

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH POM FRITZ**

An Oral History Conducted by Kristel Peralta and Stefani Evans

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Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander  
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
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University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2020

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

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## PREFACE

One of four children born to a farming family in Udon Thani, Thailand, Pom Fritz is a retired guest room attendant who arrived in Las Vegas in 1981 and worked at the Flamingo, Desert Inn, and Mirage hotels and casinos. She is a longtime member and leader of Culinary Workers Union Local 226, serving as committee member, shop steward, Trustee, and member of the Executive Board.

Pom came to the United States with her second husband, a member of the U.S. Air Force, in 1972. After a few years living at Air Force bases near Sacramento and in North Carolina, she left her marriage and moved to Riverside, California, where her younger sister then lived. Finding no work in Riverside, she commuted to Santa Ana (a distance of about 40 miles each way) to work for \$3.10 per hour from 1979 to 1981. This was a time when gasoline prices were rising, so Pom's eighty-mile, round-trip commute took a large portion of her pay. After her 1981 move to Las Vegas, her neighbor helped her to find work as a guest room attendant (aka housekeeper) at the Flamingo Hilton Hotel and Casino. In 1985 she joined the Culinary union and rose through the ranks.

In this interview, she talks of her work with the Union and the duties and benefits of membership; she also describes her role as a committee member and a shop steward. She identifies the people who raised her up in the Union and talks about boosting the employees she's helped. She recalls working full-time at the Desert Inn and picketing the Frontier Hotel and Casino before and after her shifts during the six-year strike. The inspiring mother of five children (with three sons still in Thailand), also raised three grandchildren in Las Vegas.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Pom Fritz

June 8, 2021

in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Kristel Peralta and Stefani Evans

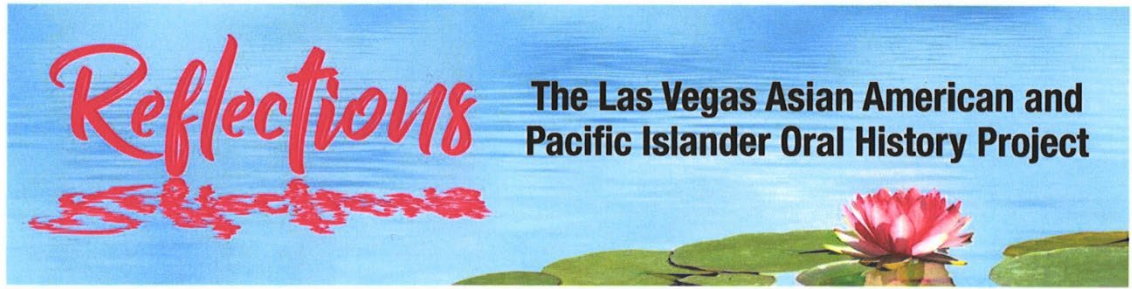
Preface.....iv

Parents; 1972 arrival in U.S.; North Carolina; Beale Air Force Base; 1979 move to Riverside, California; commute to Santa Ana. 1981 move to Las Vegas; Flamingo Hilton Hotel and Casino; Flamingo Hilton Hotel and Casino; Desert Inn Hotel and Casino; Culinary Workers Union Local 226; perceptions of Las Vegas in 1981; Steve Wynn, Desert Inn, Mirage, and promise to rehire DI workers; the Frontier Strike 1991-1998.....1-11

Union Trustee 1991, Union leadership, picketing at the Frontier, and Frontier owner. Standing up for Union members, benefits of Union membership, importance of contract, mentors and Union leadership. Demanding respect and fairness from hotel owners. COVID-19 and effects on work and members.....11-20

Immigration, family, and establishing credit. Medical benefits of Union membership, responsibilities of Union members to honor contracts, dealing with conflict.....20-29

Duties of Union committee member and shop steward; encouraging members to stand up for themselves and know the contract. Sister, brothers, children, current husband. COVID-19, interrupted travel, missing items from packages mailed to family in Thailand.....29-41



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Stephani Evans                      6/8/2021  
Signature of Interviewer                      Date

**Good afternoon. This is Kristel Peralta. It is June eighth, 2021. I am here with Stefani Evans, Cecilia Winchell, Pom Fritz, and Nelson Lucero and the Culinary Union.**

**Ms. Fritz, could you please tell us about your childhood, family, your parents, siblings, and anything you can remember about growing up?**

I'm from Thailand. My parents lived in Udon Thani; that's where I was born. My mom and dad were farmers. They had four children, two boys and two girls. That was it, I guess. Just a farmer, just a regular farmer; grow rice, grow vegetables when I was young and stuff like that. When I was eighteen I got married to, well, my first love at that time. Anyway, we didn't last, really. I have three kids by him. Then we just broke up and I remarried.

I remarried to military, and so I came to the United States in 1972. He was stationed in Beale Air Force Base, California, near Sacramento. We stayed there for a year. Then, when he retired, my ex-husband—I'm talking about my ex—we moved to North Carolina, since he has family. He was born in North Carolina, and we lived out there. It seems like life is getting better. The money, too, everything at that time is so hard. I came to the United States and I don't know nobody. Then I started working in North Carolina, working in a factory making baby clothes, sewing baby clothes. I was working in the factory making No Nonsense Pantyhose for a couple of years. Somehow we didn't get along again. We don't get along, so I moved from North Carolina in nineteen—no. We moved from Beale Air Force Base. We stayed there for a year and then we moved to North Carolina; one year [at Beale] and then we moved to North Carolina. Then I moved back to California again; 1979, I moved to California. I was trying for a better life, I guess, to do some things for myself.

I have five children. I have five kids. But the two kids were with me, and three of them were in school at that time in Thailand. My mom and dad said it would be better for them to stay

over there with them, for them, and I agreed with them. I was kind of young, too, when I come to the United States. I was twenty, twenty-one. Things were getting better for me, actually.

“Where are you going to work?” I don’t even know about the union or anything like that. Nobody talked about that. Finally, I moved again from North Carolina to California; Riverside, California; 1979 I moved there. There were no jobs. No jobs, no nothing. I didn’t know where to turn, actually. Thank God I have my sister. Her family was there and they’re helping me out and things like that. In Riverside, it’s no job. It’s really hard to find a job. Then, finally, I get a job in Santa Ana. In Santa Ana, to drive from Riverside to there, it takes an hour. Then I only made three ten, I think it was, three dollars ten cents [\$3.10 per hour]. When I just go over and get paid and coming [commuting] back and stuff like that, there’s no money left. It’s no money. It’s just really sad. I stayed there for a while, too. I just don’t like to live with somebody, with no money, no job. You know what I mean? [*Ed. Note: Driving distance from Riverside to Santa Ana is approximately 38 miles, but the actual commute from home to work was likely longer. In addition, gasoline prices rose from an average of .63 miles per gallon in 1979 to an average of 1.19 per gallon in 1981.*]

I was thinking about it and I heard about Las Vegas. At that time it was 1981. I heard that and I said, “You know what?” I told my sister and told my friends in California, in Riverside, I told them, “You know what? I’m going to move.” They tell me, “Again? My god, how many times you got to move?” I said, “Well, I have to. I cannot live here. I can’t because it’s no money, no job, no nothing. How am I going to live? Maybe if I go there, I heard that you can work in the hotel, you can do this or that. I don’t know, but I’m going to go check it out.” I sure did.



I think I know one person—I forgot her name now—that lived here on the Westside at that time. They said, “Hey, Pom, you know what? If you come, you can come stay with us. You can get a job and things like that.” I stayed there for a little while and then I just go have my own apartment. I can’t live with them. I had a little bit of money. I sold everything from North Carolina, everything I sold, so I have a little money left still. I didn’t live with them that long, and then I got get my own apartment.

I get an apartment, and a lady lived upstairs. She had five kids. She has five children, and I said, “You know what? I have five kids, too.” Things like that. “They’re just not with me, though,” I said. “We have a problem,” I said.

“Hey, you know what? I work at Flamingo Hilton,” she said. “You want to work?” I said, “Yes, I want to work. That’s the reason I moved to Las Vegas.” And she said, “Hey, good.”

I have a little girl with me, too, and she is handicapped. She is in a wheelchair. I stayed and took care of her for a little while. It’s another thing I don’t know where to turn because she needs medical attention. She needs medication, needs a lot of things. I needed so much help at that time. And so she said, “You can go work. I’m going to talk to them. You can work.” I said, “What kind of work?” “Housekeeping.” I said, “Whoa, housekeeping, I never worked housekeeping in my life, but I can do it. I can do it.” She got me a job. She talked to them. I said, “What about my daughter? What do you do with your kids?” She said, “How about if we take turns? You watch my kids when I’m working. When you go to work, I’ll watch your daughter.” I said, “Hey that sounds good. It sounds good. Hey, I like that.” And so I did, I worked at the Flamingo Hilton...I forgot what year it was.

