

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH MACH AND ARLENE MANUEL**

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, 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. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases, photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Building Las Vegas Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White  
Director, Oral History Research Center  
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## PREFACE



*“We’re not young, but we’re still in love... I guess we fell in love with the difference... We would say for our family, everything was not without a lot of work and sacrifice.”*

From two different sides of the world, Mach and Arlene Manuel share their colorful lives of growing up in two contrasting environments. With their only geographical similarity being the Pacific Ocean, the married couple explores the struggles, joys, and sacrifices of being a long-term and long-distance couple, as well as merging their two worlds together.

Mach was raised in San Diego to a pair of parents and a brother. He shares his experiences of finding his identity through his roots and taking pride in his Filipino heritage. Mach is a stay-at-home dad but has notably worked part-time at several Rogue Toys locations over the Las Vegas Valley. Arlene was born and raised in the Philippines and has lived there for nearly thirty years. She uprooted herself from the lively Filipino family culture and moved to the United States to begin a new life with Mach. She is a nurse at Sunrise Hospital and St. Rose Hospital. They have a daughter named Summer and are preparing for her sibling in the upcoming year.

In this interview, Mach and Arlene discuss topics of family, racism, COVID-19, and many dimensions of culture. Additionally, they emphasize the importance of a family unit and how each member would cease to function without the other. Their views and opinions make for interesting conversation, and ultimately are the glue that bind them as a loving couple.

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June 28, 2021  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Kristel Peralta

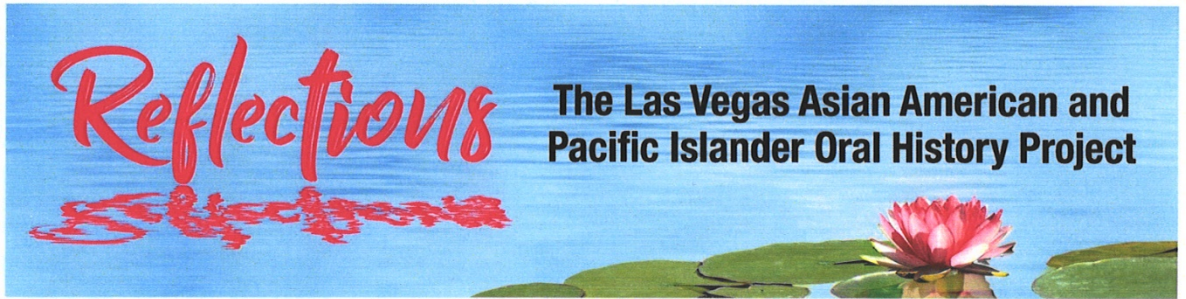
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Mach and Arlene talk about their early life and families. Arlene mentions growing up in the Philippines for nearly thirty years. She describes the lively Filipino household and the tightly knit family dynamic that treated her well. Mach mentions growing up in the rougher neighborhoods of San Diego. Both talk about their family backgrounds and how each occupation shaped the way they grew up. Mach contrasts his American experience with Arlene’s. They also share the experience of meeting one another and the details of a long-distance relationship. Mach and Arlene touch on the idea of long-term dating and how they witnessed each other grow over the years.....1-14

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Use Agreement

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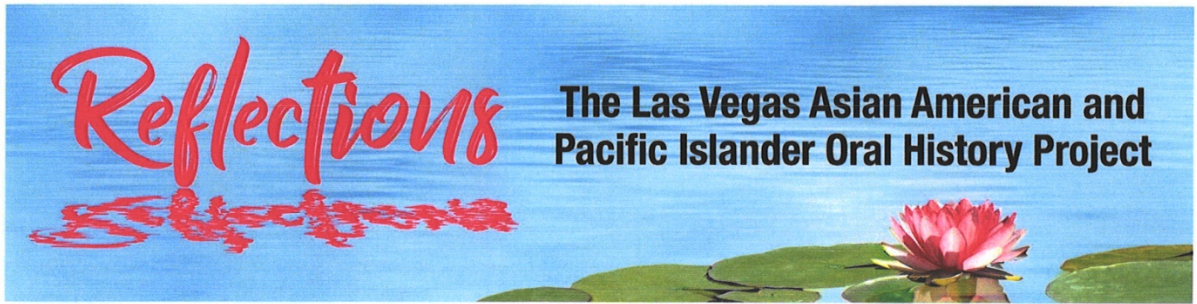
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Arjene C Manuel 6/28/21  
Signature of Narrator Date

Kristel Peralta 6/28/21  
Signature of Interviewer Date



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Name of Interviewer: Kristel Penata

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M. V. Manuel 6/29/21  
Signature of Narrator Date

Kristel Penata 6/28/21  
Signature of Interviewer Date

**Good morning. The date today is Monday, June the 28<sup>th</sup>. This is Kristel Peralta and I'm here with Stefani Evans and Mach and Arlene Manuel. The Manuels, could I please ask you to spell your first and last names for the interview?**

Arlene, A-R-L-E-N-E.

*Mach, M-A-C-H. Last name Manuel, M-A-N-U-E-L.*

**Thank you very much. To start, I would like to ask—any of you can jump to this question—about your family and your childhood, any friends, siblings, growing up, where you grew up, and what it was like.**

I grew up in the Philippines. [As for] family, I have three siblings. I grew up all my life in the Philippines. I moved here in 2013 when I was nearly thirty years old. Basically, I'm your standard, one hundred percent Filipino. I grew up in a Catholic home. I went to a private school. All my siblings—we're very close. My parents were very strict. I pretty much had a really good environment growing up, but pretty sheltered. I didn't get exposed to a lot of crazy things. Coming to America, it was a little bit like, *woah*, what did I get myself into?

*I grew up in San Diego. I was born in the Philippines, but I was brought to America at six months old, so I was raised pretty American. I won't really say much about my childhood because that would be a two-hour conversation just by itself. I had both parents and one older brother growing up. In a lot of ways, my childhood was quite the opposite of hers. I was exposed to...*

Everything.

*Yes, the stuff the typical American would be exposed to, which is quite different from the Philippines.*



**Could you tell me what your education was like? Where did you go to school, and what was it like going to school in the Philippines and San Diego?**

I kind of mentioned it; I went to private school. My parents had this belief that we can't give you money or gold or anything, just a good education. They worked their butts off and sent me to the fanciest private school in Manila—which was ridiculous because I was with all the rich people, and I wasn't rich—so that was interesting. From an early age, I grew up adapting and getting along with people that were different from me. I guess, it kind of helped a little bit. I just knew who I was, and it was not an easy lesson to learn. I mean, when you're a teenager; you want the same things your classmates have. But in hindsight, I'm so grateful for my parents sending me to that excellent school. I wouldn't have all this education behind me if it weren't for them.

*Again, my experience was quite the opposite of hers. I grew up in what would be called "the hood," so I grew up where it's minorities. A lot of my neighborhood was Asian—a lot of Filipinos. From elementary to middle school to high school, I didn't really feel like a minority because it was all Asians, Hispanics, and Blacks. In fact, the high school I went to, I believe, had the highest number of Asians in the San Diego school system. The schools that I grew up in were your average American schools. Again, except for the fact that it was in the hood and it was largely minorities.*

**Thank you. Could you tell us more about your family dynamics and, if you can remember, your grandparents?**

Should I start since yours will be quick?

*That's a hard one for me because that's going way back, growing up.*

You didn't see them, your grandparents, right?

*Oh well, my grandparents, yes. I didn't know my grandparents. I knew one; I think she passed away when I was pretty young, around twelve or so. She was in the Philippines. She visited us a few times. But, yes, I didn't really know my grandparents. As far as family dynamic, average two-parent household.*

Then for me, it was the opposite, again. My parents and siblings kept to ourselves, but there was an extended family. I grew up with my cousins. I grew up with both sets of grandparents. I had really good memories with my grandparents, both sides equally.

When we got married it was really like trying to merge those two things, too—different experiences. It was interesting.

**Going off how you grew up with a bunch of cousins and family, what were some fond memories you remember, and what kind of memories do you recall the most from growing up with them?**

I mostly remember my grandma's cooking and going to their house. It was really my brother that was close to me. But having uncles that would clean your ears for you was just so crazy. I just had a family that was [around me]. Then, of course, endless birthdays because everyone's birthday was just rolling around and you're always together. My brother and I went everywhere. We would spend weekends or sometimes whole weeks in my grandma's house. She would let us eat spaghetti every single day. It was fun. I don't know. It was just really like life was full. It felt like there was always somebody there. My parents built that environment for us, for us siblings, so it was good, yes.

