

**Dr. Maryam Beltran Shapland**  
**Narrator**

**Lita Malicsi**  
**Interviewer**

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Maryam Beltran Shapland - **MS**  
Lita Malicsi - **LM**

**LM:** Today is Tuesday, the 25th of January 2011. My name is Lita Malicsi, and I am interviewing Dr. Maryam Beltran Shapland.

Maryam, were you born here in the United States?

**MS:** No, I was born in the Philippines.

**LM:** Where in the Philippines were you born and when?

**MS:** I was born on December 14, 1976, in Quezon City.

**LM:** Do you have siblings?

**MS:** I do. I have a younger sister named Raiza

**LM:** How old were you and your sibling when you immigrated to the United States?

**MS:** I was thirteen and she was eleven years old.

**LM:** You lived in the Philippines the first thirteen years of your life. What were those years like? What was your childhood like in the Philippines?

**MS:** What I remember from those years is that we were surrounded by a lot of family. I come from a very large family. My mom [Eleanor M. Beltran] is one of eight siblings. We were, essentially, raised by a lot of people. My aunts and my grandparents helped take care of us, so it was almost like living in a community, or being raised by the village, so to speak.

**LM:** That's great. When you left for the United States, you knew you were going to stay permanently in the new country. Tell me how you felt.

**MS:** I think it was a very hard situation. We already kind of knew what it was like to move to another country. We lived in Canada for a year when my dad [Alfredo M. Beltran] pursued a master's degree in Hamilton, Ontario. So we knew what to expect in terms of the cold, and the isolation, and being far away, being far away from everything we knew, and the loneliness. I think knowing what was about to come was a lot harder than if we had no clue what it was going to be like.

**LM:** You mentioned that your dad left for Canada and obtained a master's degree. What was the master's degree on?

**MS:** It was in epidemiology.

**LM:** It seems a difficult medical term. Would you mind explaining a little bit what epidemiology is?

**MS:** What I know about it is, essentially, it is a public health degree where they study the distribution and determinants of health-related events and the application of this study to the control of diseases and other health problems.

**LM:** That's a tough subject. Does it involve biostatistics?

**MS:** Biostatistics, data collection, statistical analyses.

**LM:** That's a great explanation. Thank you.

What was your view about America when you were a young girl growing up in the Philippines?

**MS:** Again, I think I thought of it like Canada—this was after we came home from Canada—cold and being far away, and the isolation from everybody and everything that was dear and familiar to all of us. When I was growing up, I just remember watching *Sesame Street* and watching TV, and that's what I knew of America. I thought that whatever the movies and TV portrayed as America was what it looked like.

**LM:** And did this view change when you came here and started living in the United States?

**MS:** I think so. When something becomes familiar to you, it becomes a more natural way to live, I guess, is the way I'd put it. What was familiar to us in the Philippines was the heat and the tropics, the millions of people around, and the loud noises. I think that's what was normal to me. When I got here, the new normal was cold, and quiet, and clean streets. I think that became the new norm for us.

**LM:** Were there friends that you left in the Philippines?

**MS:** Yes. I did leave a lot of friends. I ended up being in the same school from kindergarten to high school, and made a lot of friends. I did leave one particular friend; that was my very best friend. Her name is Nana, or Josefina.

**LM:** Do you still keep in touch?

**MS:** We do. We do communicate not as often as we used to. We used to write each other letters and send each other tape recordings of our voices and our thoughts. Now, with the new technology, we email and Skype and talk on the phone quite a bit.

**LM:** Does Nana have any plans of migrating to the United States?

**MS:** She's got a thriving event-planning business in Manila and she's doing quite well, but I think she would jump at a chance to visit the U.S. I think she has family in Canada and she's been to Canada, but I don't think she's been here yet.

**LM:** What did your parents do in the Philippines before you came to Minnesota?

**MS:** My mom and dad were both physicians. My dad was a cardiologist and my mom, I believe, was just finishing up her residency when we left.

**LM:** What medical school did they go to, in the Philippines?

**MS:** Both of them went to the University of the East Ramon Magsaysay [Memorial] Medical School. They did their residency in the Philippine General Hospital [in Manila].

**LM:** Why did your family immigrate?

**MS:** My dad actually came here on, I believe, a student visa, to do research under a very prominent cardiologist (Dr. Jay Cohn) at the University of Minnesota.

**LM:** And your mom?

**MS:** Came along for the ride.

[laughter]

**MS:** And so did we.

[laughter]

**LM:** How long have you been here now?

**MS:** We've been here twenty years.

**LM:** I'd like you to talk about your first year in school in Minnesota. How were you accepted? Was school a happy place for you and your sister?

**MS:** You know it was a very hard year. It was a hard year in terms of the culture shock, and it was a hard year because she started middle school and I started high school. In a lot of ways, we came here at the absolute wrong time in a child's life, because we were starting to become adolescents and starting to change in terms of our bodies and our thinking. To throw us into a very different environment in those years was very difficult for both of us.