I went to work. I got a job. I worked there for a couple of years. I worked there for a while, a good while. When I started working, they talked about the hotel room signed a contract

and things like that, they're going to go on strike, because they have one girl, she's from Thailand, she's a box person. She's a really young girl. She said, "Hey," blah blah blah. She asked me, and I told her my story that I told you. Then she said, "Oh, okay. But you know why you're union?" I said, "What union? What do you mean? I don't know nothing about union." Then she was explaining it to me about the union [Flamingo Hilton Hotel and Casino], how good is this, and that. But then we let it go, and I go to work and stuff like that. I don't know what happened.

Then I decided to move from there [Flamingo Hilton] to Desert Inn. I just wanted to see how things go. I like to do that. Then I moved to Desert Inn. I went to the union because they tell me, "Hey, you go union, they got your back," and stuff like that. I thought I would join the union in '84, but I think my records say '85. Probably when I came I just didn't know; nobody really helped me to go join union. I don't know where to go or nothing like that. I'm surprised (NAME), she didn't even tell me; that little girl, she would try to tell me everything. I guess she forget that, too. That's why.

When I decide to move to Desert Inn, I went to the union. I said, "I don't have a job; I want to get a job," like that. Maria, she still works up there at the union hall [1630 S. Commerce Street, Las Vegas, NV 89102]. She's still there, I remember her. She gave me seven hotels to pick one, which one I want to go. I say, "Oh, that's one." I didn't know any one of them. I said, "I take Desert Inn." I worked there for twelve years, a long time. When I started working, Shirley and Jo Marie [Agriesti], she worked at the union; they were there. They were talking to me and this and that. She said, "Oh, you're the new one. You're not here long." I said, "Yes, I just started." She said, "You know we become a community," this and that. Believe me, I listened. I

really didn't understand none of what she said. I didn't know, but she keep coming. They didn't give up on me.

That's what I like about union: They never give up on you. This is true. I said, "No, I can't do this. No, I don't know. No, no, no, I can't do it. I don't know." She said, "Oh yes, you do, yes, you do." I said, "Why you pick me? Why did you pick me instead of Jo Marie?" She said, "Well, when you sit on the table when you take a break, it seems like the people are following you." The workers follow me; they just come sit and talk to me. I don't know. They say, "These supervisors, they treat me bad. They treat me bad," this and that. I go, "Why they treat you bad?" It seemed like, "Why do you allow that to happen?" To me it was like that. When I left Thailand, I don't allow nobody to step on me, anyway. I was like that in the beginning. I said, "Why are they going to talk to you like that?" They said, "Well, they're supervisors, they're this and that."

**SE: *You're not talking too long at all. We love this story.***

Oh okay, so you want me to continue?

***Yes, please.***

**Oh yes, please. I actually have a question. When you first moved to Las Vegas, what were your initial thoughts of the city?**

What I thought about this city at that time? Well, you know what? When I came it was like nothing here, actually. It was a lot of mountain. It don't have the Wynn, the Mr. Wynn, the hotel, they don't have that. They don't have Mirage. They didn't have a lot of hotels on the Strip. It's just like empty, small. They have the Sands hotel, the old hotels, and stuff like that. It was really old at that time. They have Atlantis, something like that, the one that's really down the Strip...

***The Aladdin?***

Yes, that. They tore that down. It was like nothing when I came. Then when I was coming, one year it seemed like, *boom boom boom*, everything was... Another thing, when I was staying [working] at the Desert Inn, at that time I think Mr. [Steve] Wynn wanted to build the [Wynn] hotel and back to the golf course. I was shop steward [for the Culinary Workers Union] already at that time. I was then shop steward. There was going to be on that, and we were so happy. Oh yes, we're so happy you're going to do that.

Then when we have a meeting with them, with the company. We said, "Well, if you guys are building this [new hotel], then what about us? Do we have a right to go work in that building?" They didn't answer us. I say, "Oh heck no, are you kidding?" I said, "We're working here so long time, and you all of a sudden want to dump us for that?" I say, "I don't think so." That's what happened. It was just like they would give us a hard time. Then finally... And then he [Steve Wynn] said he buy that for his wife's birthday. I said, "Wow. That was good, beautiful." Finally I never saw them and she just agreed what he said. I said, "It belongs to you. It was given to you. You should have a right to say something." But then finally they built it. They built that [The Wynn Hotel and Casino] and then they shut the thing [Desert Inn] down. I told him, "You know what? It's so sad. I've been working here for twelve years. We've been working in here for a long, long time." I said, "I feel like I'm divorced, again." I said, "All over again." I said, "I feel like I'm divorced again, all over again. I didn't have a lot nice." Again, I said it like that, "Now what? Come on."

Anyway, it come out and we had a meeting and stuff. It was all good. He [Mr. Wynn] said, "Well, when we build this, we're going to call first to get to work." He kept his promise. I think he's no better than keeping promise. I think he probably said, "Oh no, we've got to call them." I got a letter when it was open. But, in the meantime, when they're building that I come

to the Mirage [also built by Steve Wynn]. I came to Mirage. They hired me right away because I think when we were in the Desert Inn, we were training to go to school and be at five-star hotel. All of that thing, it was good for us, too. It was really good us, and people would say, "Oh, they're five-star, so we can hire them." They hired me right away. They hired me that day and I came to work. Then when Mr. Wynn opened they called us. We had first priority to went to work, but I told them, I say, "I appreciate it, but I didn't feel..." I think at that time I think it was four years already. I only have seniority. I only get to my coworkers, a lot of thing. I really pushed it that they called us to work, called me to work, and I thank them, everything. They said anytime I wanted to go back, they would hire me. Then I was... it was not easy.

Another thing, when I was staying in Desert Inn, the Frontier [Hotel and Casino] was on strike. They go on strike, 19[91]. I was still working the Desert Inn at that time. It seemed like they come to me just so long, I can picket, too. Then I go over there helping them every day, every day. Nobody is going to cross the line. The people that worked there, as far as I know, nobody crossed the line. Nobody doing that. We were really fighting. It's really, really sad, too. A lot of people died from it. In that time we have not that big union member. We have a small union that we want to form a strike. Everyone get together. Nobody come in. Nobody wanted to cross that man. We're tough. We are tough. We're not going to tolerate it. If somebody does come in, we just call them scab or just tell them, "Hey, you know we're on strike. Don't you see? This company don't want to give us nothing." We just say everything.

**SE: *Where did you walk when you were striking the Frontier?***

In the Frontier.

***On the Strip or on that side road?***

On the front, the sidewalk, yes.

***What were the rules to strike? Did you have to keep moving?***

Oh yes, yes, we're walking. We constantly walk. We don't sit down, no. We don't sit down. We're just walking. We walk back and forth, back and forth. We chant. We chant the whole time. We chant the whole time, yes.

***What did you say?***

Well, we said...what? I don't know. There are just so many chants. Let me see. We said, "What do you want? A contract. What do you want? A contract. When? Now." And then sometimes we say so many, we sang so many. We said, "We aren't no chicken no more." Yes, I mean, we're not tolerant of them. We are fighting, woo. Like, (NAME), she started the union. And Geoconda [Argüello-Kline], she's secretary-treasurer now, and she's there, but at the time she was organizer. She's a fighting... D Taylor. But at that time, Geoconda, okay, I saw her. We saw each other. Like D Taylor, too, I see him get him up there. I say, "Yes, get up there, kick butt." Sometimes people say *kick butt*. We say *kick ass*. Excuse me, okay? Excuse me. They call us sometimes, I think that one time I heard them say it that they call us the gangsters. They call us "those gangsters." I told him, I said, "You know what?" I said, "Whose gangster is it? It must be you." I said it like that, because we're not gangsters because we fight for our rights.

***Who called you a gangster?***

Yes. I forgot who.

***Was it the owner of the Frontier or...?***

No, I don't know. I forgot who was it. Yes, I think the whole union knows about that, but I forgot who now. I should have write his name down. Yes, he was on the news. He was on the thing and he said all of the union was gangsters. They called us gangsters, yes. I remember another thing when I was—I'm retired already now. I still help union. I still help the union

because I love the union. I love the honesty. I love that they're not allowed, they're not tolerated to let people step on other people. That's me, I don't like it, either. I like people to, hey, come on, we are human. Then what I see everybody is an employee just like me. Why you got to talk bad or mean or...you know what I mean?

