

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH BENILDA LONG SOMES**

An Oral History Conducted by Vincent Long

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

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

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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

“The true reason why I really moved to the mainland is because of my son. I know that here he can get a better opportunity, better than just staying in Saipan. Yes, that’s the main reason.”

The middle child among two younger brothers and two older sisters, Benilda Razon Long Some was born in 1969 in Magalang, Philippines. After working a multitude of different jobs and enrolling into a college-level institution for computer programming, Some decided to emigrate to Saipan in the Northern Marianas Islands at age twenty with her godmother. In her quest to take courses for two years with the goal of returning to the Philippines, Some met airman Robert Long and together Some had her first child.

Unfortunately, within a year, Robert Long passed away in a aircraft mishap along with the Northern Marianas Islands Vice Speaker of the House. Despite Long’s untimely death, compensation for the incident to the young widow and her infant son had not been allocated properly while the family of the Vice Speaker had been compensated shortly after the incident. This legal struggle still resides with Some as one of the most difficult experiences within her lifetime. That did not stop Some however, and with high hopes to provide a better lifestyle and a multitude of different opportunities for her son, Some decided immigrated to California with family members in December of 2009 and eventually came to Las Vegas not long after.

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November 29, 2021  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Vincent Long

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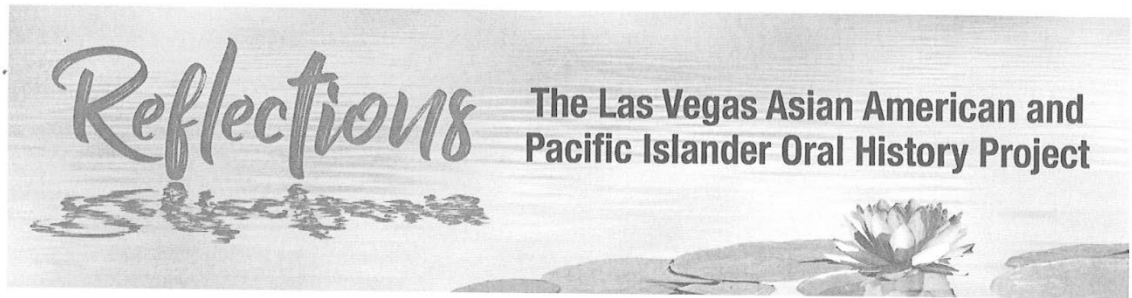
Benilda Long Some starts the interview by detailing her childhood, family composition, first jobs, higher education, immigrating to Saipan, stories about her grandparents, and her migration story along with the hardships that came with it. ....1-3

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**[Interview of Belinda Long Somes conducted by Vincent Long.]**

**Hello, mother. How are you?**

I'm fine.

**That's good. Please state your name, your age, and your ethnicity or your race.**

My name is Benilda Long Somes, and I'm fifty-one years old and Filipina.

**I'm going to ask you a series of questions. It might take over an hour. Is that okay with you?**

Yes, that's fine.

**The first question is...talk about your family and your childhood, schooling, recreation, friends, family trips, whatever you want to talk about.**

I have four siblings. I have two older sisters and two younger brothers. I am the middle child, graduating high school in a public school while my two sisters graduated at university. My mom said that growing up I was a stubborn child, and so she sent me to a public school so she can keep an eye on me and monitor me, but that's fine with me. It's turned out that for me it's a challenge to send me in a public school. I would tell myself that I will prove to them, even if I will graduate in a public school, I will be better, stable when I'm grown up.

After high school graduation, I move out from home, and I live with my Aunt Remy. I looked for a job, and I found a job. My first job, I was a saleslady in a public store, and I stayed there for a month. After that I moved in a restaurant, so I was a waitress and, at the same time, I went to school. I enrolled to college for computer programming. After that, I guess it's too much for me, and I got sick.

My relatives from Saipan, Tita Julie, my godmother, she visited me and said, "Oh, you're all grown up. Would you like to work with me in Saipan? I guess you'd be ready since you're all

grown up now.” I told her, “Yes, sure, I can work. Right now, I cannot study in college because my two sisters are going to college, and my parents couldn’t afford to send me.” She said, “Okay, yes, we will work on your papers.” They processed my papers, and I migrated in Saipan when I was nineteen years old.

**Wow, nineteen years old.**

Yes. I told her that I want to save money and stay there for two years because the courses that I wanted to take, it’s an expensive course, like a midwife in the Philippines. They call it some kind of doctor. She said, “Yes, you can stay here for two years and save money and then go back to school.”