**That's good. This question is for Mach. You mentioned that you were born in the Philippines, but you grew up in San Diego. What is your family's migration story? Why did they decide to come to San Diego, and how did they get here?**

*I don't know the full story. I know my dad joined the U.S. Navy. In the Philippines, he came from a really small town, so he was kind of like that small-town boy who wanted to get out and do big things—travel. There was an opportunity to travel and see the world, so I think that was his case. My mom was in banking, I believe.*

From what I gather from his family, it's the typical American dream. There was an opportunity to come to the U.S., and they also come from very simple families, so a chance to make something of yourself is really what brought them here. His mom will tell stories about her first year in New York and how it was so hard for her. Then his dad just loved it. He was like, "This is my dream," and he just got on that trip. He's in the Navy; he signed up for that. It was really like he was a small-town boy that wanted to get out and see the world and be American. And I still see that from them. They celebrate the Fourth of July like it's their real holiday.

*I believe they met in New York. I guess they eventually settled... there's a Navy base in San Diego; I know that's what brought him to San Diego. I don't know exactly why he decided to settle there.*

**What about your parents, Arlene, what did they do for a living?**

My mom worked in banking, and my dad in a similar office position. Their generation, I would say, as you get into a job and you stay in that company forever, and that's what my mom did. She stayed there and she rose up from being a clerk to being... I think when she retired, she was pretty high up there. She became VP level. That's what she showed us: You don't jump around. She would always laugh at our generation because it was like, "You guys have been in so many companies; it hasn't even been ten years." She would joke with my brother. But that's their generation.

Then my dad was the same. I think when he was about in his late forties, he quit, and then they built a business together. We have a family business, too. Growing up, I was young, I was working in the factory. They wanted me to work in our business. It was a family affair. Yes, that's what my parents did.

**What kind of business is it?**

We make bags. It's still going. My sister, the eldest one, took over. It's because of the income that it generates for the community, the people that have been with us forever, too, we can't let it go. When times are tough we just kind of hunker down because we don't want these families to lose their jobs because they're very poor families, too, and this is all they know how to do. Especially during the pandemic, they closed everything in the Philippines, so my sister wasn't making anything. She just said, "You know what? Just keep making bags. Who cares if I don't make any money? Just so you guys have something to bring home." That was that.

But growing up it was a good thing to do, even as children, we started working in the factory during summer vacation and our parents paid us the same as they did the workers. Summer vacation? What's that? No, you're working in the factory. That's my parents for you but I think it helped us learn even at an early age that it is hard to earn a living.

*And there were no child labor laws, I would say.*

No. Everything we have here is First World problems, everything. There, it's survival. I remember my parents were like... it was a big problem. My sister would talk to me, long conversations, about how do we make sure that we keep these families alive? Usually, it's the mother who sews because it's a bag industry, so it's sewing or manual things, and

then there was no business. The stores closed. The malls closed. Everything was in the mall; that's how my sister made everything run. Yes, it was tough. I think they gave out loans. I don't know everything. But everyone is still alive and now it's going back in boom, so I'm pretty happy about that.

***Did they switch to an online presence?***

They tried that, they did, but it's kind of hard to build an online presence out of nothing. It takes years to get that thing running. Of course, her children, suddenly they're both like Summer; were homeschooling. It was just crazy. She had two little boys running around. They were in a condo and my brother-in-law was also working from home, so it was challenging.

**Now I'd like to touch on how you came to the United States. Could you tell us a little bit about your migration story and why you decided to come to the United States?**

When people ask me that question, I'd say, "For love." Because I had no desire. I am the opposite; I have no desire to come here. I kind of gave a bit about it, but my life was full in the Philippines. I had friends. I was thirty already. You're pretty established near thirty. When you get older, because of how close our family was, I really enjoyed my siblings, my immediate family. I was very close to all my siblings. When it is a Sunday, everyone is gathered together. It was with tears, a lot of tears that I moved here. But if I didn't love this guy, I would never have made the jump. It would have not been anything I could conjure myself to do easily. I don't have American dreams; I have none of that.

The thing was I already had a degree. I had a full degree in psychology. Then I realize, oh my gosh, I'm going to marry this guy. What am I going to do in the U.S.? I didn't know, and so I went back to school. I became a nurse. I took another degree and

took three more years, and that's where my mom, as I tell you, it's about education with her. She is just like, "Okay, you want to go back, sure." In the Philippines, parents support you through school a hundred percent, if they're really good parents. They would work their butts off to get you through. Imagine, she already put me through four years, and then here I am, "I'm going to marry this guy. I want to go to the U.S. Mommy, please, help me to go back to school."

It was very hard for her because I am the most nurturing of all siblings. They were getting old. She retired already. Then I was taking care of her and my dad, and here I was suddenly leaving. But, of course, when you have children—I'm going to have to learn this lesson, too—you have to let them go, so she did.

I moved here literally with just one experience of San Diego. I visited him for a couple of days when we were still dating. I didn't know what I was getting into. I remember the first day I woke up and I was really in San Diego. I cried. I just realized, oh my gosh, there are no more sounds and bustle of Manila. It was so quiet. There was nobody on the street. In Manila, you open your window and there is like a billion people outside and there are tricycles or—

*Well, you don't even need to open your window; you hear the sounds.*

You hear them. It's just so loud and everything. It's just different.

**Yes. Now I want to get to how you two met. Am I going to get that story today?**

Oh, because we never tell her.

**Yes, you never tell me.**

*I usually give the quick and easy version, which is we were friends that became best friends that became...*

Okay.

*But how we met... I had a niece, really four sisters that were like the sisters I never had. I was staying in the Philippines for a while with them.*

It has to be mentioned though that he was in the Philippines because he grew up here, and then when he finally discovered the Philippines, he loved it. He was just like, oh my gosh, this is what I am; this is my people. He just kept coming back and staying for times just to live there although it was still a different experience because his niece was rich, and there's a difference in the Philippines with what you are. He still had a sheltered experience of the Philippines. Of course, we met.

Now we'll go to where we met. He was introduced to me. I looked at him—I'm sorry I have to say this. Because we talked over the phone, and I was like, oh, he's so nice. We were talking on the phone first, and then he was introduced to me. I'm like, oh no, he's short. [Laughing] I'm five-four and you are...?

*Five feet, flat.*

Yes. I was like, oh no, he's short. There was no term for a friend zone. I put him in the friend zone. Threw him straight in the friend box. But you know what they say about short people—they pack a punch, and he had so much personality, so many things that... I think in some ways what attracted me to him, too, was everything that I didn't see, every worldview that I didn't have, because, like I was telling you, I was very sheltered, way of thinking, way of living life. I had almost a linear plan. Then he comes along and he's just like this 'yeah, I'm still figuring it out' kind of situation. He's talking about things that I've never heard before.

*I was a bad influence, honestly. Honestly, in hindsight, I opened your mind to things that you shouldn't have been exposed to.*

But it worked. We had a friendship. We were friends. Of course, over time it started to be like, ooh, this is a little bit more like not friends. We were long-distance for a long time.

*Thirteen years to be exact.*

Thirteen years, yes, because I was studying and I wasn't sure if I was going to marry this guy. We were the literally opposites. I mentioned a bit earlier how I grew up in a Catholic family, and he didn't. He was baptized and then that's about it, right?

*Yes. My family didn't practice the faith much up until a certain age. We were going to church when I was a little kid, and then we stopped maybe around eight or nine years old for me, so I did not grow up in the faith. Again, the total opposite of Arlene's family.*

Me, I was like, no, you go to confession every month at least, and then you go to church every Sunday as a family. Then when we were starting to date and I was starting to know him, I was like, maybe not; I'm not sure, because we couldn't meet eye-to-eye on this one point. He didn't believe in God, and I love God, so it was so hard. I was just like, you know what? I'm just going to leave it to God, because that's me, too. I prayed about this guy, and then I just went with my schooling. That's why it was thirteen years.

We would see each other every summer, and that's why our kid is named Summer. We agreed early on that if we ever have a girl, we're going to name her Summer because summer is our happiest time together; that was when we saw each other. So of course, my mom was like, "Why not me? Why not after my name?" That's what parents would ask for. And then, "Where did you pick this Summer from?" I'm a rebel. All her kids, everyone stayed home. And then there was Arlene, who went to the



U.S., decides to name her daughter Summer, doesn't even give her a Catholic name. It was Summer. That's how we are.

*Just to add a little detail because you mentioned we were talking on the phone, but how we first spoke on the phone... I was mentioning my niece, who is a best friend of Arlene's at the time, they were talking on the phone. Arlene was having some boy troubles. My niece Christine was like, "Oh you should talk to my Uncle Mach; he's good with relationship advice and stuff."*

That's true, yes, yes, yes. I think she just didn't want to talk to me.

*Yes. It was like, oh, here's a chance to pawn you off onto someone else. I just wanted to clarify that it wasn't under the pretense of us two trying to get together or anything and start something.*

No. He was a friend. He was put in the friend box.