Anyway, but when we have that strike, it's not easy. It was tough. It's so hard, oh my god. We're up there. We're going to pass out some things like that, and we're still doing that. We're still doing that. They have a little tent put in there, and they would stay in there because it was so hot. They have water, I think, put water in there or something. Yes, to try to cover up with water and things like that. Besides, I don't want it; I don't want the money, anyway, but I'm not employee of the Frontier. I was an employee at the Desert Inn. [*Ed Note: The Culinary Union's successful strike against the Frontier Hotel and Casino began September 21, 1991, and ended more than six years later, on February 1, 1998.*<sup>1</sup>]

I remember they give the worker fifty dollars a week. They lose their home, a lot of people [strikers]. But you know what? I was just so proud of them, because they never crossed the line. They never crossed the line. They're doing that. They're doing that for six years and something. We're doing that. Then I tried to organize the people, the Frontier, my coworkers, to go over there and help, and I tell them, "Don't go inside that place, ever," I said, "Ever, until they sign a contract." We worked really, really hard to confront them, all six years, ten months and four days, oh. I mean, it's just... But I'm so proud. What's that, Geoconda, she worked there. And Mirna [Preciado]... I forgot Mirna's last name. Mirna, she's a union director. She's retired now. She's worked there, too. She never, never crossed the line. Ana never crossed the

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<sup>1</sup> Bethany Khan and Sean Kennedy, "UNLV Project Documents Culinary Union's Frontier Strike as 25th Anniversary is Celebrated," press release, 22 September 2016, *Culinary Workers Union Local 226*, <https://www.culinaryunion226.org/news/press/unlv-project-documents-culinary-unions-frontier-strike-as-25th-anniversary-is-celebrated>.

line. They never, never crossed the line. I'm so proud of them. We really, really did it together. We really did it together, even though we don't have that much money. We don't have that much money to do it. I felt so bad, because I was still working. I'd get paid at the Desert Inn, but those people, the ones that worked in the Frontier, that's when they lose a lot of things. They lose... Yes.

***You worked a full day at the Desert Inn, and then you went and walked the picket line?***

Every day, every day. In the morning I come early and walk maybe an hour or forty minutes in the morning, because I had to go to work, and then sometimes I was there, when people were having problems. I just wanted to keep on it. I was just nonstop for something like that. Then I worked, and then when I get off work, I would find some friend. Some friend, they worked so hard, they didn't want to come. They say, "Pom, I've got children," this and that. "Well, you know what? Think about it," I said, "I have grandkids myself." I said, "You know what? Just thinking, those people work really hard. They're fighting for their rights. They're fighting for their benefits. They're fighting for seniority. What they're fighting for, they fight for a good reason. And they're in there fighting for you and me, too, so we're going to have to be strong at the union." I told them that. I said, "And pretty soon, what if Desert Inn don't sign a contract? It's coming." I said, "It's coming." I said, "The company has looked at us. They know what we're thinking. They know what we're going to do. Are we going to fight or are you going to give up and get fired, anyway?" Oh, I refute. I said, "We're going to get fired for no reason."

Some of them are scared and they don't want to come out. I remember Jo Marie and Shirley [Burke?], my union rep. I say, "Okay, you're not coming. You better think if that happened to us, if you're like them on the Frontier and you're not going to have nothing guaranteed, because you don't know tomorrow what's going to be. They might fire you



tomorrow because we don't have contract. Then what you going to do? You can be fired if you don't have union contract. You can't do nothing about it, and then, you better think about saying goodbye to your house, saying goodbye to your car payment, because you don't have it because you don't have a job." I was telling them, "You better start thinking, I guess." Then we come out, it's just like twelve of us come out. We come out and then I said, "Well, I guess we're going to go kick butt." Actually, I didn't say *kick butt*. I said, "Go kick ass." Excuse my language. And guess what? Then we went up there like five minutes, all those people from Desert Inn come out. They would come out and say, "Hey, Pom, she's not bullshitting." Excuse me again. I said, "No, I just speak the truth. Sometimes the truth hurts." That's what happened. It was...oh god, it's not fun. It's not fun, but we did it all. We did it all. We didn't have money to really fight or do a lot of things.

But 1991, I got elected to be a trustee at that time at the union. I was a trustee. Then when we have a meeting, I know at that time Jim Arnold, he's secretary-treasurer, and Hattie Canty, she's the president at that time at the union hall. They were telling me, they say, "Unions don't have no money or nothing like that." Then when I was being a trustee and secretary boss in there, I get paid like one hundred dollars a month. I told him, I say, "I just go ahead and help the union, help the worker," because they [the striking workers] get paid fifty dollars a month. Then Hattie Canty and Jim Arnold, he put ten thousand dollars each in the union, and then a lot of people at the union, like union rep that works with the union there, they were trying to sell lemonade. Tried to sell lemonade like one dollar or something, their soda. It was (38:06), but we were talking about who going to do what. But I said, "Well, I get paid one hundred dollars a month. No need to give to me." I let it go to the people that need it. I said, "Because I have a job." They don't have a job; they just get fifty dollars a week.

But [back then] we have a small, small union. I couldn't remember how many union members. But now we have sixty thousand union members, but at that time it was really small. Then we fight to the end. We fight to the end. It was tough. It's not easy. It's really hard to organize, too. It's okay, I can talk to them all day. But then they're scared more, actually they're scared. They're afraid they're going to get fired. "They're going to this and that." I said, "No. You know what? You're not going to get fired. You're doing for your rights. This is your right to do it. Las Vegas is union town." I said, "Come on, think about it." And I said, "I just let you know." I told them, "Do what you want. But I tell you what, I hope you do the right thing. We have to fight together and stand together. That's how we become a union. That's how we get this. And you're saying they're going to come." I said, "Oh, I'm going to sign a contract for you. Do you think they're [the hotel owners] going to do that? I don't think so. You're going to have to stand for yourself." Then they think about it. The company, they aren't going to give you anything.

When they're telling you they're going to give you that, let them sign a contract, then it will be sure. I even talked to them like this. I said, "You know what? Just stand like this out there. Pretend like you are me. I'm going to take you both to lunch tomorrow. I'm going to take you to lunch tomorrow, Marie." And they say, "Oh, you're going to take me to lunch?" And I said, "Yes, I am, I'm taking you. We'll go to lunch tomorrow." Then tomorrow comes and I pretend like I don't know nothing. I said, "I don't know nothing." Then she knew and asked me, "Hey, you remember, you tell me you're going to take me to lunch." And I said, "When? When I do that? I didn't sign no paper. I didn't sign my name in there. The same thing the contract." She said, "Oh, you know what? I didn't thought of that." I say, "Yes."

Then they come. They come there. I say, “You know what? At least you can do thirty minutes.” I say that before you do an hour. “But if you can, you can do thirty minutes,” because they didn’t want to do it at all. They say, “I’m so tired.” I say, “Me too. I’m tired, too. We’re all tired. But we’ve got to stand together. We cannot leave everybody behind.” I said, “You know what? Don’t you feel bad for the people in the Frontier? Look at that. They fight for their rights. They’re fighting for them, and then they come for us, too.”

Like the company, that lady [Frontier owner, Margaret Elardi], she’s so mean in there; we call her Evil. I don’t know her name, though. I forgot. At that time I know her name. I don’t remember her name now. Oh my god, we could see that it was bad, people fighting in the parking lot. It just was a lot of things, fighting, I mean fistfight at that time, as a man. You’re not a man? Oh. They’re really, really tough. We’re not tolerate it, just like we said. I said, “You know what? We build them hotels, actually, come to think about. What is it, the company? What did they do? Just tell you what to do. Now I’m not tolerating the supervisor goes around the back to all of my coworkers or to me.” I said, “You need the respect.” That, I fix that. I’m not allowing it.

Now that I’m in the hotel, I’m not allowing them to treat my coworker—matter of fact, we had a meeting and I tell them, I say, “You know what? Everyone working here, all the supervisors, all the office people, if they see us they should [say] thank-you to the workers for the hard work we have.” And you know what? They did. They tell them, “Thank you for hard work.” I said, “See, it’s not that hard.” Same at the Mirage, I told them the same thing. I said, “Thank you to the workers. They work really hard.” I said, “You’re not just going to say, ‘Oh, I’m supervisor, so I’m going to treat you bad.’ No. No, sweetie, don’t do that. It’s not nice.”

Actually, think about it. When you're working, if the employee is happy, they do a better job. I tell them when we are meeting, I say, "You know what? Just see it this way. You have children, right? When you're going to ask your children to do something, what do you tell them? How do you say it? It's not what you say, it's how you say it. If you say, 'Oh, you go give me that thing right now,' do you think the kid is going to look and say, 'Why are you so mean to me? I don't want to do it.' Kids are exactly the same as grown people, right?" You need to say, "Tom, I have another guest that's going to check in. Can you go next?" Just say it like that. We know we're going to have to go anyway. We have to do it. But we're almost finished with this room, and let them finish this room. You know what I mean? Or if their staff is half, last room, just come first. If we've got to do that, that's fine. But like, okay, just put the towel, everything in the last one, and say, "Oh no, you drop everything; they need it right now; you've got to go right now," I said, "No, no, it needs to stop, stop right then." It doesn't make sense. You can talk to the guest and give them a little bit longer. The guests are being nice and when they come in, we don't forget nothing. If you forget something, you're going to (46:24) thing like that, no, no. We asked you to stop them, they stopped, and now they're better now. I don't know about that now.