**The next question, tell us about Lolo Nick and Papu. Do you have any stories about them that they told you or anything like that?**

About my grandparents, Lolo Nick works in Clark Airbase during my childhood, and Lola Helen, too; she works at Clark Airbase. Regarding my grandparents, my great-grandpa is from Spain originally.

**Oh, I didn’t know that.**

Yes, yes. He was a doctor and migrated in the Philippines during World War II and married my great-grandma, Filipina. Technically, we have blood of a Spaniard. Yes, he’s from Spain. That’s on my mother’s side with Lola Helen and Lolo Nick. They were originally from the Philippines, but Lolo Nick looks like some kind of Chinese because of his eyes. What I know is they were from there, in the Philippines.

**What and where was your higher education?**

I’m second-year nursing in Saipan, but I was not able to graduate. During my clinical, I thought it’s not for me to become a registered nurse because it was gross being duty on surgical part, and



I said, "I don't really want to do it." I just switched to certified nursing assistant so that at least I could get a certificate and my education for two years won't be like nothing happened with that.

**How do you identify yourself ethnically?**

I'm an Asian, Filipina.

**Tell me about your migration story. What made you decide to come to the United States because you're the only person in your family to do it? When did you leave, who did you come with, and where do you want to go next if you want to leave the United States?**

The true reason why I really moved to the mainland is because of my son. I know that here he can get a better opportunity, better than just staying in Saipan. Yes, that's the main reason. Also, for me, too, I thought compared to us living in the Philippines or Saipan, it's better here. Mainly, it's because of my son.

**Thanks, mom.**

Of course.

**What was the hardest part about being leaving behind in the Philippines, and who were they?**

The hardest part, I miss my family, especially mom and my dad. But because I left home at an early stage, it's not very difficult for me. I had adjusted myself already being far from them. At first, it's difficult. When I migrated to Saipan from the Philippines, it was really tough because I did not expect the job is that hard. In the Philippines, I was working in a restaurant, but it's fine dining, not fast paced. But when I migrated to Saipan, it's a fast-food restaurant. Everything is moving fast, and then you have to deal with every part of the restaurant. I cooked, I washed dishes, I cleaned the bathroom, and I had to deal with difficult customers. But I survived because of perhaps my very strong personality, and I'm kind of stubborn. Sometimes I encountered a

difficult customer. They are trying to intimidate me, but I did not let them. I did not tolerate that. I handled it just calmly.

**How did you stay in touch with your family members?**

Back then it was mostly by mail. Phone is so much money. Maybe I called back then when I was still at the restaurant for my relatives, maybe three times a year I called my mom.

**What are yours or your family's fondest memories of the Philippines?**

The really fondest memory back home is Holy Week. I remember my mom...how we have to take a shower at the same time with the family, things like that. Holy Friday, we don't go anywhere and don't do any crazy stuff, just respect the Holy Week. It's Holy Week, and we stay home and pray. Also, during the summer, we go somewhere else for an outing with all our relatives. Sometimes we have an uncle from abroad, like from Saudi, so he comes home for vacation, and he will take everybody. He will rent the whole place so that everybody can swim and get together and have fun. I kind of miss that.

**Oh, it's like what we did when we went to the Philippines.**

Yes, yes.

**What was the process like of going through immigration and coming into the United States?**

For me it's not that hard because, at first, I remember we went to Japan to get the visa, visiting visa. After that we landed in California, and I got married to your Tito Ariel, and he was the one who petitioned me. All the process is easy because I'm here already. For my parents, for Lolo and Lola, I was able to petition them. It's easy, also. We just also made the proper documentation and compliance. Within eight months, I was able to bring them here.

**What was your migration path to come to Las Vegas? Why did we come to Vegas?**

I was really considering moving here because I have a lot of relatives on my mother's side, and I thought that would be helpful for me because you don't have relatives in California, and at least here you would have someone, if something happened to me, to look after you. Also, not only that, money-wise, I think Vegas is better for us financially because the cost of living is cheaper than California. Aside from that, the place where we stayed in California, it's crowded already, I would say, and the location that we chose here in Vegas is a good location, I would say, because the school, when we first moved here, it's just a few students, and it's like a private school going to a public school.

**What were your first memories of Las Vegas? Where did you live when you first arrived here?**

We lived in a condo, a small condo, while we're waiting for our house to be built. First thing, before living here, we got married here, me and your Tito Ariel. We had a small condo, kind of a little chaos, Chinatown.

**What were the most difficult things about those early days in Las Vegas, and who was helpful to you?**

The difficult days is like an adjustment for you. You have to make new friends. Although I have relatives here, I don't really know them personally, or I know they are relatives from my mother's side, but I haven't seen them in a decade. But they were the ones who helped me when I first moved here. Your Uncle JoJo and Uncle Fricky. You remember them, right?