*Yes. I gave her my advice based on being a friend. If I was trying to get with her at the time, I wouldn't have given her the sound advice that I think I gave you at the time to help you with this other boy.*

Well, yes, it was funny because that first year we were... He was there for an extended period of time. I went to prom, and I guess his niece didn't have a date, so she took him, but I had a different date. He was just kind of looking. After, when we got together, he said, "I wanted you to take me." But I took somebody else. It was just funny. He still remembers how I looked in prom. Come on, braces, seriously? That's all I have to say, braces and zits. What was the best thing you said? I was like Amidala. I was like, whoa. He loves Star Wars. Then he said I look like Amidala to him, and I was like, seriously? *Didn't I say at one point I already knew that night that you were the one?*

He's so cheesy.

*Yes, yes. There was nothing between us yet, actually, but there was something about it; I just knew, I knew.*

I went through school and you would come home. He would come to the Philippines for periods of time. Literally, he saw me become an adult. Pretty much he saw me grow up.

*Yes, I saw her grow up. She was seventeen at that time.*

I was seventeen when we met. We got married and I was near thirty—no, after thirty already, right?

*Yes.*

It was a long time. A lot of changes between the two of us, yes.

*You also mentioned something about how I hadn't been going to the Philippines because she refers to it as home. For me, I can say it was going "back home", even though for most of my youth and early adult life it wasn't. I didn't have that appreciation until I went back for the first time as an adult. I only visited the Philippines twice as a child, when I was six and eleven or twelve for roughly a month, I think. When you're that age, you don't appreciate it. You're taken away during summer vacation when you want to spend time with your friends and stuff, and it's hot. When you're young you don't enjoy that. It's hot, it's sticky, there are mosquitos.*

And they usually take you to the province, because his parents are from the province. Some of the kids that grow up here in America, when they tell me about their story of why they don't go to the Philippines or why they don't like the Philippines, it's a difference between the province and Manila. I touch on it, but it's such a huge, big difference: Your class in life, too. Your experience dictates that. For somebody who

doesn't understand Filipino culture or doesn't have knowledge or familiarity with it, I would just say, think of India. India is similar.

*There's not much middle ground.*

You're either very poor or you're wearing the gowns and the spices and all that. It's like that. When he first went to the Philippines, and through our course of dating, there was this one story I cannot forget. He went to Jollibee. I don't know if you're familiar with Jollibee; it's like our McDonald's. He went to Jollibee and saw a grown man eating a one-piece chicken leg with rice. Mach goes in there. Of course, he has money. He buys two because he's hungry. He was watching this guy and he was like, "He is eating a one-piece. Why is that?" He asked me. Then I go, "Because that's all he could afford." It was probably a very special meal and he just had one piece. What crossed his mind was, how is it that he's full from that? It was so small. Philippines' portion is very different from American portion sizes. When I told him the explanation for that, his mind was just blown and he was quiet for a long time. The next thing I know, when we'd go to Jollibee, he'd only order a one-piece. It was small.

I would take him—look, he's getting teary-eyed because he thinks about the Philippines—I would take him to the places that were so real; it was so real that we could get robbed. It was a kind of craziness, but he loved it. He would get all geared up in his wife-beaters so that he belongs. He would try to learn the language because he felt like, "Oh my gosh, these are my people; I didn't grow up with this." I'm just like, "Yes, that's just a neighborhood; that's my neighbor." It was a little bit about the Philippines and why this guy kept coming back to it. I would joke, "Nah, he's not really for me; he just likes being here."

**What sparked that interest in going back to the Philippines and discovering who you were and what group you belonged to?**

*Good question. Growing up, I can say I didn't have an appreciation for where I came from because I didn't know. I can say the Filipino American culture is quite different. I'm sure by now you've noticed it, too.*

Yes, yes.

*In a way I... I don't want to say I didn't like my culture. I had a misconception of my culture and didn't understand where I came from. Then when I got to see it for the first time as an adult where I can...*

He gets emotional about this.

*Sorry. Do you want to help me a little bit?*

Yes. He just... the blinders were off. Even now when I meet other Filipinos, like yourself or at work, I have young nurses and they were raised here. When they speak the language, I'm already like, "Good job, your parents did a good job," because it's hard to transfer that. Then if I ask them in small conversations, "Have you been to the Philippines?" Some of them would say, "No; yes." You can't be you until you know where you came from, and I think that's what he discovered, and he loved it.

*The beauty of the culture, yes, and the people.*

And just the people and the reality of it, just how in your face it is. This is not a Hollywood version; it's real. The good and the bad. I think he became fully Filipino after coming to the Philippines. That's why when he remembers it now, he still gets emotional about it. I think it's one of your best decisions, right?

*Yes, yes. That and Manila are a lot of fun. It's more fun in the Philippines.*

***Stefani Evans: When you started going to the Philippines, did you stay, or did you go back and forth?***

*I went every year. Once we were together, I was going back every year for, what, three months?*

He would stay for the summer. He would stay for two months or sometimes a little bit longer; that's usually my summer vacation. Then it had to be mentioned, too, a little bit, my parents were strict. They kind of saw this guy, and they were like, "Who is this boy?" They had this rule: No boys until after college.

*We were secret, secret lovers for a long time.*

Looking back I just giggle about it because now that I'm a parent, they knew.

***Of course, they knew.***

*Yes, there's no way...*

Of course they knew, but we were so dumb that we didn't think that they knew. He was there for everything—my high school graduation, my first-degree graduation.

*With flowers.*

And in a suit. I would always just say, "Yes, this is just my friend." But they didn't say anything. Now when you think about how they must have known, that's love that you can only get from a parent. They didn't like it, but they let it go. But there was also that factor. We just have to put that out there. I think that's why we never tell her because out of respect for her parents, we don't want to teach her bad things.

*Bad influence.*

No hiding, Kristel.

**No hiding, no.**

*I've got to add, though, how most of the time it was two to three months, although there was one time I stayed for over a year, just over a year, like a year and a month or something like that. Because Manila is a lot of fun.*

***May I ask where in San Diego you grew up?***

*In San Diego, I grew up in Paradise Hills, which is the National City/Paradise Hills area, about fifteen minutes south of downtown San Diego. Again, it was kind of like the hood. I lived there pretty much my whole life. There was a different part of San Diego in the North County that I lived in only until I was around four years old, so not a whole lot of memory there, not a whole lot of growing up there.*

***What high school?***

*Morse High School. Again, it had the largest Asian number of students in the San Diego School District.*

***When you say "Asian," do you...?***

*Filipinos mostly, yes, yes, had the highest concentration of Filipinos.*

***Do you think that is because of the naval base?***

*I think a good majority of the Filipinos that are in San Diego are there because usually, their dads are in the Navy, so largely because of a navy base. That school and that neighborhood specifically? I guess there were just a lot of Filipinos in that neighborhood.*

Also, because it was... whenever you see Filipino communities, they're usually in a cluster. Even in Vegas, they're kind of in a cluster. In National City, it was unique in some ways because it was almost like Little Manila because they had Filipino stores,

Filipino restaurants; there was so much presence. Even in church, it was Filipino priests, it was a Filipino service.

*There would be some parishes where it's almost all Filipinos.*

It kind of makes sense because that's how Filipinos migrate too. They move their family. When they were done with moving the family and the kids move into their own place, it's always nearby because of the culture. People don't jump far from each other. We need that support system, so we need to be close to each other. I remember your parents were telling the story where they ended up buying that house because their friend was just a stone's throw away. It was across the street. They were like, "Yes, I'm buying this house; you buy that house." And then they were like, "Yes, sure." That's how they grew up. His childhood was growing up with his mom's friends. Their neighbor was filled with people like that... he had so many friends, but they were all Filipinos, too. They all knew each other.

*Yes. We weren't blood-related, but because we were so close, we just considered each other as cousins. Yes, a large concentration of Filipinos. In our community, we even had an annual Filipino festival at a nearby park.*

It still remains that way. San Diego especially was that way.

***Where would that cluster be here?***

*I think there are a few of them. I don't know exactly where they are.*

For one thing, Our Lady of Las Vegas has Filipino service, so I'm assuming there is a big Filipino community there.

*Yes, in that area.*

But it's different. Here it's a little bit different, I would say, in Las Vegas. It's either of you—because we're now transplants in this city, so we don't know everybody yet. In some ways, where are the Filipinos? This is where we are. But I find when I hear stories, it's usually nuclear families that make friends with other families through work. We see so many. Even in our parish St. Joseph, Husband of Mary, we see the Filipinos and we know that they take care of certain committees. This city is different.

*Yes, it's a little different.*

It's more spread out, but you can see the Filipino presence here because we have several markets. We have Seafood City, and we also have Island Pacific.

*That's where the Filipino communities are. If there's a Filipino market, there's got to be a Filipino community nearby.*

***So that's your marker?***

*Yes, in a way.*

When you see a Jollibee, a Jollibee is where Filipinos are. We're learning this now. We didn't know that when we moved here. At least I didn't. But a lot of people from Hawaii, they're also originally Filipino. They're also part of that American dream kind of thing where they moved to Hawaii. They, though, identify as Hawaiian. There's a difference. We are teaching our daughter that she is Filipino; she is not a Pacific Islander. When you do grow up with that idea, I guess sometimes I see it like... how in the black culture, where you're black and you're just black all around. But then some people from Africa would be like, "No, we're African; we're not black, like American black." There's a difference. It's similar. Sometimes when you meet a Filipino, they would say, "Aloha. I'm a Pacific Islander," or whatever, or do this.