I heard they're not that good now at the Mirage. It's really bad. I'm not \_\_\_\_\_ myself. They don't want to have a meeting; they don't want to have anything. You have housekeeping meeting every month; good or bad, you've got to have it. I did that. I did that. It was good. Just tell them, "Hey, thank you." Everything is so good, running smooth, everybody is happy. If it's not good, then we fix it. I even tell them, "Hey, you get paid to fix the problem."

I had one human resource lady come tell me, "I need to know about the union thing." We were sitting and having a meeting. She said, "Well, you've got a union. Do you know what the

union is?” Something like that. It was so long ago. I tell her, I said, “Excuse me.” I put my hand out. “No, no, no.” I said, “Excuse me. You know what? We’re having this meeting right now. We want you to solve a problem, not you’re going to come tell us about the union. We know about the union. You don’t need to tell us nothing.” I tell her to apologize, and she did. She did, yes. It was so much more. It’s just like, golly, these hotel people, they’re so mean. They’re mean if you allow them.

Any questions, just stop me, okay, because I’ll talk, talk, talk.

**Who were some of your biggest inspirations as you were trying to push for more rights and for more humane practices?**

When I go in, it seemed like most of the time you’re going to see how they’re talking or who they’ve got a problem attacking, and then I go to the union. Since I learned so much from the union, if I have a meeting or anything like that I write it down. Even though sometimes I write not that good, but I write it. I know my own handwriting. If I don’t know a thing or something like that, you just call them and ask them, “How do I do this?” And you go fix it. A lot of things, because it seems like every day everybody has different [problem], and I don’t know how to track this thing. Because if the people have a problem, it seems like it is always different, a little bit different. It’s just about the same meeting all the time, job performance.

The other thing we have to remember or practice is about the contract. You have to know your contract; that’s what it is, like what pays or what... Just like sometimes in the company, just mixing working, like sometimes they get housekeeping girl training to be a supervisor. A thing like that, we look at that as mixing work. It’s not really allowed, that. We can’t work with the office nonunion and then with the union. Decide whatever, this training; they don’t get benefits from the hotel. They get benefits from the union. I think it’s unfair and not allowed. When I

worked there I said, “Okay, how long you’re going to let them train?” I say, “Actually, it shouldn’t be two weeks and bring them out, and then you can hire them or they come back.” I will say that. I will tell them that and that’s the way it is. I don’t want people to be a supervisor and then be union, too. No, you’re not. They’re not happy to be in union. They’re happy because they get good benefits.

**SE: *Who were your mentors in the union?***

I really didn’t understand this word.

***Mentors, the people that lifted you up in the union? Who were the people who brought you along?***

Oh, Jo Marie, in the beginning, Jo Marie. The first time I go, “Oh no, I’m not doing this; I don’t know; I don’t understand,” and she never gave up on me. She never give up. She would come pick me up. I even tell her, I say, “I don’t drive. I’m this and that.” She said, “I’ll pick you up.” Yes, Jo Marie, yes. She never, never give up on me, Jo Marie and Shirley. I forgot her last name, Shirley, but she was together with Jo Marie at that time. She used to build me up, build me up, oh my god. I’m just like, oh okay. She said, “You can do it. You’re good.” I said, “I do? I do?” She said, “Yes, you can do it.”

Then they come to 1991. At that time Jim Arnold and Hattie Canty are still... Jim Arnold is secretary-treasurer and Hattie Canty, she is president. They talked to the union members here and whatever. They even asked me to be a trustee. I said, “Okay.” I did. I’ve been a trustee for a long, long time, over ten years. I forgot what year was that. Then they trained me to be on executive board. I retired after that. I have been doing that for twenty years, in the executive board for twenty years.

***But it was Jo Marie and Shirley that really encouraged you at the beginning?***

Yes, especially these two people. Jo Marie never, never give up. She would come pick me up no matter what. I go, "Wow, you're doing that for me?" She'll do it. She said, "Yes, because you're going to be a good leader." I said, "How do you know I'm going to be a good leader?" "I see you. I see you." Yes, that's her. I'll never forget her. I'll never forget these two people.

Then I think when...I forgot what year was it...D is going to run to be secretary-treasurer. I don't know D so much, but I know he's a fighter, too.

### *D Taylor?*

They're fighting and act like they don't know him. He is good. He is fighting. Like I said, I don't like to say kick butt. I say he kicked ass. Excuse my language. And the same thing as Geoconda. Then they elect D Taylor, and then they get Jo Marie to become president, the union president. I was already in the executive board. I was in there already. Then Geoconda, she come in and D Taylor was coming in.

Oh, I forget to talk about who else is a good fighter, too. John Wilhelm, oh my god, yes; at that time union negotiations, oh my god, he can get it. I really forget a lot of stuff, but I remember I worked at the Mirage. At two o'clock in the afternoon, they come and say, "Pom, we have to negotiate the contract; it's coming up. I've got to go out of town." I forgot what hotel, a hotel downtown that has been fighting for a long time to get the Mirage Hotel and Casino. I think one time, early one time negotiation. The last one I remember it was two o'clock in the afternoon. I was still at work. They come get me and we go. Then we stayed all night, until four o'clock in the morning. I remember that one company was saying, "Oh, you need to tell your people." I don't remember what that conversation was about, but I know the company said, "Oh, you tell your people," like that. I'm not happy the way he said, "You people." I didn't let the company say that. I think it's really no respect.

*What do you think he meant by “you people?” What did he mean?*

He mean like us. He said, “You people,” like, “You tell your people.” To me, I think we’re just not “you people.” To me, I think it’s really low. I think that. I said, “You don’t respect us when you say ‘you people.’” I don’t know what he meant by that, but to me, I think it was bad, no respect. Then I tell John Wilhelm, I said, “John Wilhelm, didn’t you hear what he said?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “Well, you know what? I’m not really happy the way he said ‘you people.’ He needs to take that back.” I say it like that. “You tell him that he needs to take this back.” Guess what? Then the meeting started again. John Wilhelm said, “Well, a while ago you just said ‘you people.’” He said, “Might you remember,” I think he said, “They’re not really happy when you say that. You do not respect them.” He said, “You need to apologize.” Oh, they’re all up in there. They said, “Oh, we’re sorry. We’re so sorry. We didn’t mean anything.” Oh yes, you did, but that’s okay, we accept it. That was it. It was good.

Same with D Taylor; oh, he gets it, too. After he [John Wilhelm] retired then D Taylor took over. He’s a good fighter, too. He’s a good fighter. Now the president Ted [Pappageorge], he can do negotiation, too. He can nail them, too, yes. I see him do more that I think one or two times I think Geoconda did, but he’s really good, too. To me (1:01:10), no. No, no, no. But these people taught you have to get your voice out. They get their voice out loud and clear.

**In regards to COVID-19, what have been some of the biggest struggles for you in the Culinary Union?**

It’s really sad. It’s hard for me because I didn’t get to go to the union [hall] no more. Really shot that down. Everybody just goes different directions now. I mean, everybody stayed at home and things like that. It’s just like in jail to me. I miss my friends, my coworkers. I used to get to go with them, go to this hotel, go to that hotel, and do a lot of good things. Now I can’t really do



like that no more. Just like today, I should have been sitting out there in a [face-to-face] meeting with you guys, but I can't. I have to be in here [connected electronically, via Zoom]. It's really sad. But it's much better now, though. It's better in Las Vegas.

Joe Biden, to be president, I really think he do a good job. Everything is better than Trump is. Talk about Trump, you know when we do a registration. I was helping union, volunteer going to Aria Hotel [and Casino]. I put the table in there. I put the sign up in my table. I said [Voter] Registration. Then I think that one man—I have his name, though; I don't know where I put the little card—he's a boss or something at the Aria. He come down and he sees me, what I am doing. I say, "Well, I'm doing a registration." He said, "Is it only a Democrat?" I said, "No, sir. You can do this, too. You can fill out if you want to vote or something like that." He said, "How come you're only helping Hillary?" At that time I think we [Culinary Workers Union] went for Hillary, we were doing. Then he said, "Well, what about Trump? Why you don't like Trump?" He asked me. I said, "You want to know the truth?" He said, "Yes, tell me." I said, "Okay. Number one, he is lying. Everything come out of his mouth, he's lying." I was in his hotel, but I felt like I had a right to say that. I feel like, I'm organizing and you asked me, I'm going to tell you. I didn't run up there to go to tell him, but he come to me, and he asked me why, so I gave him a good answer. I said, "Well, he's lying all the time. Every time he opens his mouth, he lies." He said, "Oh, you don't watch the news?" I say, "Are you talking about Fox 5 [KVVU Television, the local Fox News affiliate]? Heck no, I'm not." I'm sorry to say that. "I'm not," I said. "I don't trust Fox 5 because—" Oh, I say a lot more than that. Anyway, until he leaves me, the longer he stands there talking to me, I talked to him, yes. He gave me a card. He gave me a card and he said, ( 1:05:29). I said, "Okay, thank you. Nice to meet you. Nice to talk to you." Sometimes the truth hurts, but I don't care because I just tell the truth.