**Yes.**

Tita Hershey, she used to babysit you. That's what makes me feel a lot better, like we have a relative here in Vegas.

**Compare Las Vegas with other American cities of where you've lived, so L.A. or here, or Saipan. How would you compare Las Vegas to those different cities?**

At first, migrating to Saipan as a contract worker, it's just a small island, and people would know each other. Then I moved to California. It's a big adjustment because of the job and people around you. It's just so different. I found it more comparable moving here in Las Vegas because, first off, the cost of living mainly is the reason why I really like here in Vegas. It's nice to live here. Not only that, the job, there is a twenty-four-hour job. If you have kids, the wife can go to work during the daytime, and the husband can work during the nighttime because there is a casino that is twenty-four hours and you don't have to pay for a babysitter, and that what makes it more convenient here.

**Tell me about your Las Vegas family, the composition.**

I have a lot of relatives here in Vegas on my mother's side. From what I can remember, my mom told me her brother was in the U.S. Navy. He was the first one who migrated here in the mainland. This is after World War II. His name is Hamblen. He stayed here all his life, and then he went back home when he was already retired, like seventy years old.

**He stayed in Las Vegas or just the mainland?**

Just the mainland.

**Tell me about your work in Las Vegas, all the jobs that you've had.**

My first job, I worked at the registry, an international placement agency. I basically processed as a registered nurse applicant to migrate here to the U.S. Also, the registry, we deployed nurses, CNAs, physical therapy to the hospitals. It's like a per diem nurses. Then after that I worked at the Vacation Village Resort, Grandview, and this is a very challenging job because I worked with all ethnicities, like Caucasian, the Spanish and all this. Sometimes they make fun of my

accent. I asked them, “Why? What’s wrong with my accent? Don’t you understand me?” They said, “Yes, we understand you. It’s cute, actually.”

**That’s funny.**

But it’s very challenging to work at Grandview. After that I worked in a bakery, just a part-time job as a cashier, and, at the same time, I also do a small business, like buy and sell. Then my current job, I work at the home health. We deployed nurses, physical therapists to a home to a patient, and I do the intake, so I schedule them and verify all the information on the patient. I also do HR. That’s what I’m still doing right now.

**Where in Las Vegas have you lived in these neighborhoods where there are other people of ethnic backgrounds? Do you think the neighborhood that we live in, do you think there has been a lot of Asian people in our neighborhood?**

Yes, there are a lot of Asian people in our neighborhood. Just within sixteen years, there are a lot of changes. This neighborhood used to quiet, and you can barely see a car in St. Rose. Now it’s just busy, busy.

**Tell me about traditions and festivals that are important to your family? Are there any festivals that you would like to reinstitute?**

Actually, I miss our town festival in Magalang. During the festival, we cook a lot. We have a lot of food, and usually our guests are relatives and friends that we don’t see them often. I miss that. I haven’t seen that festival in thirty-one years. That’s more than half of my life, since I migrated in the United States.

**How did your celebrations and festivals change after you moved to Las Vegas?**

I no longer celebrate those things.

**What are a few of the most significant events in the history of your family or community?**

It was tragical for your dad, my first husband. He died with his boss, the father of the DHL, Larry Hillblom, and with the vice speaker of Saipan, Mafnas. It took almost three years before they compensated us, before they awarded us for what we lost. I had to go through a really hardship at a young age. I have to deal with the hearings and all the depositions, things like that. I was even told, my lawyer said, "Okay, this is the process we are going through, and we might end up not getting compensation." I told him, "That's fine if we are not getting anything. At least I tried for it." The other family of his boss, the Mafnas, they are very influential people in Saipan. After a year, they were able to compensate us for there being a loss. At that point, I feel I was being discriminated. I talked to my lawyer and said, "Why is it like that?" Your dad and him, they were on the same plane where they died there. They died at the same time. Why is it so difficult for us to get what we are entitled to? You were young when your dad passed away, and he was supposed to take care of you financially and everything because you are his son. Not only he gave you his name, he really wanted to give you a bright future. I remember he was even telling me, "I will work for Larry Hillblom, and this is a bright future for us," for you. When you grow up, you could work for him. Things like that.

**He had a whole plan.**

Yes, yes.

**I'm sorry you had to go through that, mother. It must have been tough.**

Yes, it's really tough because I'm just by myself. But I have a friend that was guiding me with it, your godfather. He knows the law, and he would help me and guide me in what to say to my lawyer. Sometimes my lawyer said, "Oh," and he is wondering, how did I get that idea? That was a difficult part for the family, for us.