**LM:** Did you have any language problems, any language barriers at all?

**MS:** Fortunately, having lived a year in Canada was a big help. I remember walking in high school the very first day and just experiencing this shock that everywhere I looked was a Caucasian face. I still remember very vividly just looking around the hall and thinking -where are all the Filipinos? I wasn't used to it. The language, fortunately, came pretty smoothly to me. I was fortunate enough to pick up languages pretty easily, so it wasn't that hard of a transition. It was mostly the shock of being in such a different place than I was used to.

**LM:** Would you say that the issues were more socially rather than academically related?

**MS:** Yes. Yes, I definitely would say that.

**LM:** Talk to me about how well you did academically.

**MS:** We were talking about going to school in the Philippines and coming here. I went to, I guess, a very prestigious elementary school in the Philippines. It was very difficult to get in. We had to take tests to get in. Then, they did a lottery after. They administered tests to all would-be kindergartners. My sister and I both passed. They did a lottery because there were so many people that wanted to get into the University of the Philippines Integrated School, which is where I went. I, fortunately, got picked and my sister, unfortunately, did not. I don't know if "fortunately" is the right word, because it was a very rigorous curriculum from day one. I still remember as early as first grade, they would have the top ten kids in my class listed on the blackboard. Your goal was to get that number one spot. Also, they divided all the children into high classes and low classes, and if you were a very academically inclined student, if you were the cream of the crop, you would get into the high class. If not, then, you would be in the low class. So it was always the goal to get into the highest of the high class. It was really already very, very stressful from the beginning. School, I think, academically was very stressful. So coming here, it was a complete relief in terms of not having that rigorous competition, but, I felt somewhat lost, because I didn't have that structure. I didn't have that push and drive, the external drive, to excel.

**LM:** Having gone to school in the Philippines before coming to the United States, what were your observations regarding the systems in education? Did they differ? Were they similar? Talk about the grading and the school hours, are they longer here? Are they longer in the Philippines?

**MS:** They were much longer in the Philippines. I remember waking up really early from elementary school on, so we would be in school by seven-thirty and finish around four-thirty. The grading was never A, B, C, D, pass fail, satisfactory, unsatisfactory. You did ninety-seven percent in math or eighty-seven percent in English. It was very specific how well you did, and also, in comparison to other people.

I remember—this is a story that my family still tells and kind of makes fun of me for it—I think when I was in grade three or grade four and we were learning the multiplication table, we had to have the entire multiplication table memorized by a certain time, because we were getting tested by flash cards in front of the class. I wore glasses. I wore these pink, big, round, rose-tinted glasses, because I was very nearsighted. I broke my glasses in frustration, because I was having so much trouble memorizing it, and I knew I needed to do well, and I needed to learn the whole multiplication table by the next day.

I remember getting headaches as a child, because I would study so hard. Looking back now, I think that helped me, because it really gave me a work ethic and, as I said, the drive to do well, to exceed expectations.

**LM:** That, certainly, was early character building.

**MS:** Yes, it was.

**LM:** Did you have to make big adjustments here and, if so, in what areas?

**MS:** One of them, I think, is the mindset of doing your own thing, of being independent. When we started high school here, they pretty much said, “Okay, these are the classes you’re supposed to take. You pick whatever else you want to take on top of this.” That, to me, was a revelation. I mean, there was no picking your own classes in the Philippines. You were given a curriculum, and that’s what you did, and that’s what you followed. You had no choice. To get to choose what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it was a huge thing. I thought it was the best thing in the world. I took jewelry classes. I took pottery...

**MS:** Things that I should never even have taken. They advanced me in science and math, so all my science and math classes were one grade ahead. By the end of high school, I had earned all these credits so I got to take the post secondary option where you go to the University of Minnesota and take classes there for college credit. Again, that was a huge thing for me. Wow! I get to choose what I want to do from these millions of classes the University Minnesota offered. That was great. I really loved it. It was fun and challenging and a good thing for me, at the time.

**LM:** You were in high school and, you were allowed to go to college!

**MS:** Yes! For free. [laughter]

**LM:** For free, in America.

[laughter]

**LM:** Are there any stories you remember most clearly about your high school days in Minnesota? Were they memorable because they brought joy, or were they unforgettable because they caused you pain?

**MS:** I guess the most painful days were those early days, the beginning of high school. I remember feeling just like a zombie, because I felt very numb. I wanted to fit in and I wanted to be just like any American student, but I knew I wasn't. So in terms of going to school those first few months, I don't remember much. I think I just kind of numbed myself from the pain of not being around my friends, not being ever around anybody familiar or anything familiar. It was very hard for my sister and me. I'm glad I had her, because we really were going through the same experience at the same time, so we became very close. We'd always been close, but we became closer because we were both dealing with the same things.

**LM:** Did you two talk about those unhappy experiences? Did you help each other out?

**MS:** We did. We would take the bus to school, back and forth every day. I remember we'd get home and we'd just kind of talk to each other about how we were feeling and what we were going through.

It was also hard for me because my sister is very shy, or was very shy—she's not as much anymore—in high school. But I was more gregarious. I was more sociable, and once I started making friends and started opening up and doing things in theater and speech, and all these other extracurricular activities, she felt like she had to do the same thing. She kind of followed my footsteps, even though, maybe, that wasn't what she wanted to do at the time, but she felt like she had to do it. In some ways, it was good that we were going through the same experience at the same time, but, on the other hand, I feel like maybe I led the way. She always had me to kind of follow, and maybe she needed to do her own thing, but didn't, because I was there.