**How did you feel when the recent president of the United States and other high-ranking officials referred to COVID-19 as the Wuhan virus or the China virus?**

About the China... You know what? To be honest, I'm sad. I'm sad. I'm really sad. I don't want people to be hurt like that or be condemned so badly. Nobody wants to die. Nobody wants to have this kind of disease. It just happened. We are human. We're stupid. We're not smart. We are human. Things like that at that time, when I heard, I don't know if it's true or not. My grandson says, "Grandma, the China people, they eat bat." I said, "No. Are you sure?" "Well, yes, they say it in Facebook or something on the phone." I just tell him, "You know what? We don't know for sure." I said it like that. "So, leave it alone."

I don't know how to describe it. It's more sad, and people die, and I wish this thing never happened. I pray. I pray to God. I say, "God, help us," because it's only God knows. Only God knows. God is the one who created all of us. (1:07:42) whatever \_\_\_\_\_. He give people two choices, right? He give it to you, and you're going to do good or you're going to do bad. In \_\_\_\_\_, the Bible, God said something you should never eat. He said it's no sin in there, no sin, but it's going to give you sick. He said that. We're here and we don't know. Some people, they don't know what the Bible said. I'm not going to say I know everything. No, I don't. In the Bible, I don't know all of it, but I know about when you eat, if you (1:08:55) to clean the earth, and then humans don't know and will eat it, it's going to make you sick. Nobody going to get sick. People get sick; that's what happened. But what can you say? I can't go out there, hey, eat this, eat that. I may get slapped because that's how people are. I don't know how to explain more than that.

**I know that situations having to do with a green card and sponsorships have been an issue. What are your thoughts? Also, what was your experience emigrating from Thailand to the United States?**

You know what is my experience? I learn more. I learned so much more. I know how to be independent. When I was in Thailand, believe me, my dad and my mom were farmers. Guess what? I don't know how to do all that. I cut myself. I still have a scar on my finger. Because I'm not good at that. I'm not good. To do farm work, to do—how you say when you cut rice? The rice thing? I forgot how to say it in English. That's the farmer. I can't do that.

Then when I got older and I got married and going to come over here, my dad was so worried about me. He said, "She just don't know anything, and she's going there and, my God, what's she going to do?" My brother, my younger brother and my mom, they were so worried. They say, "Oh my God." Then my sister is even younger than me. He'll call my sister and say, "Hey, you know what? Your sister is going to come over here. You've got to go look to how she's doing. I'm worried about her. I don't worry about you. It seems like you can take care of yourself. But her, Pom; I'm so worried." I said, "Dad, it's okay." If I tell him, I say, "Oh, I'm fighting with my husband," I'm this and that, "Oh, you want to come home now? I send a ticket one-way for you to come home. I send a ticket for you one-way and you come home. They're no good. You come home. Tell it like that." Then I begin to think, I can't be whining like that, so I stopped telling him. I stopped doing that.

Actually when I married my last ex-husband, he's really bad, really bad. Do you want to hear about this, or no? Well anyway, it's been a long time now. It was really bad and just say I came over to the United States.

My English is not that good. I tried to learn a little bit English, but still I just think sometimes they understand or sometimes they don't; I just talk. Then finally when I have time I said, "I've got to go to school. I've got to do something." I said it like that. And I did, I went to school. I never finished, but I keep going because I work. I just work all the time because it's not like you're [I'm] in Thailand, and if I'm mad at my husband or fired or something, I can go home. I can go to my father and my mother's house. They're Asian people. They're not going to say, "Oh, you can't come home." They don't do that. But over here, who I am going to go? Who am I going to go? Even with my own sister, my own sister, she welcome me, but what about her husband? I was so much in love when I married that guy. I think the thing has happened for a reason. It's just like...he's supposed to support me because I'm his wife, right? And I have two children with him. It's just I'm the one that be working. I not be working. I not be taking care of my two kids.

I remember [the woman] next door to me when I was in North Carolina; she felt so bad because at that time I work at factory. I made two dollars ten cents at that time, really, really small. I walked. Now just imagine; it's so cold, and I don't have no car. I don't have no car. I have a kid I have to carry to go to babysitting, and I go to work. Then the lady next door, she feels bad for me. She says, "Hey, Pom, why don't you buy a car?" I said, "I can't. How do I going to buy a car? I don't have money to buy a car." She said, "Go to the bank. Go to the bank. Go borrow money from the bank." I said, "Really?" All my life I never borrowed money from nobody; no bank, no nothing. I didn't even know about that in my country. I think, okay.

She took me. She took me to the bank. They asked me, what can they help me? I say, "Well, thank you for asking me. I need to borrow to buy a car." I tell them, "I need the car so I can go to work or grocery store and take my daughter to the babysitting." And he checked my

thing. My ex-husband had such a bad thing [credit] and I can't get it. He said, "Oh, no, no." I never had credit in my life. But I was like twentysomething, twenty-two or twenty-three, I think, at that time. Then I kind of upset, like hurt my feelings, I guess, hurt my feelings more, because they don't want to help me. Then I say, "You know what? I came over here. I really need you guys to help me." I say, "I really need the car. Why can't you guys help me?" I say, "I work. I didn't make that much, but I'm sure I make enough to make car payment. I guarantee you that." I say it like that. "I'm going to pay you back," I said. Then that guy there said, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry." I said, "Oh okay, thank you for helping me." I say it like that. Then I'm going to cry, but I don't cry.

I come back home. At two o'clock my phone was ringing. The manager at the bank, the one that talked to me talked to the manager, and he called me and he said, "Ms. Billings?" At the time I was Billings, my last name Billings. He said, "Ms. Billings?" I said, "Yes. Who is this?" Then he explained to me. I said, "Oh, hi." I said it like that [without expression]. "What can I do for you?" I said it like that. He said, "Oh, I listened to your story. You know what? We're going to get you a car, but I'm going to go get the car. I'm going to go look. I don't want you to go because you're a woman. The people might take advantage of you." He said that. He said, "We're going to get the car for you." He go get Chevrolet. First time in my life I got the Chevrolet car for six hundred dollars.

In one year I pay him off, and then later on he said, "Ms. Billings, if you want to get another car..." I said, "Oh no, thank you. I got this car running good and everything." They're helping me. "Oh my god," I say.

Yes, I got the car because they hear my story. They say that he feel like—when I say, "How come they don't help me? I need help." I did say that, yes. He said—I got the car. He go

get that car, four-door. I drive for a long time. It's worth it. It's worth it. Oh my god, I was in (1:19:24) until I really came more for their side; didn't have no job, no money, no nothing. The money you have left, it's gone. I used to have jewelry and stuff like that, and I pawn, I sell to buy food and stuff like that.

Thank God then I moved to Las Vegas. I made the decision myself to come to Las Vegas, and I do better. I drive a better car. I have a job. I don't have to...what is it? Just like guarantee, contract. When you have a five-year contract, you know you can buy you a car; you can live pretty good at that time. It just goes up, goes up a little bit. Now housekeeping, make nineteen dollars an hour. The house person, nineteen dollars an hour.

Then when I heard the people come out and say, "Oh, it's union, nothing," ooh, it burned me up, believe me. I get really upset. I don't know why. I really get angry, but I didn't show that. It's inside of me is just burning up. Then I kind of get my voice real loud and I say, "Uh-huh." I say, "What? What did you just say?" I go like that. That means I'm really pissed off now. I said, "What did you just say? You have a guaranteed job, and you still say union no good? You want everything free." I almost say, 'Well, go back where you come from,' but, no, I'm not that kind of person. You know what I'm saying? You come out here and you get better life. You thank the Lord, thank God, that you have a union to be on your side, to take care of you, to do everything. But they're going to say something like that. Don't want to pay union dues. I'm fighting with these people all the time. I used to say, "Wait a minute." I say, "You know what? You don't want to pay union dues? What this paper? This paper here you get for free? There's nothing free. You want union people to work for nothing? Don't have building, no nothing. Come on, now. Common sense. Use your brain." I go like that. That means I'm mad. I'm ready to fight with them. I'm ready. I'm not stopping. Yes, I say, "You know that. You know I'm right. You take

your children and go to the doctor. You shouldn't have opened your mouth. Thank God first and then thank the union. If you don't have union, everything is so expensive. Common sense. Wake up," I said.