*This is called the shaka, it's Hawaiian...*

His brother thinks he's a Pacific Islander.

*Yes. If I can add to what I was saying earlier, I had that misconception growing up—*

Because he never went to the Philippines.

*—most of the Filipinos that I knew were in their groups -the cool kids and stuff- and they all identified with that Pacific Islander culture. But I knew something was off there. I didn't feel it. I knew it just wasn't who I was, but that was—*

Everybody thought he or she was a Pacific Islander.

*Yes, and I didn't identify with that, so that's one of the reasons I didn't appreciate my culture.*

I would always be like, “Yeah, no, because we're Asian.”

*If you look at the map, it falls in Asia.*

If you look at the map, the Philippines is in Southeast Asia. But then people just look at me like, “Oh, you snob.” I'm like, “Come on, I'm the real deal.” Anyway, it's just little nuances, but it makes a difference when you really know. Have you ever been to the Philippines, for one thing? But some people, don't even think they're Filipino. It's kind of sad. They think they're from Hawaii.

Now, speaking of Vegas, there's a lot of Hawaiians here, and so it kind of helped, too. When you moved to this city—that was his condition; I needed to be a nurse, and I couldn't be a nurse in California with my education. There were some technicalities that they were pinning on me. The Board of Nursing there was very strict. Just to kind of keep it simple, you needed to take your med surg courses at the same time as you do your clinicals. In the Philippines, it didn't roll that way. You get thrown in an area whenever

there is an opening. All my subjects never lined up. I took them all, but they never lined up, and so they weren't counting it. They were making me go back to school, which was ridiculous because no one would take me just to take those deficiencies. I went back to school so I could be a nurse.

I guess we kind of need to mention it, too, why it was so important for us to move: your education, too. I really love this guy and I knew everything about him, but he didn't have a lot of education and I did.

*Just a high school education.*

Options for working are so different. It's like going from blue-collar to white-collar, but in America that was fine. That's not a big deal. In the Philippines, you can't be anything if you don't have a college degree, so that's why I had to do everything. It was a linear way. You can't even work in McDonald's without a college degree in the Philippines.

*Yes, or in a store or anything.*

You just had to be that way. That's how it is. Anyway, I told him, "I need to be a nurse." When we were married, already with Summer, we moved to the hood. And this was the hood of the hood. We were already in the hood, in his house.

*But, no, this place...*

We were both making pennies. I wasn't a nurse. He was working. I was working. When we had Summer he had to stop working because somebody had to take care of our kid. I was just making minimum wage, maybe a little bit more than minimum wage. But we wanted to build our family by ourselves. We didn't want to live with his parents, just because... not about anything, just because that's how it is. You want to stand on your own feet. That's how I was raised, too. We moved in the hood. This is where we laugh

about all the stories. In this apartment, we were with Mexicans. I was just like, “Yeah, we really dropped a tier or two because Filipinos would never stay here.” Like, this is just too rough. We were in an area that was surrounded by Black and Mexican people in San Diego. The Filipinos stick together, but they’re in a safer group. In the one and a half years that we were living in that place, we’ve seen stuff. At one point there was a cartel in the bottom apartment, and gunshots left and right.

*To put it into perspective, one of the ways I always tell this story to people is, we were there until our daughter was two years old-*

Almost two.

*Almost two. Did you know what one of her first words was? It was not a word. It was the sound of a siren. She would go, “woo-woo, woo-woo,” because we would hear it several times a day. I’m surprised she didn’t start making gunshot noises. “Bam, bam, bam.”*

But we were happy. We were happy in that apartment. It was a cozy apartment. We made it our own. But then we moved here. That’s when things changed. That really shitty apartment, when we moved here, we were like, “What? The same rent for this house?”

We were so floored.

*It was a small two-bedroom, more like one-and-a-half bedroom apartment.*

In a shitty part of town. We were like, “In Vegas?”

*It cost exactly the same to rent this.*

As this house, yes.

*That’s California for you.*

We felt so happy, and that’s when things improved for our family because I became a nurse and I was making much more than what I was making before. I actually made

double what I was making on my first salary here. That's when things got really good for us. But, yes, Vegas is different. It's more spread out and mixed. But he asked about it. There was such a segue. When I said, "Can we go to New York? I could be a nurse in New York or Vegas," he was like, "No, no, I need to be somewhere where I'm not a super minority." That was his only thing. You can uproot me from San Diego where I grew up, but I need to be somewhere our kid is not going to think that she's the "fly in the pool of milk" kind of situation. She's growing up and she knows she's Brown. She already knows this, now. But when she was much smaller, she didn't.

**Thank you for sharing that. That was a great story. Now I'd like to touch on how you moved to Las Vegas. I kind of already know. What is your story about moving here? Why did you choose Las Vegas?**

*You kind of mentioned why.*

Yes, we didn't want to be a minority.

*For me, there were several things. I wanted to stay within the Southwest. I've done a little traveling around the U.S. and there are a lot of great places to see, but these aren't places I'd want to live—especially where it snows. I basically wanted to stay within the Southwest because it's largely all the same. I've seen Arizona, Texas, Nevada. What stood out about Vegas was the fact that I had been coming here back and forth my whole life for family vacations, so I already kind of knew Vegas. Unlike a lot of people, I knew there was so much more to Vegas than just the Strip. A lot of people think of Las Vegas and they think, oh, it's just the Strip and casinos and stuff.*

And I thought that. I really thought that. I was in tears moving here because San Diego was so beautiful. Summer was so small and we'd be like, "Let's go to the beach." A ten-

minute drive and we were at the beach. It was such family life. Because I had only been here once before we moved here, all my ideas were like, “We don’t even gamble.” It just felt like, “What? We’re moving—”

*There’s more to it.*

I’m super Catholic. What? We’re moving to Sin City? No. But then when I found out I could be a nurse here, I was like, yes please. I wanted so much more for our family. We moved here. I remember on our first trip looking for a home or even a job because I would apply from San Diego. No one would pay attention to me because they would see my San Diego address. Of course, being Philippine educated didn’t make that much difference; it wasn’t popping out. We came here and did an Airbnb. I intended to just knock on nursing homes and try to get a job. I didn’t have an interview. This is where faith really comes in because we were praying. I remember we went on my birthday weekend. I was praying so hard, “Please give me a job.” Then we got a job. I remember he would drive and then he would sit outside in the car with our kid. She was less than two. He would wait. I remember that first nursing job, when I got out he was smiling because I got an offer. He goes, “Don’t work here.” I’m like, “What?” He goes, “Everybody who comes out looks so sad.”

*All the nurses I saw coming out looked so miserable. I’m like, “This can’t be a good place to work. Find something else.”*

“Look for something else.” My first job was at a rehab hospital. You’re post-acute, moving out of the hospital to get stronger. It wasn’t a nursing home. I would say for our family, everything was not without a lot of work and sacrifice. Both of us were like, no handouts, no anything. We’re going to start from the very bottom if we have to. We

knew, even to this day, I work as a nurse. He's mostly stay-at-home, but we know that this family is a tripod; it doesn't work without the other. We completely saw eye to eye with that. Of course, I can't pay you but his contribution is equal to mine. Our family works this way. When you meet our kid, over time, everybody who meets her would say, "She's such a good kid," and she is because of him. You can't put a monetary value on that.

*Because of us.*

Because of us, but you're day to day. I'm working. I'm a night shift nurse. There are times that I would be sleeping. When I work, on my days off I really have to sleep. I can't still be here. That's why I remind him, you're not a house husband; you're everything to our daughter.

*I'm not laying around eating bonbons and watching TV. That would be the life.*

Just like any housewife would say, "I'm a housewife." They're proud. But because he's male, there's a stigma there.

*There is a stigma there. But there is a stigma with housewives, also.*

Sometimes, too, but it's more accepted. Everything, our family, we started from the bottom, and now we're getting ready to buy a house. We kind of pat each other on the back. Something as simple—okay, this is where I get a little shy. I don't drive. I'm afraid. I recently started driving. But this is common in Filipinos. You see a lot of Filipino people getting driven to work. My kid would say, "Oh, there's another brown person."

*Getting picked up.*

"Getting picked up just like Mommy. There's another Filipino right there." That's just the way it is. But I couldn't have been able to work if he didn't drive me without any

grudges. No grumbling, no anything. We really work and our kid was there the whole time because you can't leave her here. Every time she picks me up. Every time I go to work, she's in the car seat. That's why we are so proud when we think about how far we've come because everything was like, "It's you and me, and we have to do it together."

**Thank you. Now, I want to go back to your love story, because you never tell me.**

**You mentioned that it was thirteen years and you mostly saw each other in the summer. What did those summers look like? How did you spend them? What are some of the things you did?**

*We were young and in love, so we just had so much fun. We did everything you could possibly do.*

I would take summer classes too, so he would go to university with me.