**LM:** Did you ever discuss these school experiences with your mom and dad?

**MS:** I think we talked about it. I don't remember feeling like they could relate, though. I didn't feel like they really could understand, and I don't know if they really could have, because they were going through a different experience, their own immigrant experience—trying to keep the apartment, buying a car, and all these things. I think that was a different experience for them.

**LM:** How long did you go through this kind of experience and when did it finally end? Did it?

**MS:** I'm a pretty social person, so I, eventually, started making friends. I would say maybe by my second year, I had already created my American self for the world, for my world. [chuckles] I'd already made some friends and joined extracurricular activities and started really enjoying high school. At the time, I joined student council and other school activities.

**LM:** I would like to know about that. What were those after school activities that engaged you?

**MS:** The biggest one was, actually, speech. A lot of people may say, "Well, English is your second language. You had just immigrated, so why would you join the speech team?" I enjoyed it very much. It was a way for me to really express myself in English. I memorized poems and I memorized monologues and used that to express myself. I, also, sang in the choir. What else? I think that was it. Nothing sporty.

**LM:** Did you do theater?

**MS:** I did do theater.

**LM:** Tell me about the theater part.

**MS:** Theater was interesting. I auditioned for all these lead roles. I sang and I felt like I sang better than some of the kids that were auditioning, but I was never picked as the lead role, because I was brown. [chuckles] I auditioned for *Steel Magnolia* and I ended up the background person. I was in the back stage as the voice-over person. Then, I think I was a hairdresser or something like that. I auditioned for *Little Shop of Horrors*, for the lead.

**LM:** For Audrey?

**MS:** For Audrey. They made me one of the African American singers. I auditioned for *Cinderella* for the lead, and I was put in the chorus. So it was an interesting experience for me, because I thought, hey, I can sing better than that Cinderella or that Audrey or whoever is singing, but for the director, I just never looked the part.

**LM:** Now, let's think back. About what year was that?

**MS:** This was about 1992, 1993.

**LM:** Okay, Maryam, this is the year 2011. Tell me, if you were Maryam Beltran auditioning in a high school play for the lead, do you think things would be different?

**MS:** I think it would be. I remember it was groundbreaking—I think it was 1996, 1997—when there was a Filipino prince on TV.

**LM:** Yes, I remember that.

**MS:** Was it *Cinderella*?

**LM:** It was *Cinderella*.

**MS:** That was huge. I think, maybe, colorblind casting became the norm and not the exception.

**LM:** Isn't that interesting? It became a conversation piece in the community.

**MS:** Yes, it did.

**LM:** In high school, was there a teacher that you remember as having been inspirational, and what was inspiring about this teacher?

**MS:** Yes, I had Mr. Jim Studer as the one teacher that really sticks out most in high school. He was also my speech coach. This is a guy that believed in me and thought that I could make it. He knew I was a new immigrant, and he knew that English was my second language. Yet, he said, "I think you can do it." I, actually, went to state for speech a couple of years, because he pushed me and he knew that I could do it. He, also, was a humanities teacher. He would bring in different people, Lou Belamy from the theater. What theater is that?

**LM:** The Penumbra.

**MS:** Penumbra. He brought in somebody from Theater Mu. It was...

**LM:** Rick Shiomi?

**MS:** It was Rick Shiomi. He came in and talked to the class.

Mr. Studer really opened my world and opened my mind to people and experiences out there. He was great. I actually wrote him a thank you card after college, and I went to visit him and personally thanked him a few years later, just to let him know, in case he didn't know, that he was absolutely inspirational to me.

**LM:** That was a wonderful thing that you did.

**MS:** He changed my high school experience.

**LM:** What an awesome teacher!

**MS:** He was amazing.

**LM:** Does he now know that you became a doctor?

**MS:** I believe so, yes. Yes.

**LM:** This maybe repetitious, but how you would describe yourself as a student? It's all right to not be too humble.

**MS:** I was a very highly academic student. I did all the advanced placement classes. I took a lot of upper-level classes in math and science. That's interesting because I also really loved English, and I loved literature, and I enjoyed theater and drama. Although I was academically inclined in terms of the sciences and math, I knew that I had that side of my brain, but I enjoyed the other side, too.

**LM:** While your left hemisphere is on, you could activate your right, as well.

**MS:** I would think so—a little bit, a little bit of a combination.

[laughter]

**LM:** Tell me, what did you learn in those first years in school in Minnesota that you would like to pass along to incoming young immigrants?

**MS:** I think that you have to expect to develop a persona, an American side of yourself that you present to America. I think that's just something you have to do in order to cope and to fit in. But, I think the most important thing is to not forget who you truly are, and not forget your roots, and your culture, and your home country. That's what I would say.

**LM:** Those are excellent words of advice.  
Do you remember your very first job in Minnesota?

**MS:** Yes. I worked at McDonalds for \$4.25 an hour—no, it was less. It was \$4.15 an hour. I worked in the back at the grill and salad prep area.