Oh, when I was working at Desert Inn, one lady, she is housekeeping like me. I've been talking to her to join union for years. That woman don't want to join union. I say, "Well, you know what? What about your kids and stuff? If they're sick or whatever, how are you going to do this?" I say, "Well, you know what? Whatever. I'm not going to argue with you." Then one day her son was sick. She took her son to go to the doctor. I forgot where she took them. Then they asked for her insurance, and she don't have it. She don't have a card. Somehow she didn't get the cards or nothing because she never filled out the union member. She never fill out, so the union don't have her records. It's in computer and she don't have no name, no nothing in there. Then the doctor said, "Well, you have to pay a co-pay of one hundred dollars before the doctor can see your kid." Guess what? She don't have a hundred dollars. She don't have one hundred dollars.

The next day she came straight looking for me. She come straight looking for me, and she said, "I'm looking for Pom. I'm looking for Pom." I say, "I'm over here." I said, "Come here. I'm over here." She come and she told me what I just said. She said, "Oh, Pom, you know what? You're right. Give me the paper. Give me the thing so I can fill that thing so I be union member." I give it to her. I always have everything with me. I always have stuff with me. I give it to her, and she filled it out. I say, "You know what? I think later on I'm turning this in. I'm turning this in tomorrow morning because it's late now and they're closed." Then later on she's thanking me.

**SE: I was going to ask you, do you find, like with this story that some people don't want to join the union until they need it?**

Yes. This is true. This is a fact. They don't want to join union. They want something free. They want everything free, just about, these people. I didn't say all of it. A lot of them, they push it when you talk to them. But a lot of them, they don't want to pay. They don't want to pay union dues. Now, see, when that happens they wake up right away, and then the next day she's looking for me. "Pom, give me the paper." Same at Aria. I've got a lot of people sign up about the union because I have a book. I have a book, like union give to you, the book, the name, and say who pay and who don't pay. I have for them. Yes, I do. I not tolerate. I get so angry. I don't know why. I get so angry that people don't want to pay. They thought, well, union bad. I not tolerate it. I say, "You know what? Keep to yourself. Keep to yourself," I say. I say, "You know what my mom tell me? She said, 'If you don't know how to say something good, keep your mouth shut.'" I'm not afraid of them when they say about the union, but when they need help, who comes see me? You know what I tell them? I tell D, too. I tell D Taylor. I say, "You know what? I get really, really against people that don't pay dues." Oh okay, what is that? Union said check in. I could be so firm. Then I tell D, I say, "D, you know what? People don't pay union dues, I tell them I don't help them." Yes. But they say it's the law you're supposed to help. And D said, "No, you're shop steward. That's okay. You can say what you want." I said, "Oh, thank God. That's good." But I already say it.

You know what? The people, the ones that don't want to pay, sooner or later they always need help. They always need help. This is a fact. Then they're going to come—at the Aria, I don't know how many, but I know I get a lot of people sign up. Sometimes the people take leave, like they have kids; things like that. They say, "I join union. I join union." I open the book up



and I say, "Yes, honey, you joined union before. That was last year. But this year you didn't join union." They say, "How you know?" I say, "Right here, honey, come and look. Right here. This your name?" Then they say, "Oh okay." I say, "Why don't you do? I give the card. Here is the card and you sign it. That way you be back the union member. Right now you're not union member," I said. They said, "Ooh, I'm not union member?" Some of them. I said, "Yes, you're not. You're not union member, honey, because you didn't fill out this." Then they fill out.

**SE: Do some people think they're members and aren't? Do some people think that they're automatically a union member if they get a job at a union shop?**

Yes, yes, that's what it is, yes. That's true they think that. That's why union send us, send a union organizer to go in there to work it out nonstop. Plus, I like it. I like it, because the union never sleeps. These people, you cannot sleep. If they get a contract, they aren't sleeping, believe me. When they get contract (1:29:48), but that's okay. But we always get in touch with them or things like that. That's the way it is. I don't understand. I don't understand, too, about people like this. I don't. Why they like that? Then it's not only that. Sometimes they get lost when they're going in. I think just two times when I volunteer to go to Aria, they have Asian people, Filipino group, about ten or twelve people sitting at one table, and they finally need help. It's got to be one person that's not good. It's got to be one person. This is a fact. Because I'm getting used to that.

One day I walk in the table, and I don't know what I said. I forgot. I have something to tell them or something. It's been a while back. One lady, she just stand up. Oh, I think I was organizing them to go walk. Where was it? We have picketing. I think it's \_\_\_\_\_ or somewhere. Yes. Then I tell them to balance here, to do this, do that. Then one lady stand up and she said, "I'm just so sick and tired of you." She pointed her finger at me. "I'm sick and tired of

you coming to tell everybody to do something. What about you? You don't do nothing." I just listen. I let her finish yelling at me. Then she said, "I used to be a shop steward. I know all about it." Oh, she was cussing me out. Then she said, "You're getting paid. You do all this. Don't come tell all of us to do this," she said.

I tell her, "You finished?" I said, "Are you finished speaking?" She said, "Yes," like that, really, really attitude. Then I was standing out there, and I tell her, "You know what? Number one, actually I'm not talking to you, because I know you, the way you look, you're not friendly. You are bad news." I'm so mad, I just say it. I don't care. I was so angry at her. I said, "You're kind of bad news." I heard around about this lady trying to organize people. Then I tell her, "Number two, I don't get paid because I love union. I love my union members, my coworkers, and that's why I'm here. I'm retired already. Union is good. You stand out here and talk nonsense, and I'm not going to tolerate you." I said it like that. I said, "You don't have no right to yell at me at all. You can talk to me." I said, "You can talk to me. Maybe I'm not agreeing with you, but we can talk. But I tell you one thing, though. You should never, never again to yell at me again. You understand?" I said it like that. Then I said, "You have a good day."

All the girls, they were on my side, thank God. I thought maybe some of them were going to stand up and yell at me, too. I was sweating. Then a lot of them would stand out and say, "Pom, we're so sorry, okay? She's no good. She's got a bad mouth. I'm sorry for that. She's Filipino like me." I said, "Oh, she did?" But I already know she's Filipino. I said, "Oh, she did? Oh well, that's okay. But I tell her off. Maybe next time she be..." Guess what? Next time, she's so nice with the people. Maybe this lady needs somebody to stand up with her. People sitting out there say that I'm telling her. Next day they say, "You're so mean to Pom." They go out there. I get with her. I say, "You're fighting for me? Ah, that's okay." I say it like that. "She's just so

angry. She's not happy." I say, "That lady is not happy and she's not union member. She don't want to pay union."

**SE: What would your advice be to a young woman just starting out in the union today?**

Well, you know what? I want to tell them they could become the committee with the union. That's my opinion. I think they go ahead and join union. To me, I think when the union rep or somebody talks to them, they should listen. If they listen, it's not going to hurt them. It's not going to hurt nobody to just listen. Matter of fact, they learn something more for their future, to me. Then if they're going to start—like union rep talked to me, like Jo Marie—say, "Hey, you can be on committee first." This and that. Then you learn so much. Then you go to the union and you go to the class to be a shop steward. I go every class. I go there. I finish every class just about, because I want to know. I want to know more, and that way, I learn more. To me, I think in the future—I got elected to be a trustee. I be secretary on board. I learn more. I get to go to San Francisco. I forgot what the hotel there was on strike. I go on picket line, go, and come back. I did that. I get to go to conventions in Chicago. I used to get to go to Washington, DC, and talk to Harry Reid, talk to people. It's a good future, to me, and learn more in the future, learn more.

**SE: What does being a committee member mean?**

Committee, you start like—the union rep, when they give you ten names, say, one time, your friend, you work here how long? Things like that. They're going to sit by the book and you know them, right? Then you just pick the name and make them feel good. "Oh, I want Marie. Oh, I want Jesse. Oh, here, here, you write it down yourself." Give them the paper, right? "Here, I'm going to open the book." I have a book anyway, right? I can say, "You look at a name you like." They go, "Oh, I like this Maria." "Here, here, write it down." Then, "Which one you want? How many people you think you want? You want to start at five people? Maybe five people? Or you

want ten? What do you think?” Then some of them say, “How about I start five?” “Okay, get your friend.” Then they get their friend. Then you’re going to talk to me. Do they join union? You’re responsible. You have their number. You talk to them all the time. Then, if we have a picket line, you talk to them to go. Or they have a meeting at a union, they can come, too. Things like that. That way they learn more, and things like that. But you tell them like that, and then they get excited. A lot of them, they want to be [members], yes.

**SE: And what does it mean to be a shop steward?**

Shop steward is helping people, like people having problems, I help them. I did learn step one is go out there—okay, beginning in shop steward. I was shop steward for a long time. The people that had a problem, they would come to me. They come to me, and then I would ask them, “Okay, what’s the problem?” Things like that. If they want me to help or if they get suspended or things like that. If they get suspended or if something is not right, we’re going to have a meeting. I would start up the meeting. I would start up the meeting, and I’m going to fix that problem. I’m going to fix that. But mostly I win the case, so I win the case.