*I didn't go to college, but in a way, I did have the college experience of hanging out at her school all day.*

He would just be there. He would come too, for my early classes.

*I even sat in on some classes.*

He would come except for math. You never sat in math.

*Math and I are not friends.*

There would be classes and my friends would be like, "Arlene, your boyfriend is sleeping outside." He would just lean on the wall and then just go to sleep. Everybody knew him, all my friends knew him: that's why everybody was so happy when we got married because everybody knew him. He was pretty much part of my whole friend group...well, aside from the sneaking around.

*Imagine, we'd have to meet up at a place.*

We thought we were so smart.

*Why am I expanding on us sneaking around? Say we wanted to go watch a movie. We couldn't just meet up. We'd have to enter separately, go different ways through the mall, and then meet at the movie theater.*

We were just so crazy. Who did we think we'd fool?

*We did things like spend time in the mall.*

A lot of time in the mall.

*Watch movies, go to events...*

And a lot of eating.

*We did concerts.*

And going to the beach. I think that's the first time we saw a real beach because San Diego does not even compare. I'm sorry, it's just that American beaches suck based on Filipino standards because we have white beaches with white sand.

*White sand and clear waters.*

What you see in pictures, that's how it is. When I first saw the San Diego beaches, I was like, "What is this?"

*It's a beach.*

I'm like, "I don't want to dip my toes. It looks dirty."

*Which it was, but it was our beach.*

We were so different. We were so different. I guess we fell in love with the difference.

He challenged my worldview, and then I also challenged his worldview. He didn't see



things or appreciate certain things that he wasn't raised on, and then I also liked your [his] open-mindedness. I was really like this.

*We broadened each other's horizons.*

It was an endless conversation. Even when he was in America, we would burn... all the money we threw away.

*Back then you had to use calling cards. We didn't have all the internet you do now. You don't even need to spend money to communicate across the globe. Back then you had to buy these phone cards.*

And they were like twenty dollars each for, how much, twenty minutes?

*No. That's for about an hour, hour and a half or so.*

Sometimes we'd go through them like nothing because we would talk... That's what made us work. Even though we were long-distance, endless conversations, just talking and talking about nothing and everything. Of course, what switched with the light with us—I was just like, okay, this is playtime; we're not going to get married. But he said he went back to church. Out of nowhere he goes, "Yes, by the way, I'm going to this class." I'm like, "What do you mean class? You never liked class. What are you talking about?"

*Full disclosure, me and school never [got along].*

They never agreed. He barely got through the door [of graduating].

*I skated by. I just barely, barely made it through.*

He was the kid that grew up forging—he was such a bad kid—he would forge his dad's signature because he would skip school. He has so many stories.

*We're divulging some information now.*

Yes. He would have stories where his teachers were like, “Mach is sleeping again.” So opposite. Anyway, he just said to me, “Oh, I’m going to class.” And I’m like, “What is this class?” “It’s in church. You learn about the faith.” And I’m like, “What the heck?” It took eleven years of praying for you before you decided, and that’s when I realized, okay, I can make that jump. If he’s going to be at least seeing eye to eye with me on faith, then I can pack my whole life in two boxes or two luggages and ship everything away and say goodbye to everybody I love and I would make the jump—make the leap. That spelled the difference because we still are very much Catholic and we raise our kid that way. She is homeschooled in the Catholic school program, so that’s another thing he does. When he’s having a low day, I’m like, “You taught our kid to read, come on.” But, yes, that’s our story. We had so much fun.

*Going back to what you said, that it was just playtime, I think in hindsight now, that’s a good part of why it also took so long. It’s not that I didn’t take our relationship seriously or that I didn’t know that she was the one, but it was just having fun. We were young and we were just having fun, so I wasn’t thinking too much about actually getting ready for the future.*

That’s why we had to start from the bottom, too. He waited for me to get everything lined up. This is in hindsight. But I wouldn’t change anything because we wouldn’t have gotten through those long-distance years without fun. Sometimes when you have low days, we look at our kid and then we’re like, “This is the reason why we got together.” She’s so good. She would never have been a person if we never got married. It gets us through and we’re still together and we’re going to grow old.

*We’re not young, but we’re still in love. We were young and so in love.*

That's it. Is that enough?

*One minor thing, going back to what kinds of stuff you did, we did a lot of eating, also, because the Philippines—Manila especially—has a great food scene, so much diversity.*

If anything we would tell foreigners, just go to Manila and eat. It costs nothing.

Everybody would be like—

*Especially if you've got American money, oh man, you can eat like a king.*

Yes. Pretty much our dollars go far. If ever you wanted a vacation—not now, COVID—but someday, it's the most beautiful beaches. Like, Cayman, what? No, no.

**SE: *When you think about the Philippines and you want some comfort food that reminds you of the Philippines, what would that be?***

My hands. Cook.

***What would you cook as comfort food?***

Sinigang. It's like a soup broth. It's made of tamarin. That's my kid's favorite food, too. It's a clear soup with pork and vegetables. It's sour. That's one part that he still hasn't warmed up to.

*It's another of our opposites.*

He doesn't like sinigang, but he likes meat dishes. But there are some really good spots here, too, that kind of come close because they're run by Filipinos. There's a lot of places you could get food on the go for home cooking. But if you ask me, what is good Filipino food, it's my cooking because even though it's not the best Filipino food, I still like it. It's my mom's way of teaching me how to cook. The same thing with his parents, his brother especially, he loves his mom's cooking. He would also say, "It's my mom."

*Again, kind of the opposite end of the spectrum, not growing up so Filipino, I didn't love Filipino food like a lot of other Filipinos. Now if I was to think of Filipino food and something that would be comfort food for me, it would be some Jollibee fried chicken; that's the stuff.*

**Now I'd like to touch on more of your life in Las Vegas. Could you tell me a little bit more about what it's like working where you work and just a little bit more about that?**

I became a nurse here in Vegas and it was hard at first because. As I said, I didn't grow up here. I remember sometimes I would almost in a joke, but also not joke, that I didn't know about racism until I became a nurse. I didn't. I did not know what the deal was with White people disliking Black people or why it was so. I didn't experience being a minority the way that I experience being one now that I'm a nurse. It put me in a unique place working with adults because I'm a med surg nurse. I work with adults. They would be like, here you go, a cold dose of water; this is the reality. I never felt bad being a Filipino until I became a nurse. Sometimes I would get treated differently. People have said stuff to me, like, "Do you even know how to speak English?" And I'm like, "Do you even know where I went to school? I have so much education behind me that you don't even know." It's insulting, but of course, I'm a nurse. I'm like, "Yes, sir, I know." Then you just let them go with their ignorance. That's how I put it. It's their ignorance, it's not me. I learned that the hard way. I've been called many things—mostly people coming off some drugs because this is also Vegas. I have to put that in there. This is a very unique city because we have a big opioid problem and a drug problem and it's a party city. I'm a trauma nurse, so I see the stabbings, the gunshots, the motor vehicle accidents. It's a very

unique floor that I became a badass nurse, pretty much. I've been called "monkey," and other things. I would just kill it with kindness. Do you want to be ignorant? Well, I'm not going to go there. But when I was first starting, I would stand there like a dumb person. I didn't know I could leave. Filipino culture, it was rude to turn your back on somebody. My White co-nurses or the Black co-nurses, they were like, "What were you doing standing there?" I was like, "I didn't know I could leave." I just stood there for the abuse. One time, one of them was calling me all sorts of things, and I was crying inside because they were like, "You whore, you whore." I was like, "I've only been with one man; I met him at seventeen," in my head. "I haven't been with anybody; you can't call me that," in my head. Of course, I'm crying inside, standing there being the professional. I became American when I became a nurse in Vegas; that's my American side now. I'm still working on it. I call it "American balls". I still need American balls. Everyone who meets me at work—the patients especially—would be like, "You didn't grow up here; you're too kind," they would tell me. I would say, "Yes, and I'm not changing it." Sometimes I know I get walked all over, but I know how to set boundaries now. I know I can turn around and say, "I can see you're upset. I'm going to come back." I didn't say anything wrong.

It was funny, [Mach] was always trying to teach me to be a certain way because he grew up here. Sometimes I would get offended because of communication styles, and then he said, "They didn't mean anything by it; that's just how we communicate." Americans are in your face. They will tell you what it is, and they don't mean anything by it. I had to learn everything. I had to learn how to do my job and then, also, to be strong and not get so, *boohoo*, do you know what she said, or do you know what he did?

Then he would just be like, “No, no, it’s okay. Next time you say this; next time you do this.” He’s teaching me to be American.

But I love my job. If we’re just talking about nursing, I love it and I’m pretty good at it. Now especially I’m pretty experienced in my hospital. So many nurses went through me, just teaching, learning from me. Then I work another job where her parents work in St. Rose, too, so I have two jobs. It makes me happy being a nurse.