**LM:** How did you get that job?

**MS:** I was just looking for a high school summer job, and they had an opening, so I applied and they took me. What was interesting is that they never put me in the front. I was always in the back. I don't know why. [laughter] I was always the prep cook or the grill person or the drive-through, but they never put me in the front.

**LM:** Hmm. Interesting. Honestly, did you experience racism in the work place?

**MS:** In general?

**LM:** Let's start with that first job.

**MS:** That, I thought was interesting. I always felt this was because they didn't trust me with the money. I never took care of the money. It was always the cooking side of things. Even when I was doing the drive-through, I would give them the food, but I never took care of the money. So I wasn't sure if that was because of racism or because I was young. I don't know, but I felt like I was dependable enough to be trusted with that, but they never taught me how to be the cashier. The whole three, four months I was there, they never taught me to do that.

**LM:** And you never thought to ask?

**MS:** I never did. I guess I just thought maybe they didn't trust me and I didn't want to broach that subject.

**LM:** If you were in that same situation now, would you keep quiet about it?

**MS:** No question, I would say something.

[laughter]

**LM:** Tell me about your involvement in the Filipino community. Did you join any organizations?

**MS:** This is when I saw the light. Life started to become better for our family when we joined the Fil-Minnesotan Association. Particularly for my sister and me, it was the FMYO, or the Fil-Minnesotan Youth Organization.

**LM:** Tell me about the Fil-Minnesotan Youth Organization.

**MS:** I believe it was during one of the first, if not the first, years that it was formed when we first started.

**LM:** Yes, the first year it was formed was in 1992.

**MS:** I still remember very, very clearly the first time I was in contact with other Fil-Minnesotan youth was when we were auditioning for the *Musikal*, which is a great musical play that you, Lita, the director, staged for youth to perform in it. If you'd talk to my current friends, we all think of that day as the day that became kind of the glue that held us together because we were always rehearsing, and we always got together before and after rehearsals. Then we performed together. This definitely became the glue that held our group together. We're still close – very, very close up to now.

**LM:** It feels good, so good, to hear that.

**MS:** So, my sister and I credit FMYO as the one thing, the one organization, the one experience we had, that really changed our lives and helped make us feel part of the Fil-Minnesotan community and really made Minnesota our home. We met Filipino youth,

Filipino-American youth that were our age, that were going through the same thing. Our dearest and closest friends are still people that we met through this organization. I was just talking about how all of my friends and I still remember that very first day we met at the Musikal auditions.

**LM:** You were a group of high school youngsters – full of hope, and energy, and talent!

Now, after high school, you went to Saint Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. What degree did you pursue and what prompted you to major in that area of studies?

**MS:** This is interesting because after all the math and science in high school, I decided to pursue a degree in American Racial and Multicultural Studies, which was kind of a lesser known degree at Saint Olaf College.

This was a struggle with my parents, as well, because I was going for a degree in biology and I was in pre-med, and I decided during my sophomore year in college that I'd taken all the biology classes I wanted. I'd taken human biology, cell biology, micro biology, and I was not interested in plants. [chuckles] The only classes left for me to take to complete my degree was plant biology, a few of those classes. I was just absolutely not interested in it. I said, "I don't want to take this. I don't want to pursue biology." My minor at the time was American Racial and Multicultural Studies which was fascinating to me, because it was a study of the different cultures and races in the U.S....the different experiences of the different ethnic groups: African Americans, Hispanic Americans, gay Americans. It was just fascinating. So I decided to pursue that degree, much to the chagrin of my parents. I remember having a conversation with them and they said, "If you have a biology degree, this is what you could do. If you have an American Racial and Multicultural Studies, *what* can you do?" I had to convince them that this was a valid degree and that it would help me in the future.

**LM:** In May 1998, you graduated magna cum laude from Saint Olaf College. What an awesome accomplishment. I would like you to describe that moment in your life and your family's.

**MS:** Well, it was a very good day. I remember feeling very proud and feeling like I wanted to express my Filipino-ness during my graduation. So I decided that instead of my cap, my graduation cap, I wore some Filipino Muslim headgear. I also wore kind of a Muslim—I forget what that cloth is called—

**LM:** Batik?

**MS:** Batik sash across my chest to express my being Filipino during graduation.

**LM:** I can just see you wearing the Batik headgear and the sash with pride and dignity. You still majored in multicultural studies?

**MS:** I did.

**LM:** At this time, had your parents' feelings changed about your major?

**MS:** I think they slowly warmed up to the idea. I think they were okay with it in the end.

**LM:** Especially after having graduated magna cum laude!

**MS:** Yes.

**LM:** Where did you go after Saint Olaf College? What happened next?

**MS:** I, actually, wasn't sure if I wanted to do medicine. I was in pre-med. I did take the MCATs [Medical College Admission Test] and I didn't do as well as I wanted to, so I thought, maybe, this isn't for me. I think my heart was just not in it at the time. I thought I wanted to explore something else.