I think that one time the girl, a Filipino girl, she’s housekeeping, my friend. Everybody knows you’re not supposed to take cell phone with you. She’s wrong, right? You’re not supposed to carry your cell phone on the floor. She have an emergency. Emergency, somebody passed away in her family. I think her husband called her, but she picked up the phone. She should never have picked up the phone. She should have let them call housekeeping and then they come get her. You know not to answer the phone. You know you’re not supposed to have the phone on the floor. You’re supposed to leave it in there; that’s the rule. Sometimes you’ve got to respect on that. I respect them for that. That’s why they really respect me, actually, the company respects me, things like that.

But when I have a meeting with them and I have my contract book, I go by my contract book. I'm not going to go with their book, no, I'm not. They love to do this; the company loves to, "Oh, this is the rule." I say, "No, no, no, this is the rule. This is my contract. It's right here," I said. I say about the union rules, "I already know about the rules about doing this, doing that, but this one here is a solved problem." These are solved problems. That's what shop stewards do, an investigation, investigation for this and that.

Most of the time I would tell the worker, I say, if it's not so big, I would tell them, "Okay, you go see Cathy, director. You go see her. You go first by yourself. You do like I told you." Whatever it might be. I tell them, "You go tell them." Like, take a suspension away. Just say she don't call, no show, but she call. I said, "Did you call?" "Yes, I called four o'clock in the morning, but I got suspended anyway. They can't find." I say, "Well, you call by your cell phone. Open your cell phone. Open it up. It should be a thing [date and time stamped] in there. The call, it should be on your phone." I said, "Then you go over there and you tell Cathy, the director, and say that they suspended you, and you called in so-and-so. You show them [your phone] and you tell them that your suspension one day or whatever." They give you one chance, no call, no show, at the Mirage. The second time you're fired. That was her first time. I told her, "You go and tell her that. If she's not agree, come get me and then we go together." I'm pretty easy. I'm pretty easy with them.

I give them a chance a lot, the office. Then they're going to say, "Who send you to come here?" I say, "You say Pom. Pom told you to come talk to them." Then she'll go there, "Oh, I don't agree. I don't see nothing," or something like that. I say, "Okay, then I call back." I say, "Cathy, I'd like to talk to you." She say, "What about?" I say, "About that so-and-so that you say that you're not going to pay her that day, and then you're suspending her, and all that. I want

everything off,” I said. “I want you to take the suspension off, clean her record, and then you pay her one day back.” I say, “Do you agree, or you’re not?” I say, “You should.” I say, “I do you a favor.” I say that. I’m good at that. I said, “I’ll do you a favor.” I say it like that. “Just help the company. The company’s got to pay her, not you. The company pay it,” I say. “But it’s up to you. She’s going to go file a grievance.” No. “She’s going to do a \_\_\_\_\_. And then you not agree and she’s going to go file a grievance and she go to arbitration. Hey, that’s a lot of money she’s spending.” I say, “Well, you think about it. You think about it, Cathy. Ain’t no matter to me. But I just tell you the way it is.” Guess what? She calmed me down and said, “Okay, Pom, I see it.” I say, “Well, open your form up and show it to her what day you’re seeing.”

See, some people didn’t want to pay it. The company, they don’t want to lose. Well, I’m telling you what, though, I ain’t going to lose either because I know she is right. If she didn’t have that I don’t know what to do.

**SE: She had it [the call] right on her phone?**

She had it right on her phone, yes. It’s just a lot of problems like that. People, just sometimes they don’t want to pay. Then one time one lady, she’s an alcoholic. She really drink heavy. She’s housekeeping. She got suspended. Actually, she drinks so much, but she didn’t drink at work. But I think that the workers smelled her. They go support her. You see, the workers are together. They attend to each other, a lot like that. They go out there and say, “Hey, I smell you. You drink at work.” She said, “No.” She didn’t. She drank last night.

Anyway, the supervisor come up and take her downstairs. They suspended her for two weeks. Then somehow she finds my phone number. She got my phone because I think somebody tell her to call me. She called me. She said she got suspended for two weeks. I say, “Well, why

you got suspended? What did you do?" Then she told me and she said, well, she drinks, but she not drink at work. She drinks at home. Then the next day she still smells, I guess, that she is alcoholic, too.

She came and I look. I forgot what page was it. This is not in the contract book. I think I went to the union. I forgot who I asked. It could be Charlene [Payne]. Charlene, she is really good. I like to go with her when she do a grievance. I think I called her up, and she told me what page was it in the contract. It says that if she is under something on the alcohol drink, or something. I forgot what page now. They cannot do that to her. I think it's under [a certain] percent [of alcohol in the blood as a percentage]. I forgot now. At that time I just open it up and I read everything. Sometimes I didn't understand and I call her back, what that means and stuff like that. Charlene will tell me what that means. Then she said, "Oh, Pom, I know you can fight that. She's not over [the percentage]." Like that. She's not over drink or something like that. But they call it other words now.

I went in and they said, "Oh yes," blah blah. I tell them, "You know what? Actually she was under." Under three or something. I used to say it on that book. Then I say, "I read before that. You guys need to pay her two weeks because you didn't look what's in the contract. You didn't do that. You suspended her." Matter of fact, they suspended her and they were going to get rid of her. Two-week investigation; that means it's bad. I told her it was a good thing she called me first before they fired her. Then I go back. "You believe that?" I said, "You can look in the contract." They check on that thing and they say, "That thing that you say, it was over the limit, but actually she's under." They got a paper. They got a paper that they were going to get rid of her. Then I look at that and I said, "Well, if you fire her then you're going to pay her

more.” I said, “You’re going to pay her more. Right now I think she’s need to come back to work, and you pay her two weeks.”

Guess what? They did. That lady just come and say, “Thank you, Pom. Thank you.” I told her, “Don’t do that again.” I called her to another side when we got done meeting. You know what? This case? The system-wide president at the Mirage come down and meet with me. They came down. They were so proud of me. They come down and said, “I heard this story. I had to come down.” Then I say, “Well, you know what? She probably needs help.” Guess what? They find a place for her. They do a lot of things for her. But that day she’s just lucky that drink is not over limit. That’s how I win the case for her. Then she’s crying. She says, “Thank you, Pom. Thank you.” I tell her, “Now you know don’t do no more.” I say, “If you do it again, you know what? You’re out. Don’t call me, because it’s not going to work because you drink so much, but you’re just lucky it’s under.” I say, “If you drink over...” She’s hungover because she drinks so much. People, if they drink a little bit or even go to bed, tomorrow it will be gone. But her, it’s still in her body. I just wondered, did she take a shower? You need to take a shower and smell good to come to work, hello.

**SE: But the fact that you had that rule book, you were able to save her job.**

Yes, exactly. The contract, it’s a help. That’s why when people talk about union, I get so angry. Can you blame me for that? I get really angry, yes. It just helps people. I don’t understand why they’re like that. I do not. But there’s a lot of good people, too, though.

**SE: Sure. Is your sister still in Riverside?**

No. My sister moved out here, too. Yes. She works at Mandalay Bay. She’s been a union member for thirteen years. She’s a back person and she can do a lot of things. She goes to Culinary Union school. You know what? She works so hard. She’s lifting. The bone, this side



and this side, it was like—what you call it? It's not work no more. On this side, it's not work no more. She has to have surgery nine times on this side and then this side, too. Now she's just disability, poor thing. But she followed me, too, because I tell her, "I work with the union." I say, "Hey, you know what? You come down here if you want."

**SE: You're the one that wasn't supposed to be able to take care of herself, right?**

Yes.

**SE: Yes. And yet, you're the leader in the family.**

Yes, yes. She's been thirteen years, but she got her pension. She get her pension and stuff like that. I got my pension, too. Oh, when I retired, just say like this year and next year, I'm going to retire, right? I'm sixty-two next year. I tell my coworkers. They say, "Oh, no. No, no, no, no. You're not retired. You stay here. Who going to help me?" "You. You help you," I say. "You need to do like this. You need to do it. You don't let the company stomp you down." I say that. They don't want me to retire because I'm the one helping them. I say, "It's not true." I say it like that. "You need to do something." I've been training them. I've been training them before I leave. I've been doing so much in there until the union say, "You know what? Go get somebody else. Don't let Pom do it. She do too much already."

**SE: What about your brothers, are they still in Thailand?**

My brothers, they all live in Thailand, and they pass away, yes. Yes, they pass away. It's just me and my sister. I have three boys in Thailand. They want to come here, but then they don't want to be living here. They have their own business. They do things. Two of them were farmers that they pick up from my family.

**SE: What was the name of the place where you were born?**

Udon Thani. I have to write that down because I don't want to forget the way to write it, Udon. You spell U-D-O-N. Thani is T-H-A-I-N-E (sic), Thani. Udon Thani in Thailand.