**Thank you for that. I know that you’ve done work, too, with the toy store. Do you want to talk about that?**

*Yes, at Rogue Toys, if I want to touch on an experience unique to Vegas, I’ve worked at all of their locations. Working at their downtown location can get a little interesting.*

*That’s where I would say it’s the most “Vegas” of them all. We get people who come in—transients, drug addicts. It’s a toy store, mind you, but it’s downtown, so these people are all around and they’re coming in the store. I’ve had to deal with shoplifters.*

Naked people.

*Naked people, yes, people barely dressed.*

And just buying a toy, naked. Like, come one.

*People trying to steal a can of soda or a piece of candy. Yes, it’s some interesting experience that I feel like would only be in Vegas, yes.*

Just to kind of touch on it, I think one of the things that makes me love this city—or at least the population I serve because I’m at Sunrise—was drug addicts. When you see the poorest of the poor come in through Sunrise, because of poor choices, they’re into drugs. A lot of them are also dirty, it reminds me of my people [Filipinos]. I’m able to care for them more because I know what it’s like to be that hard up, not because I grew up in a

hard place because my parents worked so hard, but I saw it. When I would see people that are so dirty, I am familiar with that because in the Philippines there are people who live in the streets, too. We have homeless all around. I love that about this city and especially downtown specifically because you really will see everything that the other hospitals will not see because they're farther from the center where Sunrise is just right there. Get ready.

**Now I'd like to ask about some of the changes or experiences that happened due to COVID-19, especially in hospitals. What was that experience like? What were some of the experiences you went through? How were you treated, and what kind of precautions were changed because of COVID-19?**

When this started, oh gosh, that was so crazy because nobody knew what it was. Of course, this is another thing unique to America, I would say Americans are very political. Very "my freedom, my personal freedom," which is so different from collective freedom in the Philippines that would take care of the whole community. "Everybody mask up." Everybody masked up, no ifs and buts about it. That was a big struggle because when this was in the thick of it all, especially being med surg, my whole unit got it. It's ridiculous when you think about how many nurses. Everybody got it. There was a nurse who died. There was another nurse on a similar adjoining unit, and it was career-ending.

On a personal level, I would remember—because this is Sunrise. I still have to talk about Sunrise, too, because Sunrise is a bit of a corporation, so they skimmed through it kind of like—I hate to talk negative about them, but they just gave us the bare minimum. Everybody had to shell out for their own PPE. Whereas in St. Rose, they gave everybody N-95s. I never saw an N-95 until 2021 because that's when I started working

in St. Rose. In the thick of 2020, we got at best level-three masks, which don't really do anything. Of course, there was a [mask] shortage and you couldn't find N-95s.

Everybody was getting things from Amazon. It was just ridiculous. I even went to work at one point... because I found out that vacuum cleaners had HEPA filters, and so Mach started buying vacuum cleaner liners and opening up the bags and cutting them to shape just so I would have another layer to protect myself. My coworkers did the same in whatever ways they were comfortable with. But it was hard because when COVID was happening, everything was... understandably, Americans didn't like things to change.

When I say that "I'm going to be American," I live in America. I have nothing against Americans, but I saw for real how people didn't want things to change. The difference was so stark. Nobody wanted to mask up. There were huge rallies about masking.

Everybody thought this was a hoax. I was in the thick of it, in the warzone, and people were dying, and everybody thought nurses were so dramatic. At one point, I felt like I came off like that too because in our immediate friend circle they thought that I was being dramatic, but I was in a sense where I was too afraid. I was afraid because everyone was dying. I would come to work and I would see all these young people, old people, and they're not breathing. I couldn't understand it. None of us knew how you get it. It was just so crazy. It really put the fear out there.

That's what started the homeschooling for Summer, too, because Clark County couldn't figure out what they were going to do for the longest time, and we couldn't wait. She wanted to go to school. She was looking forward to kindergarten. We were like, "You know what? We're going to do this. We're going to pray about it and we're going to do this and we're just going to wing it." So far we like it, but it was hard.



I had COVID already. But when I didn't get COVID yet, I would sleep in our guest room, and I would use a different bathroom. I would change at work. I would never drink when I'm on the floor. There were so many precautions that I did. I would not take breaks with my coworkers because we just didn't know. Then everyone was so individualistic about their levels of protection, I just had to do what I had to do for them [my family]. Thankfully when I got COVID, Mach and Summer never did. They lived in the living room. I was in the main room, our bedroom upstairs because it had the bathroom adjoined, in one area. Yes, COVID was tough.

Right now everything is opening up a bit, but I'm kind of a bit cautious. I still mask when I'm outside because the numbers are coming up again. When we talk about it, it's because people that are not vaccinated are not wearing masks. After all, everyone is not wearing masks. I still believe in vaccines. He's vaccinated; I'm not because I already got COVID. In my head I'm like, yes, I'm still good. It's just that way.

I'm a little afraid of what's going to happen if everything keeps opening up, but then I'm also so happy that I had a job. I would always say this... just in our street alone, our neighbor over there, he works in the casinos—this is why I know that nurses could complain, oh woe is us—we had a job. I never had to worry about where my meal was coming from or when the next cup of rice is going to be or if we're going to be able to keep the A/C running. But our neighbor across there, for a good year we first noticed him, and we were like, why is Jeff sitting outside in his garage in the summer? This was last year. We were like, doesn't he feel hot? Then it clicked that he was there because probably unemployment wasn't making ends meet. Finally, he was able to open up. In some small talk, we asked him, "Hey, are you okay?" And then he was just like, "Yes,

this is the only way I can keep a roof over my head. I just have to run it when I'm asleep." But in the day he just let himself get used to the heat and sit in his garage because he can't have it running all the time like we are right now.

I always think about counting your blessings. It was really hard; I got COVID. Thankfully I survived COVID. Most of my unit survived COVID and they were all okay. Everyone was kind of out for a month, but it wasn't so bad. Everyone is still okay.

**What are your thoughts on it? Do you have anything to add?**

*Well, my experience was a little different because I was working for Rogue Toys, and so it was one of the businesses that closed down when everything shut down, so I was out of work. Some minor differences... when things opened back up, we're in there and we're wearing masks—which masking up was never an issue for me—unlike my coworkers; they hated it. They complained about it. I wore a mask and a face shield and gloves. I had to make sure, because this was long before there was a vaccine, that I did my part in protecting myself and my family.*

**Going off of the COVID-19 topic, recently there has also been a surge of Asian hate crimes in the United States. Did that ever have an effect on you as a family or in your workplace?**

No, but his parents are really afraid, in San Diego. His dad had this unfortunate—he was just walking in his neighborhood where he has lived all his life. He was just walking on a morning. Some kids decided to beat him up. They just got out and then they started beating him up. When he came out of it, thankfully nothing was broken, but he got some abrasions and skin tears and stuff because they were kicking him. They're so old-school they didn't even tell me because they know that the nurse in me would kick in or the

more aggressive Arlene would be like, “Call the cops,” kind of situation. They just called him and his brother told him, “Oh yes, Dad got beat up.” When you see him, he’s just like Mach; he’s the same size. He is this elderly man.

My mother-in-law, we were just talking about it, too. “Oh, what’s this interview that you’re doing?” Then we were like, “Oh yes, it’s one of the Peralta kids,” we like saying. She was talking about it. She was like, “Yes, I’m really scared. I’m really scared about the Asian hate crimes because you know what’s happening is they sneak up on you. You’re just walking and they trip you up, and I’m old.” She is so small, like your [Kristel] size, but much frailer, really thin, too. She’s just like, “I can’t even see well because of my cataracts, and they’re going to trip you up.” They’re talking about all sorts of things.

Of course, we didn’t think about that. I already knew about racism, but I never felt like our safety was [compromised]. We were telling them, “Yes, we don’t have that in Vegas.”

*Yes, I feel like here in Vegas—*

I didn’t feel the fear that they have. He doesn’t talk about it, but you could tell... nobody wants to get beat up. And by kids, too, teenagers. Come on. Did they steal anything? No, right?

*No.*

It was just to hurt him. I couldn’t wrap my mind around it.

***Just because they could?***

Just because they could and... I don’t know. Then she said to me—and I can totally see that too sometimes from another view, another perspective, because especially with an

accent... I don't know if that's been touched on. Even though I'm very educated, I still sound Filipino. Because of my accent, people think I'm dumb. I'm like, are you serious? Especially over the phone, I come across as very Filipino. At first, I would get so upset about it because why did I need to go through that? Why do they have to talk to me a certain way? Because when you hear it; you feel it.

My Filipino coworkers who grew up here don't sound Filipino. They would be like, "I'm sorry, *ate*." Ate is a respectful term for an older Filipino [female]. "Oh sorry, *ate*, you had to go through that."

There is this coworker; she's Nigerian. She goes, "Why are you feeling bad?" She was telling me, "I sound African and I know what you mean, but I don't care." She would tell me, "Stop feeling bad about your accent." Because I would tell Mach, "Do I sound American yet? Am I still sounding Filipino?" I would ask him.

