippines for the United States, did you have plans of returning to the Philippines?

BA: I did. I did.

LM: And what happened?

[laughter]

BA: What happened? Well, you know how it is. You start a family and that's it. Then, my sisters and brothers were interested in coming over, too. I had to wait. I was an immigrant. I had to get my immigrant status, and, then, I became a citizen in three years. Then, I started to also petitioning my brothers and sisters.

LM: Was there a Filipino settlement when you arrived here in Minnesota?

BA: No, there wasn't. There was no settlement; however, the Old Timers, as we call them now—those were the old immigrants—the biggest group, lived in Northeast Minneapolis.

LM: I see.

BA: But there was no settlement.

LM: Do you remember approximately how many Filipinos were here?

BA: Oh, probably at that time it must have been about eighty.

LM: Eighty !

BA: Yes. When I did my interview, for a document I was writing on Filipinos here, I was able to interview seventy-three—only two women.

LM: There were only two women.

BA: Yes. Two married women.

LM: Do you remember who they were?

BA: Yes. Clara Balbuena and Petra Custodio.

LM: Were they the first Filipino women in Minnesota?

BA: No. The first Filipino woman here was Basilisa Garcia Epperly. She was a Filipino married to Mr. Samuel J. Epperly, who was a teacher in the Philippines.

LM: That's the explanation for the Epperly.

BA: Yes. I don't remember how many kids she had. I think maybe about five. Most of them stayed in Minnesota, and Bessie was the only one who was involved with the Filipino community, because she happened to marry a Filipino.

LM: Would you know if any of the Epperlys are still around?

BA: I think there are two brothers still around. They don't live in Minneapolis but they live outside. That house [at Fourth Street Southeast in Minneapolis] of the Epperlys was where all the Filipinos congregated during holidays.

LM: That's interesting.

BA: She would cook Filipino food and students at the University of Minnesota also congregated there.

LM: Especially Filipino students who did not have any homes to go to?

BA: Yes. Right. These students did not have families here.

LM: Didn't you use to do that, too? You invited and fed the students?

BA: Ben did that.

LM: Tell me about that.

BA: [laughter] Yes. We had fun. Really, we enjoyed having the students here. I would just send an invitation to the U, and they'd send it to Eddy Hall and tell them, "Filipino students who don't have a place to go are welcome to be here. If they need rides, let us know so we can have them picked up." Yes, we used to do that for many Christmases.

LM: What did you serve them during these holiday parties? What kind of food?

BA: I'm sure, if I can put my place in their place, I would love Filipino food. Oh, yes, we served Filipino food.

LM: Pancit? Adobo?

BA: Yes, right. Pinakbet, and many more. That was fun, and we really enjoyed them, too. We really enjoyed those times. Yes.

LM: What year was that?

BA: We moved here in 1958. I think we started that in 1960.

LM: Wow.

BA: It was fun. We also had the nurses in Rochester, Minnesota. That time, there were many Filipino nurses in Rochester, too. Some of them later married American men. But before, in the years back then, discrimination was really bad. My uncle who married an American woman, could not even walk side - by - side with his wife; otherwise, somebody would be spitting at them or throwing stones at them. Yet, many Filipinos here married Americans. There were no Filipino women then, at the time.

LM: I remember you said there were only *two* Filipino women that you met.

BA: Mrs. Clara Balbuena who ran a grocery store in Saint Paul, and Mrs. Custodio [Petra Rigucera] who got married here. She followed Mike [Miguel] to Minneapolis and they got married here. Mrs. Balbuena was already married in the Philippines. She was a teacher, also, in the Philippines. They had no kids.

LM: What were their reasons for coming here, these first wave of Filipinos?

BA: The first wave thought they could go to school with all the promises of, "Go to America and it's going to be really nice there." They did not expect that they were going to go through the discrimination and prejudice that took place here. In fact, many of the graduates went back to the Philippines. They did not stay here.

LM: Hmm. Those Filipinos who stayed here and got married here, are some of them still around?

BA: No.

LM: They've all passed away.

BA: All of them are gone. In fact, there is only one—I am not quite sure—who is in the nursing home, if he is still alive. Mr. [sounds like Obedoza. I have heard of him and I was told he was in a nursing home when I was interviewing for my monograph. I don't know if he's still alive. I think of the Old Timers here, they're all gone.