**SE: Udon Thani?**

Yes, Udon Thani, yes. You see I wrote it down right here.

**SE: Oh, there it is.**

Yes. See, a farmer, I was farmer. We in Thailand, we are farmer, yes. My mom. This is my dad. That's his name, Pomn. This is my mother's name. Her name Theeb. They have four children. Sometimes you forget. I write it down like that. Yes, I write that down. I forgot. I be forgetting.

**SE: You have three boys in Thailand, and two are farmers. What does the third boy do?**

What they do, you mean?

**SE: You said two of them are farmers?**

Yes, two of them.

**SE: And the other boy, what does he do?**

The other one, he sells things online.

**SE: He sells things online?**

Yes, he sells Buddha. That he believes. I can't say nothing about that.

**SE: You have your daughter here.**

Yes, I have a daughter here, two daughters. Angela, she is here and she's working. She works in engineer thing. She has five kids.

**SE: You have five grandchildren.**

Yes. Then my other daughter, the baby one, she passed away when she was nineteen.

**SE: Oh, I'm so sorry for your loss.**

Thanks. Yes.

**[2:00:00 to 2:00:15/delete from recording]**

I have custody of my three grandkids. I raised them, three of them. I got them because she didn't do good, so I just take care of them. I got them kids. Thank God I have a union. When you have custody of them, you can put them on your insurance. That's why you have union. It's good. I love union. Now they're big. They're grown now. Jeff, he just came over here earlier to help me set up this thing for me. He come help me. I said, "I need your mom helping me. What the heck? And she doesn't even know how to do it, and she's a thing at college." I said, "Why you don't know?" He said, "Mom, I don't know." And, see, the first time we have a meeting, I couldn't get nothing done. Everything just move really fast. Now my grandson coming. He said, "Momma, do like this." And then it worked, see.

Now I'm married again. Oh, I can't forget my husband now. For thirtysomething years now.

**SE: Congratulations.**

Thank you. He is a \_\_\_\_\_, but never get mad at me when I go to union. He just say, "Okay." I say, "Oh, honey, you know what? I have a meeting, okay? My day I have a meeting." I think so many week I'm off on Friday/Saturday and he off Friday/Saturday. He didn't tell me ahead he's going to take me and go to dinner. He didn't tell me. Then I have a meeting. He say, "Oh, honey, tomorrow I'm going to take you for dinner." I say, "Ooh, honey, I'm sorry you didn't tell me earlier. Oh my god, I have a meeting. I can't, okay? I'm sorry. I go next time. How's that?" Then next time it happen again. Then for next time he tells me two weeks ahead. He tells me he wants me to go two weeks ahead. He says he's going to take me to dinner. Then I have a meeting come up the same time. I say, "Oh, not this time. You know what? Not this time." I tell my husband so

many times. I've got to go with him for dinner. But he never get mad. I go somewhere one week, three days or whatever, go with the union to do this. He never gets mad.

**SE: Well, he sees how good it's been for you.**

Yes, yes, yes. I believe that, yes. I believe that he trusts me and I trust him. I like to help people, too. I love to help people, yes. Then I learn so much. You know when you can say things. You know you shouldn't say or not say. Then they have Jim...the lawyer at the union. He teases us, too. He teases us about a lot of things. You learn that from him, too. I learned so much from D Taylor, from Charlene because I hang out with them a lot. I have learned so much. Like Geoconda, you know she's a fighter. She's a fighter, yes. That's how it is.

You have to ask me. Stop me because I'm talk, talk, talking. What's your name? I'm sorry. How you spell your name?

**SE: Me? I'm Stefani. Stefani, S-T-E-F-A-N-I.**

Okay, Stefani. That's such a pretty name, Stefani, yes.

**SE: Thank you.**

That's a cute name, yes.

**KP: I just had one more question. Do you ever go back to visit Thailand?**

You know what? No. But I did plan to go, but corona [COVID-19], they don't want me. I was planning. I didn't see them so long. Actually, in the middle thing I'm going to go to Thailand, and I lost my passport. I don't know how to get that. I don't know anything about things like that. I didn't go, actually. But I talked to them, though. I talked to them and whatever. Then I say, "Okay." Actually, I was so busy. It's not excuse, actually, but I didn't. Just like I'm so busy. I'm working and then I go with union. I have two jobs. They think I living at the union. They said next time I probably have pillows and a blanket, sleep over there. Then finally, about a year

and a half when the corona hit, so we didn't get to go. We buy a ticket over there. I still have a ticket right now. Me and my sister and my husband, we're going to go. We're going to go. Then over there in Thailand was bad and they shut down. Over here, too, they shut the whole country down. We didn't get to go. Now Thailand is getting bad now, too, because of other countries coming there and stuff like that. I think Panama and another place, they're just coming and they bring that. Other people, they go to boxing place and they just too crowded. People are not wearing masks or nothing, and it spread. It all come back out again. Now it's getting bad again. I have to wait again. I just pray and hope that it gets better soon. That's why I didn't get to go back. I still have a ticket, though.

Guess what? Then I bought a lot of gifts for my grandkids in Thailand and buy stuff for my son, too, and his wife and his kids and all those things. Guess what? Somebody stole it. They opened it up. They opened the box. I have two boxes. I have one box that I have—how many pairs?—like four Nike and a sandal. They didn't take the sandal. They take three pair [Nikes]. They take the good ones. Then they take the brown, so many they took. They broke a Super Bowl mug. I sent it to my son. I saved it for a long time. I sent him and it broke. All that stuff broke. I think they broke it on purpose. They take just about an empty box. They record it and they let me see it. I say, "No, no, this is ridiculous." I was so hurt. Mainly I'm sad because a little kid, like thirteen years old and fifteen, another one nineteen, that pair of shoes, they've been waiting the whole year because I'm going to go to Thailand. I didn't get to go because of corona. Then I send it to them and the box come. Oh, they were so happy. Then they look and they didn't have it. Then they get the next box. The one pair of shoes, the baby one, they got it because they didn't open the second box. I said, "Thank God," because I [sent a] watch for my son that costs three hundred fifty dollars. There were two watches in that second box. All that second box, it

was so expensive stuff I bought. Then the shoe. I don't know. It just costs so much for us. Then they didn't open, thank God. Then one boy, he got the pair of shoes because I put the one in the second box. He saw that. "Oh, that's mine." Size eight and a half. He ran and he was so happy. But what about the other two boys? The two boys look at him. "Please, can I just try them on?" He say, "Okay. You just try them on. That's mine." They try them on. "Oh, that fits me. Oh, that fits me. Are you sure that's yours?" They all say it fits them, too, because they felt bad. I felt so bad they didn't get that. It's so sad. How can they do that? A long time ago I send seven watches to them because my brother has four kids, four boys, and I get three boys, so seven kids, right? Seven boys. They stole four of them and they give him three. It's sad. Why they so mean? You work with the governor, the post office, I think. How can they do that to the kids? Guess what? I write that down. I tell my daughter. I write about this story. I said, "This story, I'm going to put on Facebook." I say, "How can somebody? Shame on you to steal it. I call that stealing." I told them, "Don't you feel bad for the kids?" They don't know nothing but wait for the whole year, and somebody just took it just like that.

**KP: I'm sorry that happened.**

I know. I didn't know that. Right now I buy six more pair. I'm going to send to my other son because I have three sons. They have kids. I don't know. I shouldn't send that. But then my daughter-in-law say, "Well, Mom, maybe you send one pair each time. Send two pair each time. But if you send so big like that, maybe it's true." Then I'm going to buy two more pairs and try to send one each time to see if they get it. They can buy in Thailand, but they want something from here. They want something from the United States that comes from me. I say, "Oh, I'm so sorry. Okay, I'm going to get two more pair and I'm going to send them for the ones that got

stolen.” Actually, three, three pair. I’m sorry, three pair. They got them and I don’t know if they’re wearing them or they’re selling them, I don’t know.

**KP: Our final question is, why is it valuable for the university to collect interviews such as yours?**

Well, to me, I’m so proud that y’all are doing that. I think that I’m proud of that. Actually, if it wasn’t for union, I wouldn’t be like I am now, actually. I’m very proud of that. I don’t mind if you’re going to ask me or talk to me. I’m proud of people to ask me. I’m really proud. I’m not sad, I’m not mad, I’m happy. I’m happy. I hope this thing stands forever. I heard that you guys are going to put in (2/00:43). Hey, I’m so proud. Let the whole world know. It’s the truth, true story. It’s good, yes.

**KP: Thank you. Thank you very much.**

You’re welcome. Nice to meet you, too, okay?

**KP: We appreciate your story.**

I love to. I don’t know if it’s good or not.

**KP: I enjoyed it. Thank you very much.**

Thank you.

**[End of recorded interview]**