What I actually became for a year was the multicultural student advisor for the Anoka-Hennepin School District. It was a great experience. It was a very stressful, but eye-opening experience. It really opened me up to racism. I, essentially, was the multicultural liaison for all the schools in Blaine from elementary to high school. I formed diversity groups in the high school and spoke to people about diversity. We held diversity workshops along with the other multicultural advisors for every city. I, also, went into elementary schools and had one-on-one meetings with the very few, at the time, multicultural students there. They would tell me things like, "My teacher said the N word today." Or they'd say, "My teacher called me 'Oriental.' I'm not Oriental. I'm Chinese-American." What I would have to do was actually meet with these teachers and talk to them about diversity. I was a young, twenty-two-year-old lady. I really had to become assertive and headstrong. I had to know that I was in the right place and that I was doing the right thing. I met a lot of resistance, as you might imagine.

**LM:** Did you feel that you were successful in that job? How long did you stay in it?

**MS:** It was a one-year contract, and I finished the contract. I didn't renew because I, actually, decided that that wasn't my thing. I think I was relatively successful. I formed these groups in high school that continued on after I left. I would have students come up to me and tell me, "Thank you for being here," and "I appreciate that you're here to talk to." It was a really good experience. It just wasn't my deal. I knew that there was something else that I wanted to do with my life. But it was a great experience at the time.

**LM:** When and how did the University of Minnesota Medical School come into the picture?

**MS:** I think I missed the intellectual stimulation while I was working. I knew that there was more to me. That was a great job, but I really wanted to do something else. I thought

about it, and I said, “You know, I think it’s medicine, because I really miss that part of my life.”

So I retook the MCAT—this time with my heart and soul and mind in it—and I applied to medical schools all around the country. I, fortunately, was accepted to a few, and I picked the University of Minnesota.

**LM:** And your parents were ecstatic?

**MS:** They were ecstatic, yes.

[laughter]

**MS:** They were happy as can be.

**LM:** We know that your parents are both doctors.

**MS:** Yes.

**LM:** Do you think they were influential in your choice of career?

**MS:** Oh, yes!

[laughter]

**MS:** I grew up with my parents saying, “You can be whatever you want to be, but medicine is the best job in the world.”

[laughter]

**MS:** So there was definitely some pointing of path. Yes.

**LM:** I like the term that you use, “some pointing of path.”

**MS:** Towards a path.

**LM:** You did not use the word pushing.

**MS:** No.

**LM:** So, you did your residency at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland.

**MS:** Yes.

**LM:** How were you accepted by colleagues? Was your ethnic background ever an issue? We’re going back to ethnicity and all that. Was it ever an issue?

**MS:** I think initially, because when you look at me, especially back then, I'm short. I'm petite.

**LM:** Young-looking.

**MS:** Young, exactly. I looked like I was about high school age. I guess people's first impressions of me up until now, was: Oh, she's sweet. She's nice. She's smiley. She must be easy to push around. They don't realize that I'm "mataray."

[laughter]

**MS:** I don't know how you describe that in English.

**LM:** I guess "mataray" is one who is not afraid to speak up. One who could be feisty when provoked.

**MS:** I can show my side with an attitude if I want to. I think once I established myself as somebody that they can't push around and gives orders better than takes orders, the respect came. My appearance didn't become a detriment anymore, once they knew who I was and what I can do.

**LM:** Again, how long did you have to go through that kind of proving- myself- type experience?

**MS:** Ohhh, three years in residency, probably two years. Then, my last year in residency, it became a lot easier. Certainly with little old me ordering a six-foot-two, two-hundred pound nurse, or somebody who was older than me, it's tough to establish that presence. It took me probably my entire first year in residency to really get the courage and the determination and the confidence. Then my second year was much better. On my third year, people were afraid of me.

**LM:** But of course!

**MS:** I actually made some people cry, which I didn't mean to—well; maybe I did, because they were not being nice. You have to establish respect and some people were not respectful and so I let them know that.

**LM:** Good for you.

Do you feel that Asian women are respected the way they should be by the rest of America?

**MS:** I do not. I think that the initial impression is always that we are subservient and that we will say, "Yes, ma'am," and "Yes, sir," and that we are weak-willed and not very opinionated. I think that you have to establish that right away, that you're not somebody

to be messed with. I do it every day with my patients. I have to establish that, no, I don't look like I should be the doctor, but I am the doctor. You may think that I'm not the one making the decisions, but I am the one making the decisions! I think that as petite Asian women, in general, we have to establish that presence all the time.

**LM:** Your school life from high school to college to medical school was tremendously academic. You were always on the honor's lists, always receiving academic scholarships. Did you ever have time for social activities or community events?

**MS:** I did. I have to credit my parents for that. I haven't spoken about my parents much, but they are pretty wonderful people, the two of them. They were very open to the American culture. We moved here when my sister and I were pre-teens and teenagers. I don't know if it was because they were younger. They were very young parents. They were very willing to let us experience what we needed to experience as American teenagers. So I did have time for a lot of social activities. I hung out with my friends quite a bit. We went out quite a bit. They really gave us the freedom to do that. They didn't restrict our social activities, and were pretty open with the dating, which is surprising to a lot of people.