LM: Do they have families here? Do they have children?

BA: They have children. Yes. Yes, they have children. It would be nice to interview those people, too, the second generation from the group.

LM: Yes, that would be good.

BA: If you look at the occupations of the second generation, it's so different from their parents.

LM: Tell me something about these younger ones. Do you know anything about them? I'm very interested to know.

BA: Well, actually, some of them are still around. I have a few addresses of these young people—well, they are no longer young—who are still around Minnesota. Like I said, in that manuscript that I published, the occupations of the second generation of Filipino Americans from this group are so different from their parents.

LM: In what way or ways are they different? What do they do now?

BA: Some of them are really in the professional field. They have finished their college degrees and are no longer working the way their parents did. But, for the parents, that was the only thing they could do. There was no choice.

LM: Are the first Filipinos here, the ones we call Old Timers?

BA: Yes, they are. The OTs.

LM: The OTs. The Old Timers.

BA: I am already starting to call myself an OT.

LM: You're saying you have become one.

[laughter]

BA: Yes.

LM: Did you marry an OT?

BA: Yes, I did. [laughter]

LM: You were a newly-arrived professional and married an OT in Minnesota. Was this an advantage ? A disadvantage ?

BA: Actually, I became the bridge between them and the professional group. There was a large group of doctors here, at the time, who were here on exchange programs. So we became connected with them. You know we invited them to picnics. I really became a connection and that was why my first role in their organization was to be a PRO. I was the public relations officer.

LM: So *they* had an organization?

BA: Oh, yes. They had a Filipino American Club. That was already an extension of the Philippine-sotans. The old group of students at the U called themselves the Philippine-sotans

LM: That's interesting.

BA: Like our Philippine Minnesotans, like our Philippine Minnesotans. They spell it P-h-i-l...like Philippine and sotans.

LM: The combination of Philippines and Minnesota.

BA: Yes. At that time, they, also, had a Filipino Helping Hand Club.

LM: What was that?

BA: That is just like, you know, when they have to help somebody. Then, they had the Cabeñan Club, because there were many from Caba la Union here.

LM: These Old Timers, how did they adjust to life in Minnesota? What did they do for relaxation?

BA: They were a fun-loving group. Some of them were musicians. They loved music. If you remember, Phil Velasco and his group played at the Nicollet Hotel [in downtown Minneapolis]. But the social gathering that has always been maintained up to now is the Rizal Day. That is what they always celebrated every year was the Rizal Day. Their picnics were their form of socialization, too, getting together at somebody's house or getting together at the park for July Fourth . They did have time for socialization.

LM: You mentioned something, the Nicollet Hotel. I don't see a Nicollet Hotel...

BA: What is it now? I don't even know if that hotel is still around. But when I came, they were playing there.

LM: And it was called the Nicollet Hotel? [The Nicollet Hotel was razed in 1991]

BA: Yes, it was the Nicollet Hotel. Phil Velasco and two other Filipino musicians played the guitar there.

LM: So they had a band?

BA: Yes, they had a band.

LM: This was an all- Filipino band?

BA: Right. It's an all- Filipino band.

LM: Are some of them still around?

BA: No. No, all of them passed away.

LM: Let me go back to the Old Timers and their groups or organizations. Afterwards, the new immigrants and professionals started taking over the leadership of the organizations. How did they feel about the new immigrants?

BA: I think they liked it. It was a nice kind of takeover. They know they're not going to last long. They were very *proud* of the professional group that came after the Immigrant [and Nationality] Act of 1965. The professionals, the nurses, the doctors. In fact, the doctors group organized at that time. There used to be a Mr. and Mrs. Club, also, for people who were married, but that died very quickly. I don't think there was any resentment at all. They were very proud of these young professionals. Because, at least now, they can say, "Okay, yes, this is how you looked at us before. Look at what we've done."

LM: Ah ha. They are a source of pride.

BA: Yes.

LM: You mentioned something about the Act of 1965. Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

BA: The Immigration Act was 1965. It allowed professionals to enter the U.S.

LM: And many professionals from the Philippines?

BA: Many professionals took advantage of that, oh yes. That really changed the group here in Minnesota, and, of course, in other states, too. Yes, that Immigration Act of 1965 really was a very good entry for professionals to come in. They came in as immigrants.