I don't even have communication problems. I can communicate well; it's just my accent. But then I can see where the hate crime is coming from, too, because when you hear an Asian talk and you're not from there, it's like "what are you saying?" They think we're dumb. They think that we're less because of how the accent is. It's easy to not like something or think something is bad because it's not you. That's where the ignorance comes from. The elderly, I guess, are more... because his parents lived here all their lives. How many years? When they moved here, he was a young, young man, and he's old now. But when you talk to him, you could still see... at times it would take him a minute to hear... *what are you saying?* Kind of like that.

It's unfortunate that people cannot see that that's just another human being and you shouldn't do that. Go figure out where they come from. What are they thinking? Yes, it's very real; they're very afraid. We're not.

*Yes, definitely here in Vegas, I feel like it's not a big thing.*

I don't see it in the news. We saw a lot of it in New York, I think.

*California, too.*

Yes. Finally, people are talking about it. Last night when we were thinking about this interview, I said to Mach, "You know, Hollywood? We still don't have Filipinos in *Grey's Anatomy*." But when you go to the hospital, mind you, you can pick out the non-Filipino race, especially when you go to St. Rose that's—almost 80 percent Filipino right there. I don't know why Hollywood hasn't caught up because we're not exactly new to this country, so I don't know. But it says a lot, too, about... His simple thinking was that the writers aren't thinking about the Filipinos yet.

*We're still not on the radar.*

We're not on the radar. The Indians are making it, though. Finally some of the Chinese and the Koreans. But the Filipinos, maybe not yet.

*I think the fact that there have been more Filipino movies on Netflix, we're getting closer.*

Yes, we're getting closer, but just not the mainstream Hollywood. I'm just like, *Grey's Anatomy*, come on, or any of the hospital shows, you need to put a Filipino there. But, whatever.

**In your experience, growing up in the United States especially, do you think it's getting better for minorities to appear on the screen compared to when you were growing up?**

*Yes, I would agree with that. When I was growing up, every Asian in the movies was doing kung-fu and that's all they did, and/or they were bad guys. They were always the bad guys. And there were no Filipinos, of course. There were Chinese and Japanese, and they were either the bad guys or they were doing martial arts. Now, at least the Asian presence in entertainment has changed a lot. It's a lot more diverse, the stories that are being told of and by Asians. Yes, it definitely has changed.*

**Now I'd like to touch on some of the more interesting things. You've told me your ghost stories before, but I'd like to ask how superstitions and culture intersect in your beliefs and how you've grown up behind these interesting experiences.**

*Superstition is a big thing in the Filipino culture, but this is another way our opposites come into play because I grew up learning and knowing about all these Filipino superstitions, but I wasn't able to necessarily be a believer of them. Even though I've always had a fascination with the supernatural, I was always a skeptic and a believer at the same time. Specifically, with the Filipino superstitions, I was especially skeptical.*

I think looking on in hindsight, it was more like a control mechanism for the elderly.

“You have to be quiet. There's a ghost out there.”

*There was a ghost for every possible behavior.*

Yes, it was just like my parents—well, not my parents. It was mostly my caregivers because my parents worked, so we had what would be equivalent to a nanny. They kind of helped raise me, too. It would just be superstitions and there are certain things that you just do because that's just how you do it. But they really used a lot of scary stories to keep us in line, to keep us quiet, to keep us sleeping at night, or scare us. It's just funny, looking back on it.

*But they are interesting stories and interesting creatures, if you want to call them, and stuff like that.*

***Can you share one?***

For instance, what would be like a dwarf, equivalent? Here, elves are kind of cute, right?

*There, they're bad.*

There, they're bad. They can play tricks on you. They can cause you to become sick or grow a tail or whatever, whatever you could possibly imagine. It's funny because sometimes I still do it. I know; I'm a nurse. But when I'm actually in a wooded area—because in the Philippines when you're in a wooded area—you have to say in Filipino, “tabi tabi po,” where you're basically saying, “Excuse me, I'm walking through and I don't want to step on you,” Even now when I go home, I'm still going to do it. “tabi tabi po,” because I'm so afraid they're going to play tricks on me. Sometimes here when we go camping, especially if you have to do a number-one somewhere, I'm still going to say it because what if there's an elf there? Then, of course, there are the more scary things, like creatures that would eat you.

*The Aswang, which is one of the more common mythical creatures.*

Yes, they half themselves.

*They separate from the lower halves of their bodies—*

I knew this and when I was growing up I believed it, like when I was a little kid.

*—and they fly. They have wings.*

And then they have a long tongue. In the Philippine provinces, they had straw roofs made from the palm trees. The Aswang would go on top of the trees and just separate them.

She would go over pregnant women with babies. Her long tongue would descend from

the top of the [straw] rooftops and then to the belly button to suck the baby out; that's the story.

When I was growing up, I had a little sister. She was so tiny, I would get so stressed out thinking they're going to eat her. I would watch. Nobody would explain anything to me; that it wasn't true. I don't know what it was. They let you believe them. Then when you get older and you figure out, "oh science..." But when you're young they're just like, yes, whatever.

*You never know, though, one day you might see one and you'll have the revelation it's real; it's all real.*

In the movies. It's everywhere. It's not just being told. We have movies of this, of women as Aswang and they turn into a big cat and then they turn into... all these things.

*Growing up and believing in something like that would be the equivalent of me growing up here and believing in vampires and werewolves and stuff like that. I want to believe, but I don't know.*

No, we actually believed.

**Going back to how the Filipino culture you grew up with, what are some cultural things that remind you of home and what are some practices that you still do. What are some practices that you intend to pass down to Summer?**

For one thing, this was huge...

[Arlene touches Mach's knuckles to her forehead]

This is a way of blessing someone.

*And showing a sign of respect.*



If I ever met my dad, if my dad was here and I walk home from work, this is the first thing I'm going to do.

***You're going to take his hand.***

My dad's hand and then I'm going to [touch it to] my forehead.

***You'd put his knuckles on your forehead?***

Yes.

*It's a sign of respect.*

Just recently I was crying on Instagram watching somebody. He was at the airport, and then he was just showing—his hand was like this. Then he was in the Uber and his hand was like this. At first, I was like, what is he doing? It was about the pandemic. He was a nurse, I guess, somewhere. He was going to meet his parents for the longest time, after not seeing them. Then eventually the TikTok ended with his dad [blessing him].

***The way he would hold his father's hand.***

Yes. Eventually, when he went to see his dad, he [blessed him]. When I saw it, I was crying. Mach was like, "Yes, you're doing that." When you're going home for the first time, you're going to tape parts of our trip so you could do that. It speaks so much. Even Summer knows how to do that. It's not just for your parents, it's for anyone who is older, too. If I went to see my parents' siblings, or especially my grandparents, I'm going to do that. I still have one grandparent alive. He is nearing a hundred. That's the sign of respect that we do. What was the question again?

**Culture, customs, anything you pass on or you still practice.**

*I would want to instill in Summer the same sense of respect for all people. I think I gained that largely when I learned it while living in the Philippines. Being able to respect people*

*no matter what class they come from—whether you're a beggar on the street or a corporate person. I would like to instill the same sense of respect for all people with Summer.*

You even see it through like... Filipinos. When you see them in the hospital, and they know that I'm older, they immediately call me *ate*. Then I'm the same if I meet somebody. I'm like, *ate*, the equivalent being *kuya*. We call them even though we're not family. It's just the way it is. There is an instant connection that we're going to help each other tonight. If I'm floating in a different unit or I'm just meeting you for the first time, just because you're Filipino, I'm going to help you and we're going to help each other. You can come to me for whatever because we're both the same.

That's another thing. When Summer could finally understand color, the difference, because before all her friends were, "just her friends." When kids are so small... I wish people could just stay that way. But now that she knows that this person is Black, this person is White, this person is... whatever. I want her to know that she is Filipino, first and foremost, and for her not to be ashamed. Also, at the same time, just because they're different doesn't mean that you have to treat them in any other way because you don't want to be giving out what you might end up receiving. I'm still on the receiving end, but I'm not going to do that. I'm human, of course. I think that's how the world is. But for me growing up, I had to learn. I guess it's just the way of the world. If you ever lived in the Philippines, you'd have to learn about class because that's the difference there, classism. It's just the way.

For one thing, we want our daughter to really value family because if there is anything from any Asian culture—Filipino culture, that's the only one I'm very familiar

with—it's about valuing family and taking care of your appearance. Uniquely, there are Filipinos everywhere in the hospital, but very rarely Filipino patients. For a nurse to say that, it says a lot. We take care of our parents. They don't get sick as easily. The only time you'll see a Filipino in the hospital is if they're really sick to the point the family can't take care of them anymore. Now they allow family at bedside, but before COVID, you would always see a Filipino family member, same with Mexican cultures; they really take care of their family. They're always there.