**LM:** Even as a student, you were into missionary work, some of which were international missions. Tell me about your international experiences as a missionary.

**MS:** I volunteered. I think I did an externship at the Philippine General Hospital when I was in college as a pre-med. That was a great experience. Then, after college, I also volunteered for an orphanage in Chile. That was, again, pretty amazing, and it really opened my mind and opened my eyes to a different world. I learned Spanish, as well, while I was there. Again, I have to credit my parents.

Even as we were growing up in high school, they would make sure that we were going to the Philippines every couple of years, without them. It was just my sister and I, teenagers, going to the Philippines for the summer, for a month. They wanted to make sure that we were still in touch with our family and our friends there, were in touch with our culture, and that we got to experience life as a Filipino teenager, as well. They worked hard and they saved money so we could go.

**LM:** You've done very impressive publications in medicine. Please talk about them.

**MS:** Well, a lot of them were required, but I did enjoy doing some research. I'm not a research type of scientist. That's really not my thing. But I did a publication, "Pain Control in the Emergency Department," in terms of race - which ethnic groups, or which demographics got more pain control, and were given more pain medicine. Well, it showed that Caucasian people versus people of color obtained more pain medicine when they were in pain, when they had fractures or chest pain. I did some research in that.

This work really brought in a lot of my multicultural interest, as well. Then, I wrote part of an article during residency on this one very interesting case we had in the ER [emergency room]. The last thing I've written most recently is a chapter [Chapter 16] in

one of the emergency medicine review books [*First Aid for the Emergency Medical Boards*] on psychobehavioral issues, which I found very fascinating.

**LM:** Psychobehavioral issues, no doubt, offer fascinating studies.

Starting at a young age, your life has always entailed work and rigor. Did you even have time to go out on dates?

**MS:** I did! [laughter] Again, my parents were very open to us dating and having boyfriends. I don't know if it's because my mom is one of seven girls, and they just assumed that when you become a teenager, you date. They were not very restrictive. Of course, we had curfews and couldn't go out on school nights. But, they let us go out.

**LM:** Do you remember how old you were when you were allowed to go out on your first date and do you remember who your first date was?

**MS:** I do! I think I was fifteen years old. It was a Caucasian guy with long hair. His name was Bill. We went to a church function. [laughter]

**LM:** Did your parents mind that your first date was not from the Filipino community?

**MS:** I think they expected it. I think they expected that we would date outside of our community, because most of the people around us were not from the FilAm community. We were living in a suburb. We went to high school in a suburb, so I think they pretty much expected that it wasn't going to be solely Filipinos; although, I did date Filipinos.

**LM:** Your parents were not strict with you and Raiza in the typical Filipino way, but I suppose they imposed certain rules, like most Filipino parents do.

**MS:** No, they were not strict in the typical Filipino way, and yes, they had rules. They let us pretty much wear what we wanted, again—obviously, nothing too showing or nothing too provocative. We got to pick out our own clothes. Slowly, my mom let us wear makeup over time. She herself did not use makeup very much. She was more conservative about that than anything else. They were strict about certain things: getting your homework done on time, making sure we called if we were going to be late to go home. They wanted to know who we were going out with. They wanted to know the parents if we had a sleepover. If it was from the Filipino community, they wanted to make sure they knew the parents. They wanted to meet the boys that were taking us out. But, in terms of not letting us go on dates, not letting us do social activities, they were not restrictive at all.

**LM:** Now, we come to a really fun question: How did you meet James Shapland and what drew you to him?

**MS:** It was between my sophomore and junior year at college. It was summer and I'm looking for a summer job. One of my TAs [teaching assistant], at the time, recommended

this company called Meridian Services. My friend and I applied for it. Essentially, it was helping in a group home with people with disabilities. I'd never done anything of the sort, but it paid well, and it looked very interesting. So I applied. I got assigned to this house, which was, actually, just two blocks from my parents' house, which is where I was living. It was perfect. There was a great guy there named Mac, and he'd just moved in. So, I helped him move in and met his family. I met his mom and dad and got along with him very well. One day, his family said, "Oh, Mac's brother is going to visit him. He just got back from his trip to Europe. He's going to visit today." I said, "Okay, great." Later, I opened the door, and it was Jim, this really cute guy with a very open, kind face, and that's how we met. He was Mac's brother.

**LM:** Tell me more about Mac.

**MS:** Mac has cerebral palsy. He was one of the people with disabilities that I was working with. We always tease him because we called him our matchmaker. He would come up to me and say, "My brother likes you." [laughter] Then, I'm sure he would say the same thing to Jim. It was a very funny situation, because he was our little go-between.

**LM:** Did you know that Jim Shapland was going to be your future husband?

**MS:** No. I was pretty sure he wasn't. I had just broken up with a boyfriend at the time, and he was going to be my kind of transitional guy. [laughter] I said, "I'll have fun. I just broke up with my boyfriend, so I will just date this guy and see what happens. We'll probably break up by the time I go back to college. Saint Olaf is an hour away."