LM: Let me move a little towards your personal life here. Have you always lived in Richfield since you arrived here from Chicago?

BA: No, we lived in Deephaven, and, then, in Wayzata for a while before we bought this property. Since we moved here in December 1958, this was it.

LM: Nineteen fifty-eight?

BA: Yes, December 1958, we bought this house. We like it here.

LM: You've been here in Richfield for a while now.

BA: Oh, yes.

LM: Can you talk about your family here in Minnesota?

BA: Okay. I've got two daughters, Marietta and Cristeta They both went to the Richfield schools.

That was the reason, also, why I was active in the Parent Advisory Committee and the Human Relations Committee in the same way that I got involved with the Human Rights Commission in Richfield. I served a three-year term with the Richfield Human Rights. I am really convinced that education is the big thing. If people know more about us, that makes a difference, especially, I think, in the schools. That should really be undertaken by the schools.

What happened with Tita [Andrada] at the junior high really changed the planning of the workshops for teachers at the beginning of the school year.

LM: Tell me what happened to Tita in junior high.

BA: This janitor, one of the janitors, saw her and asked her where she was from. She said, "I'm from Minnesota." Then, he said, "Well, did you used to live in a hut before you came to Minnesota?" Tita said, "No, I was born in Minnesota. I am a Minnesotan." She was so upset. Her friends were so upset. She never told me about what happened. It was her friends who told me. One afternoon, when she came home, I knew something was wrong. She would not eat. Then, she said she did not want to get the janitor in trouble. I said, "No, we are not going to get him in trouble. I think he needs to know more about us." So, fortunately, the vice principal was in my committee. So I asked him if, we, Ben and I and Tita and this janitor could be in a conference. When he came in, he said,

“I did not talk sex to her.” I said, “Wait a minute. We have not even started. We just want you to know what you need to know. I am not accusing you of talking sex to her.”

What happened there, then, is that the district decided that when they do the workshops for teachers, include the bus drivers, the janitors, and whatever extra help there is, because those are the people who get in touch with the kids more often. That really caused a change in the workshops, which I was grateful for.

Tita is not like Christy. When Christy was called “Blackie,” in elementary school, she said, “Hi, Snow White.”

LM: She was called “Blackie?”

BA: Yes, she was called “Blackie.” She says, “Hi, Snow White.” [chuckles] I said, “You know, you can get into trouble with that.” She said, “No, I know. I was by the principal’s office, so it’s not going to happen.”

LM: Would you call yourself a community activist?

BA: I really don’t see myself in the role, because I do not go out in public. That is why I thought education is really the route to changing ideas that people have about us.

For instance, when we moved here, my neighbor next door did not want to have anything to do with us. She asked me if we came here at midnight to look at the house. One day, her son had trouble with math, and another neighbor said, “Do you know who can help him?” So she came over here and said the son would be coming every day for help with me.

LM: You tutored him?

BA: I tutored the kid. From then on, when there was something about the Philippines on TV, she calls me on the phone and what channel and so and so. It’s an indirect way of getting to know me. She did not really know who I was and had not made any effort to know me. She just thought I was Chinese, so she did not want to have anything to do with us. Well, since then, there’s been three neighbors there now, but that old neighbor that we had, we became really good friends. I invited the whole block of women here, and I had coffee and tea.

LM: They still live here? You’re still neighbors?

BA: No, we’re not neighbors anymore. They were an older couple. I think it’s more with the older couples, too, older families that we have more problems than with younger ones. I think the younger ones are more accepting. I think it’s also because they learned that in school. Isn’t that true?

LM: We have come a long way?

BA: Yes. Yes.

LM: I would like to go back for a few more minutes on the topic of Old Timers.
Were there a lot of interracial marriages among the Old Timers?

BA: Well, most, if not all of them, married white Americans.

LM: Why is that ?

BA: The explanation is that we did not have enough females.

LM: Filipino females.

BA: I don't know if that was really the reason, but actually, there were no Filipino women here, because, again, our culture does not really approve of Filipino women coming singly, and leaving the family in the Philippines. I think culture has something to do with that.

LM: What about children of immigrants ? Do we find more interracial marriages among our second generation ?

BA: Yes, among the second generation, it's already happening.