**It seems like a very significant part of our history.**

Yes, it is.

**Thank you for sharing that. What are the greatest differences that you find between Las Vegas and different places that you've lived, like culturally, language, politically, religiously, the lifestyle and transportation? What were the greatest differences, do you think?**

Las Vegas compared to Saipan, Las Vegas is easy if you want to unwind. It's easy just to go somewhere, and you don't have to really spend a lot of money. The lifestyle is very modern, especially close in the casino. I cannot say anything about politics because I am not really into it. I am not really involved in it.

**That's okay.**

Money-wise, it's better to live in Vegas as long as you don't gamble in a casino. Traffic is better than California. We have a wide road. In California, I cannot drive on the freeway because I get lost. Traffic here is better. The roads are wider and easier to navigate.

**What should people who have never traveled outside of Las Vegas know about your country's culture and history?**

There is a lot of beautiful places in my home country, and people are very hospitable.

**What do you like most about living in Las Vegas?**

I like Vegas because people don't realize it's not only about casinos. There are a lot of things that you can do, like twenty-four-hour job schedule here. You can go to Lake Mead or things like that.

**How do you feel about the activity of gambling and the gaming industry here in Las Vegas?**

Casinos don't bother me at all as long as you don't involve yourself in gambling and losing money.

**What foods remind you of your ancestors, and can you get these foods in Las Vegas?**

Yes, of course, adobo. I can make that. In fact, that's one of my children's favorite foods even though it's spicy.

**Yes, it is pretty good. Your *caldereta* is really good, too. Any other foods that remind you of the Philippines that you like to make here?**

Yes, I like the dried fish, *tuyo*, but it smells.

**Yes. It's still good, though. What home-crafted items remind you of your ancestors or older relatives? Can you buy or make them here? Do any of your relatives continue to craft these items?**

Actually, the star. Every Christmas, we make a wooden star. We call it *parol* in the Philippines. I have one bought from Pier Imports. I hang it every Christmas here. Back home we used to make wooden stars. That's what always remind me.

**Oh, that's right.**

Yes, the stars.

**Have you ever experienced racially discriminatory practices against yourself or other Asian American or Pacific Islanders? Can you describe these incidents? Have you witnessed this in Las Vegas?**

The only time I felt discriminated against was when your dad passed away. But other than that, not really, especially here in Vegas. I found it even when I used to work in the airline back then in Saipan. I like working with Caucasians. I found that it's easy to work with them even though I have an accent. For me, no, I didn't see any discrimination things.



**Have you seen a change in practices against Asian Americans or Pacific Islanders since the pandemic?**

Yes, during the pandemic. If you are an Asian and you are in the grocery store, Caucasians sometimes are avoiding you. They go the other way. Things like that. They might think that you're Chinese especially since I have small eyes, things like that. That's what I feel that they avoid you.

**How did you feel when high-ranking officials called COVID-19 the "Wuhan virus," the "China virus," or the "Kung flu?"**

That's mean. That's discrimination. That's not supposed to be. They're not supposed to say that.

**Right. How do you feel about the Black Lives Matter movement and how it's affected Asians or Pacific Islander Americans?**

Sometimes I can relate to Black Lives Matter. All Asian lives matter, too. There are a couple of incidents to my fellow Filipinos that they are being attacked.

**Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are the fastest-growing population group in Southern Nevada. What does that mean to you?**

That's good. That means they are comfortable here; they are welcome, and perhaps it's less discrimination compared to other cities.

**Why do you think it's valuable for the university to collect interviews such as yours?**

I believe they want my opinions.

**Yes, of course. It's definitely very insightful, so thank you again. That was the final question. I appreciate your time, mom, and thank you for this interview.**

You're welcome, son. Good luck.

**Thank you.**

**[Pause in interview]**

**I didn't meet the requirement for an hour. I'm going to ask you a few more questions. Is that okay?**

Yes.

**How did you overcome the hardships of coming to America?**

I just do my best to make an adjustment and to adapt to the culture.

**Do you think it was hard to adapt to the culture here?**

At first, kind of, yes.

**What do you think was the hardest part about adapting to the culture?**

Just always being straightforward, like that, but as a Filipino, we are sensitive. But, no, I adapted with it already.