**LM:** Did he have a girlfriend at that time?

**MS:** No, he didn't. He was single.

**LM:** Did you and Jim have a typical Filipino Catholic church wedding?

**MS:** We did not.

**LM:** Talk to me about your wedding.

**MS:** We decided we wanted an outdoor wedding, because we wanted to get married in the summer. We both love the outdoors, trees and flowers. We hunted for a good place to have an outdoor wedding and we found this nature center outside of the Twin Cities [Minneapolis and Saint Paul] that had something like an amphitheater in the middle of a woody area. So we thought that would be a perfect place to have our wedding, and that's where we got married.

**LM:** Such an idyllic setting! It was the perfect place for a summer outdoor wedding.

Now, you're going to start your name change.

**MS:** Yes, yes, that was a big deal. It was a very hard decision to make whether I was going to change my name. I'd always been known as Beltran. I love my name Beltran. It meant a lot to me, because it was very Filipino sounding. Then, here I was, making two decisions. One of them is: "Am I going to now be known as Shapland?" I was pretty sure I didn't want to hyphenate. It was too long. The second decision was: "Am I now going to be known as Doctor Shapland? When somebody thinks of Doctor Shapland, I think they don't necessarily see a small Asian Filipino woman in their minds. It was really hard for me to make that decision. Actually, I didn't make that decision until I was pregnant with my daughter. I decided that I wanted to have the same name as her. I didn't want to have a different last name than my kids. I was happy to do so at the time. It took me a long time; it took me almost three years to make that decision, though.

**LM:** For almost three years, you were Doctor Maryam Beltran?

**MS:** I was in medical school, so I was still Maryam Beltran. Then, when I graduated from medical school was when I changed my name.

**LM:** Your beautiful children have such beautiful Filipino names.

**MS:** Isabella and Antonio.

**LM:** What is the significance of your choice of names for them?

**MS:** Well, I knew they would be Shaplands, so I wanted to infuse a little Filipino-ness in their names. Their middle names are both Beltran, so it's Isabella Beltran Shapland and Antonio Beltran Shapland. The main thing, also, is I wanted their names to be pronounceable by both cultures. I wanted them to have no problem integrating in both their American side as well as their Filipino side.

**LM:** Now, Isabella or Isa...

**MS:** Yes, how beautiful.

**LM:** Will soon be going to school. Albeit early, can you envision her as another doctor in the family, or doesn't it matter what career she pursues?

**MS:** You know, I always say it doesn't matter. She can do whatever she wants but medicine is the best job in the world.

[laughter]

**LM:** You know that you are echoing the words of your parents.

**MS:** I am. But if she chooses to become something completely different, I will have no problem with it.

**LM:** Will you and Jim raise your children as Filipino-Americans or as American-Filipinos?

**MS:** My wonderful husband has a great quote. He says, “Being American is the default, so we have to stress the Filipino part at home.” I’m very proud to say that he speaks, at least attempts to very much, Tagalog to our kids. He makes sure we eat Filipino food and he encourages them to eat and try different types of food, especially Filipino food. He does not like any other rice than the Asian rice, so that’s all we can serve at home. That’s a good sign. Isabella, when you talk to her, she’s very proud that she’s Filipino, and she teaches her friends at school Tagalog words. She’s always talking about how she’s so happy she’s brown. [chuckles] She says to me, “I’m brown like you.” She’s very proud of it. I hope that continues.

**LM:** I am sure that will continue.

Maryam, you are a wife, a mother, and a career woman—triple threat—with so much to do and so little time. Talk to me about it.

**MS:** Yes, I think this is where balance really comes in, knowing that something will have to give. I have to have my priorities in life. Family is number one. Job- not so much now. I’ve given a lot of time and energy to medicine. All of my twenties, essentially, I dedicated to medicine. So now that I’m established, I feel like I don’t have to push so hard. I don’t have to work so hard. I only work a .8 time, about twenty-five hours a week. I really make sure I’m home a lot for the kids. I’m at Isabella’s recitals and her presentations and shows. I’m here for Nio (Antonio). We didn’t decide to do daycare till now when he’s twenty months. I guess it’s just prioritizing and knowing that something will give. I don’t have a clean house, and that’s okay. I don’t stress out about it. I don’t get to go out with friends as much or go out at night. Again, that’s okay; because I make sure I have a date with my husband once or twice a month. It’s all about priorities, I think.

**LM:** I’m sorry to have to disagree, but you have a house that’s clean and shiny and pretty.

**MS:** I have a cleaner.

[chuckles]

**LM:** With all your tremendous responsibilities, you seem so centered. You are so centered. You’re a physician who is busy caring for the needs of your patients, your children, your husband, and yourself. How do you do it?

**MS:** I guess I’m not always centered and I’m not always the best in everything, I think.

But I am able to do it because of my husband's support. I have to give Jim credit in this one, as well. He makes my life easy that I can be a good mom and a good wife and a doctor. He stayed at home with Isabella when I was a resident. He was a stay-at-home dad. He was one of the few stay-at-home dads that we knew at the time. He gladly did it so I could pursue my career, and he put his career on hold. Even now, he works tirelessly taking care of the kids if I'm working. He puts the kids to bed, gives them baths. He's a very, very involved father. I have to give him the credit, because that's how I'm able to become a career woman and pursue that part of my life.