LM: How do you think the first generation parents are accepting this?

BA: I think there's nothing they can do about it.

LM: Yes. It's a sign of the times.

BA: That's right.

LM: Now, if you had married outside of your own community, in your case as the first generation, do you think your dad, would have accepted it?

BA: I doubt it. I doubt it, because my father is so stern. I would really look at him as a very strict father. We just had to do as he said. Even at my age, I can still see him hovering over me.

LM : In what other ways was he strict ?

BA: When the dishes are not done in the kitchen, I can still hear him, and, like, when the newspapers are out of order. At our house, if we read the paper, we had to put it back the way it came. Like, every Saturday night is inspection night. All our bedrooms are inspected...if there is stray stuff that should go into the basket or whatever. He really reprimands us ladies. He always says, "Especially you women, you've got to take care of your house, because if your house is dirty, it reflects you, not your husband."

LM: So he was a disciplinarian, you would say?

BA: Oh, God, oh, yes. We did not go to church with dirty shoes. [laughter] These are things that I remember. On Saturday afternoon, we had to line up *all* our shoes and what you are going to wear for Sunday. That is the housewife's job is to clean all the shoes, and it's all lined up, so that in the morning when you get up for Sunday Mass, it's already ready for us, and the same way with our clothes. We had to already prepare our dress that we're going to wear for the next day. He was just like that. It was just like an Army.

LM: Did he have any influence on the choice of your profession, your career?

BA: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

LM: He was a teacher.

BA: Right. He was a teacher.

LM: And you became a teacher.

BA: Yes. My older sister is also a social studies teacher. Our oldest is a pharmacist. I think he knows a lot about us. He knows what we should probably go into, except that when it came to Sally and Tino, my younger siblings, he did not say anything .

LM: When did he pass away?

BA: He passed away about ten years ago, but he was able to visit us here, in Minnesota. I can really say he was the most important person in my life. When my mother passed away, he did the parenting, and he shaped me into what I am.

LM: You would say he shaped?

BA: He shaped us. That is why I think he has a very strong influence.

LM: Now, about the Filipinos then, and the Filipinos today. Do you think Filipinos today face much less discrimination or, perhaps, no discrimination?

BA: I would not say, “No discrimination.” I think it’s much less, except that, sometimes, you don’t really know it’s happening. It can be very subtle. But, definitely, it’s much less.

LM: Where do you think these things happen? Where?

BA: I think in areas where people don’t really know much about the Philippines. Usually, the people who’ve been to the Philippines respond differently. They respond differently.

LM: Is there something we can do about it? What do you think we can or should do about it?

BA: I think we have already started doing it. I think all the cultural stuff that we present also represent who we are.

LM: Belen, would you like to talk about your job experience here in Minnesota? What was your first job?

BA: My first job was at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. I worked as a psychometrist at the Guidance and Counseling Office. Then, from there, I went to the Bureau of Educational Research as a research assistant. Those were really good introductions for me, as far as working with the American students. Those were mostly our students then.

LM: What is a psychometrist?

BA: A psychometrist gives testing to students. Of course, the Guidance Office, that is where the first listing for incoming students takes place, in the Counseling Office. As a psychometrist, I do the administration of the test and measurements for anything that is needed for a student’s record.

LM: How were you accepted by your colleagues? Did your ethnic background become an issue at all?

BA: You know, I really did not feel any feelings about it. They accepted me as I was. Interestingly enough, I’ve been trying to look back. That was really a neat experience for me. I think working at the University was a plus.

LM: Very good. You were a guidance counselor for nine years at Saint Margaret's Academy in Minneapolis. How was that different from the guidance counseling job at the Saint Louis Park High School, which you did later on.

BA: Actually, Saint Margaret's Academy in Minneapolis was a Catholic girls' high school. So, I was working predominantly with girls.

LM: Is that a requirement, being a Catholic?

BA: No, not really. I think the recommendation that my boss at the University of Minnesota gave was probably the reason why I got accepted there.

I taught a class in mathematics, but that did not last long. They needed me more in the counseling department than anything else.

I only experienced one incident there where a parent did not want to see me the moment she saw what I looked like; however, that was corrected by the principal afterwards. We met with her, which was really nice.

LM: And things went nicely from then on?