My siblings, when I moved here, they started—I'm thankful for technology—a family chat. Then my mom just celebrated her seventieth birthday this weekend, and they include me. We had it over Zoom. They were all together. I was the only one away. But they still did this whole Zoom thing just so I could be there. I want Summer—hopefully, she'll have siblings—to know what family is and to value family. If there's anything I would teach her, it's that.

*Also, those signs of respect because I didn't grow up with that. I didn't grow up saying kuya and ate, and now I know and I address her parents as kuya and ate. I wasn't raised that way, so I would want Summer to know how to be like that, too.*

**Thank you. Just a couple of little things before we close the interview. Holidays: what are holidays like in your families, and what kind of traditions did you keep from your families?**

Well, for one thing, sometimes I joke about it because I am still very brand-new. I still don't feel very American, but now I'm starting to appreciate Thanksgiving. I didn't before though. I'd be like, "I'll work on Thanksgiving." I'd be the first one on the Fourth of July to say, "Sure, I'll work." Nobody wants to work because it's the Fourth of July;

it's Memorial Day weekend. The only thing that matters is Christmas because we're Catholic, and to this day it's still our most favorite holiday. But we're starting to appreciate Thanksgiving because it's about family, and I can sign up for that. The thing that we have kept holiday-wise is Christmas.

I find that we're also raising Summer in a lot of the ways like I was raised. We are still very strict parents, but we also keep things very simple. That's very hard to do here, I think. Christmas, for instance, the tree is not bursting with toys. That's a very American thing. I remember my coworkers asking me how much overtime I was going to pick up, and I'm like, "Why?" They're like, "Yes because it's the holidays. We have to make sure we have a lot of gifts." I'm like, "Really?" I can't even decide what gift I'm going to get my kid because she doesn't ask for anything. She's grown up that way; we've raised her that way.

But over time she is going to be American. Hopefully, she learns my language. I'm still working on it. I want to be more American, too. Don't misunderstand. This is where I am, this is where I work, and this is what helps me provide. I'm applying for my citizenship. I'm going to serve this country and hopefully eventually be more American. *We'll get there.*

Yes, we'll get there. Yes, it's just a holiday... I love Thanksgiving now, too, and Christmas.

**What about you?**

*It's mostly the same. As far as growing up, mostly the emphasis was on Christmas as well, but not so much the reason for the season; just because it was Christmas and there were gifts. I guess that's the opposite, from me growing up in America, it's all about the*

*gifts. What am I getting for Christmas? What am I asking for? What am I getting from what I'm asking for? Hopefully, it's several things. Yes, again, that's why we're trying to raise Summer differently. Regardless of how much she gets, especially from other people, we don't let her open it—this goes for both Christmas and her birthday—we don't let her just open everything. We let her only open one or two things at a time.*

**Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are one of the fastest-growing populations in Nevada. What does that mean for you and the city?**

*That means that a lot more Californians are coming here; that's probably why all those Asians from California.*

We were once one of those. What are you talking about?

*No, we came before the rush.*

Whatever you say.

*We are transplants, yes, but we came before that rush. No, that's a good thing. I like that. I will never have anything against the Asian and Pacific Islander community growing in Nevada and Vegas.*

I think it would be good because Asians, in general, don't take advantage of anything.

They would come here and you're just going to see another family that's willing to work hard for their families. They're not going to be... how do you say it? I hate to put it this way. Kind of like they're not going to be there; they're going to be an addition to the community rather than not work, for instance, or litter or something. For one thing, Asians are very clean.

Of course, in the hospitals, too, more Asians are a good thing because naturally our culture and our people are caring, and that's why, I guess, we're all in the hospital

profession. We also like stability. I guess that's why most go that way because we like knowing that I will never be out of a job. It's all about family. It goes down to family. How do you provide for your family? I don't particularly like wiping butts, but if it's what gets food on the table and then I'm able to care about other people, I'm willing. Sign me up. Now, if Summer tells me she wants to be a nurse, I'll tell her to study harder; be a doctor. It's really hard work. Don't do it if you don't... But it says a lot about the culture that we're there; it's because we are very sacrificing. We are very hardworking. More Asians in Vegas are going to be good for us.

For one thing, too, I don't know, but we don't do stuff, like maybe drinking, yes, maybe drinking. But Asians don't really do drugs, too, so that's good. There's just so much family and support system there that the other things don't become your crutch because I feel that that's the problem sometimes. They don't have anything else to help with the feelings, and so you can't blame them because there's nothing in their life to fill that hole, and that's where the problem comes in. But with Asian culture, you're always going to have an uncle, an auntie, or another friend that you meet that will be your instant friend because you just happen to be the same color.

*I love the cultural melting pot that is America, but, hey, the more Asians, the better.*

*We're still such a minority.*

There's so much good food that people need to know about.

*Yes. Boba, come on now.*

***What was that?***

Boba, the tea. It's Asian right there. Filipino food still has to make it into the scene.

**Before we end, is there anything that I didn't ask about that you'd like to talk more about?**

No.

**Anything, Mach?**

*I know there was a couple of things I was thinking about talking about that I probably forgot. One that I can think of off the top of my head when we were talking about the Asian hate crimes and stuff like that. It made me think—because that's a more recent thing since COVID—but what about just racist experiences during my life. I know that I've had a few minor ones, but the only one that I clearly remember was I was hanging out with some friends. It was by the beach in an upscale neighborhood. Some dudes in a truck drove by. They threw their drinks at us and said, "Go home." Yes, that was probably the most prominent. But at least there was no violence involved.*

***That was here?***

*No, back in San Diego. This is when I was much younger.*

This is interesting. We went to Oklahoma for a wedding, and this was our very first time. Her family [Kristel's family], too. Oklahoma, not by their own fault, is very White. It's very—what is it called?

*The Midwest.*

The Midwest. We went to Oklahoma, and for the first time, I felt, oh my gosh, I'm Filipino. They're all White. They couldn't help but look at us because we're different. It wasn't out of hate; I didn't feel that way.

***Do you think the way they treated you was out of curiosity?***

Curiosity and it was more like, “where do they come from?” I think that’s what they were thinking because we were such a big group.

*We’re not Chinese and we’re not Japanese. We’re different.*

We’re different. We were all there for the wedding. It was such a big group. I remember when we were at reception. At first, before the dancing started, it was very clear who the groom’s side and the bride’s side were because the bride was all Filipino. We were all on one side of the reception hall, and they were on the other side. Then when the dancing started, this guy [Mach] started to dance. Everybody just realized, like, oh, they’re fun. Then everybody just mixed. But I remember when we were walking around town, going to the ice cream shop or wherever, everyone was just kind of doing a turn, too. It was funny because I forgot what it felt like. Because being in Vegas, nobody looks at you that way. Everyone is familiar. San Diego, the same, too. I was joking with him, “Oh yes, that’s why you didn’t want to go to New York. That’s why you didn’t want to go to Texas or somewhere where there’s not a huge community.” Because I don’t like this feeling. They don’t mean anything by it, but they still look, and you just don’t like that. “Mind your business” kind of situation.

*But I can honestly say because I know the difference and I felt the difference. It wasn’t bad looks; it was just like, what are you? Who are you? Where did you come from?*

For instance, church. At church, everyone was there. There’s only one church [in the whole city], so all the people were there. Then we showed up and we were all sitting in a certain area because we’re all family. But we were really singled out—like a fly in the middle of a pool of milk. It was interesting, yes.

**Before we close, Stefani, do you have any follow-ups?**



*I have one question and mainly it's for your own... Can you tell us what it was like leaving the airport?*

Going here?

*Yes, when you officially left the Philippines to move to San Diego.*

*You want to hear about somebody crying.*

It was hard because I felt sick. We didn't even make it to the airport; I had to stop through a gas station because I was throwing up from sadness. My mom who is my biggest cheerleader, doesn't cry. Her thought process was, "if I start crying, how are you going to feel brave? I'm your mom." But on the afternoon when I left, she sat on the edge of my bed and she just slumped her shoulders and started sobbing. That was hard.

*Now I'm going to cry.*

That was hard. But then, of course, when I said goodbye from the airport, they were all cheering me on. It was for the love of me—because they still had to love Mach. It still took years of us being married, not a long time, but they had to see him really show me love. To them, I was like their golden child. This is our child; this is my sister. We're giving him to you? Who are you? But eventually, he was able to show them that "I love your daughter. I'm going to take care of her; we're going to have a family." They love him now. But leaving the airport, oh my gosh, it was so hard. I was also thinking about him and, of course, being told that I was carrying too much. I was so afraid. I had excess baggage and I was trying to get away with it. Yes, I still think it was meant to be to come here.

*Thank you.*

You're welcome.

**I think that's all the questions I have. Thank you so much for sitting down, taking the time out of your day to have this interview with us.**

*No problem.*

**That concludes this interview. Thank you.**

*Thank you.*

Thank you for making us remember all this stuff, too. We'd forgotten.

**[End of recorded interview]**