**LM:** Jim is remarkable!

You've always been, since you were a teen, involved in projects, in activities, in volunteer work in the community. Are you able to do these things now? Is this another balancing act between personal life and community service?

**MS:** Definitely, and I still have to find that balance. My goal in the next few years, now that I've established my career and now that my family is becoming more settled and the kids are in school or daycare, is, actually, to become more involved in the community, doing more volunteer work. I'm involved in the administration at work. I'm part of the Emergency Department Council to help make decisions about our Emergency Department at Woodwinds Hospital [Woodbury, Minnesota]. I'd like to do more. I'd like to really get back out there. I think that for the past decade, it's really been about getting my life in gear and getting things in order. Now, I'd like to give back.

**LM:** What do you think are the challenges that come along with juggling everything in your life?

**MS:** I think the biggest challenge is feeling that I have to be successful at all of this, yet in the end, the most important thing is being a good mom and raising good children. I like that quote from Jackie [Jacqueline] Kennedy, "If you bungle raising your children, I don't think whatever else you do matters very much." In my thirties, that is my goal. I want to raise good kids. I want to raise socially conscious children. That ties into the volunteer and doing community service. I want to, somehow, integrate and get my kids to be aware of that, as well.

**LM:** Do you, sometimes, ask yourself what it is that you truly want in life?

**MS:** I really want to see the world. I want to expose myself and my family to as much as possible. Life is short. I want my kids to see not only the beautiful buildings in Venice [Italy], but also, the poverty in South Africa. I want them to understand about apartheid as much as they understand the American culture or the Filipino culture. I want to expose them to that. I want them to see that there's more to life outside of our home or outside of our bubble here. We live in a very safe and very comfortable environment here in Minnesota. I really want them to be able to see—I want to see, as well—a global view of life. That's my goal.

**LM:** What makes you happy? What is your definition of happiness?

**MS:** I guess happiness is just being with my family and enjoying them. I would say that's what makes me happy.

**LM:** And what is your happiest memory in Minnesota?

**MS:** I guess it would be the birth of my children. They were both born here in Minnesota. My wedding was here in Minnesota. Those are big milestones in my life.

**LM:** Any sad or tragic or difficult times you care to share?

**MS:** I have to say again that one of the hardest times in my life was moving here during my formative years.

**LM:** How do you think your life would be different if you had not left the Philippines for America?

**MS:** Well, there would be no Jim. And that would be huge. I don't think I would be the very independent, outspoken person I am today. I would be a different person. I think that I wouldn't have had the challenges I've had in my life that have pushed me to be independent, opinionated, outspoken, strong-willed. I was thinking about this. In terms of the very hard moments in my life; I forgot to mention that residency was extremely hard for me, physically, emotionally, mentally. I think that really formed me, as well, in terms of establishing that assertiveness and that presence. That was a very, very formative time in my life, as well.

**LM:** What is your greatest fear?

**MS:** I guess losing what is most precious to me: my kids. I think everybody has that fear about your kids, your husband. Do you want to ever think about losing them, and them getting into an accident, or something like that? That would be horrible.

**LM:** And your greatest hope?

**MS:** I would want my children to grow up as kind, generous, good people. I want them to have integrity. I want them to have a commitment to social justice. I want them to be involved in the world. That would be my greatest hope.

**LM:** I would like to know what you think is the biggest challenge facing your generation of young Filipino immigrants in today's American society.

**MS:** I think it is keeping the Filipino culture and, especially, the Filipino language alive. I speak Tagalog to my kids. They understand it. Some of their first words were Tagalog,

but they don't speak it back to me. I think the biggest challenge with the second and third generations is how to establish that. How do you teach the language to them so that they will make it their own? How do you make it happen? Tagalog classes? Studying in the Philippines? It's really important to me that they understand it and they speak it. At this point, Isa and Nio are understanding it, but not speaking it.

**LM:** So you think the most important challenge, and our topmost responsibility is to keep the Filipino language alive.

**MS:** I think so, and then, culture will follow.

**LM:** What can we do about it? What do you think should be done?

**MS:** I think a journey to the Philippines is one way to do it—at least they're exposed to the language or immersed in it. They have a reason to speak it, whereas here in Minnesota or in the U.S., you don't have to speak it. Everybody speaks English. Most Filipinos speak English. Filipino-Americans speak English. We're from an immigrant population that is highly educated and speak English very well, so the need is not there. We're not a generation that isn't able to speak the language and the children do not have to be the mediators. We don't have that kind of experience. I think it's something that we really need to stress.

**LM:** Maryam, you have been an absolutely remarkable narrator. I will now be concluding this interview. Do you have a final statement or, perhaps, some words of wisdom?

**MS:** Well, I think my final statement would be that we have much to be proud of as Filipinos and as Filipino-Americans, as Filipino-Minnesotans. My dream is that we pass on our language, our culture to our children and our children's children so that they will be as proud of it as we are today.

**LM:** I would like to thank you very much, Maryam. It has been such a great pleasure doing this interview with you. I had a most delightful time.

**MS:** Oh, I did, too! The pleasure is mine.