BA: Yes, things went nicely after that. I really enjoyed being there.

However, I wanted another experience and that got me to Saint Louis Park, which I was glad I did, because I worked with seven other counselors, and it was grades ten through twelve. I was the only female. I was the only minority on the staff. The guys were fun. They were really good, and I learned a lot from them. When I was at Saint Margaret's, I was the only counselor. Working with all the kids from, also, Asian countries—that was when the start of the immigration took place from Asia—was also an interesting experience for me. It was nice to share my own experience with these kids, who were really scared starting with no English at all. There I was for ten years, 1958 to 1968. Then, I had to be terminated because enrollment was getting low, and they needed to eliminate one counselor position.

Fortunately, I got a job at Minnetonka Senior High, and, there, I was one of six counselors. There were three women to three men. It's just an equal division of men and women. It was another suburb similar to Saint Louis Park, and I had no problems when I was over there.

Five years later, in 1983, I was called back to Saint Louis Park High School when one counselor retired. I stayed there for eight years, until my retirement in 1991. At that time, now, the high school was already nine through twelfth, but the first year I returned, I had to travel from the junior high to the senior high. I had senior high and junior high assignments. Then, the following year, I was full time again until my retirement in 1991.

LM: How does it feel to be retired?

BA: Oh, wow! I was really looking forward to retirement. My superintendent had asked me if I could stay a few more years. I said, "Please, do not ask me to do that. This has been a very difficult decision for me. I love the kids. I love my job."

LM: Belen, you are a service oriented person and have been actively involved in Filipino American organizations, one of which was the Fil-Minnesotan Association or FMA. What were your involvements with the FMA?

BA: Okay. I was once an officer. I was treasurer of the Fil-Minnesotan Association. Of course, officer or not, because I love being with this group, I supported every activity that the FMA undertook. One of the activities that came about was the Parenting Seminar, that Lita [Malicsi], Tito [Sumangil], and I kind of organized seeing the need for bicultural parenting among our newly arrived immigrants. With the help of Doctor [Charles] Bazerman at the University of Minnesota, we were able to organize this very, very important activity, not only for Filipinos. We also opened it up to other ethnic groups. That was really excellent, because it was also educating American parents. With all the interracial marriages that have taken place already, it was very educational for the bicultural kids.

LM: Do you think there have been huge changes that have taken place since you first joined?

BA: Of course. You know, when Lita was president, we had many drama presentations on the artistic part of it. We had several drama presentations which, again, are very educational for people who don't know much about the Philippines. Those are really examples of activities that have been promoted and that have helped us in informing the public about our culture.

LM: You sound like you like the changes that have been implemented?

BA: Oh, *very* definitely. Definitely. We've been doing, also, presentations. Like I have done some presentations not only here in Minnesota, but also on a national level, again, educating the public about our culture, about our educational system, and the professionals in Minnesota. That was always an interesting experience, because it is not only helpful for other Filipinos in other states, but, also, for us, it was a publicity thing.

LM: Now, we are kind of going towards the end of our interview. I would like to ask you, if you were to describe your life's experiences in Minnesota, what adjectives would you use?

BA: Wonderful! I would not exchange Minnesota for any other state. I've been to so many states in the United States and, in fact, tried to move to San Francisco [California] when my husband was told to go to a warmer climate. We spent a month there, and decided, uh, uh, no, we are going back to Minneapolis. I think here people are very warm. They are accepting. That is the reason why I think for the coming generation, I would advise continue the education, information, the sharing of experiences, because they are very open. They're very open, and once they get to know you better, it is a really warm friendship that you develop.

LM: Would you like to make a final statement before concluding this interview?

BA: I would say to the younger generation, to the coming generation, be proud of your culture. Never forget that you're Filipino. Let us forget about regionalism that usually takes place when people arrive here and I can understand that. However, let us unite as one group as Filipinos. Be informed so that you can share. Sometimes, even if we are Filipinos, we don't really know much about our history, so learn more about your culture. It is a culture you can be proud of, and you are not going to be mistaken that way. You are going to be accepted by your neighbors, by your school, by your friends. So work on it.

LM: Thank you so much, Belen. It's a great pleasure interviewing you.

BA: It was fun. It was just like going back and remembering the past.

[laughter]

LM and BA: [spoken together] *Maraming salamat.*