**How do you think your family is doing after migrating to the United States, and not just us but your family in the Philippines? How do you think they're doing after we moved, and how do you think we're doing after we moved?**

I think we're doing a lot better, I would say especially financially, yes. Back home, my family, I help them a lot, I would say, especially my mom and my dad. I was able to provide to build their house from scratch, and now they have a comfortable house. My siblings, I was able to bring them to Saipan and have better employments. It's more stability. For me with you guys, Tito Ariel and the kids, we're good. We're not really well off, but we're okay. We have a roof over our heads, and everybody is healthy, and we get to travel at least once a year. That's what I really like because for the whole year you work hard, and it's good to sometimes reward yourself. I'm still supporting my family back home. My sister, sometimes they have an emergency, and I'm able to provide for them. The job, I would say at my age, I'm already in my fifties, and here in

America, even though you're old, you still have opportunity to work whatever you can. As long as you work hard, you have a job. It doesn't matter sometimes if you are not a degree holder unlike in the Philippines, if you are not a degree holder, with my job now I don't think I would be able to have this job, what I have now.

**Do you think it's harder to get a job here in the United States, or do you think it's harder to get a job in the Philippines?**

It's harder to get a job in the Philippines, I would say. It's easier here.

**Do you think it's because the opportunities are better here in the United States, or do you think it's because the Philippines just doesn't have the right resources in order for everybody to have a job, a well-paying job?**

Yes, I think it's more of that, not a lot of opportunity, and it's too populated, I would say, not a lot of job openings. But here in America, as long as you're industrious, wherever a job is that you can work, just grab it, and you will not starve. There is always a way that you can survive here.

**In what ways do you think migration has made you a stronger person?**

I think because I can only depend on myself, and with my experience, also, it makes me stronger.

**What kind of experiences do you think made you stronger?**

One of those is the death of your dad. I had to deal with a lot of situations that I couldn't imagine I could survive that because I was only twenty-four then.

**You were pretty young.**

Yes, yes. It takes almost three years to end that battle, that hearing and things like that, because we filed a wrongful death against the company of your dad.

**If someone you knew were coming to this country or community, what would you tell them to expect? What advice would you give them or any tips about coming to the United States?**

I would recommend that it's better if they have a good education because education, you can take that anywhere you are, and you have something in you that whatever you deal with, that's okay. Just be strong. Not only that, it's a must that you know how to drive because it's really a hassle if you don't know how to drive.

**That goes along with the public transportation here. Would you say it's a good source of public transportation in Las Vegas, or do you think it's hard to get around without your own car?**

It's hard to get around without your own car. You cannot really mobilize without your own car. You cannot do much. You have a very limited opportunity. That's why it's a must. With you guys, my kids, I have to provide you a car. It's a must.

**Do you think getting a car is one of the number-one priorities once coming into the United States?**

Yes, and you must know how to drive.

**Would you think that it's better to buy a car instead of getting an apartment first, or do you think someone should establish themselves in a home and then eventually get a car?**

I guess at first, you stay with relatives a couple of months, and that's okay, and then save money and get your own place and then a car. Most importantly, you have to establish your credit.

That's what I notice here. It's really important because with your good credit—that's what I always advise with a newcomer here in America. You have to have good credit because if you have good credit, if you have a job, you can pretty much get whatever you want to get, buy it without interest. That's a good thing about here, good credit.

**Would you say that it's hard to get good credit here, or is it easy to get good credit here in the United States?**

It depends. Someone must guide you. If nobody would be guiding...I know a couple of my relatives that just came here, and they struggled so much because they don't know how to maintain good credit. It's hard for them to buy a car, buy a property, anything.

**Would you advise people to move to the United States, or would you tell them to just stay in the country that they're living in now, like the Philippines?**

It depends. If a young kid, like my nephew and my nieces, I advise them to get a career, like in medical field. Yes, I would recommend them to come here. But with my sister's already age fifty, I wouldn't recommend them to come here because it will be very difficult for them to get a job, to establish. Yes, I would recommend if they were young and have a good education to come here in America.

**You think age plays a big factor into migrating into the United States?**

Definitely, definitely it's a big factor, yes.

**You think it's a big factor because of the potential that a younger person has rather than an older person, you think?**

Yes, that's what I think.

**If a person decided to come, what advice would you give them about how to make the best of their experience here in the United States?**

Just take it easy and don't be overwhelmed for whatever you have or wherever you're going through and try to save money.

**Let's say they're not able to save money, though. They have to pay for their house. They have to pay for their car. They have to pay for a lot of things. What kind of advice would you give someone if they're not able to save money?**

I believe there is no such thing like that, for me, because there is always a way to save money. I know you have to pay for your bills, but you have to learn how to budget, and you have to learn how to do the shopping in a way that you can save money or perhaps with even your electricity at home. You have to find a way on how to save money.

**Can you give me an example of a way to save money when you're buying, let's say, groceries?**

Yes. This is what I do. This is how we save money for a vacation. I do couponing. Every month there is a sale, like in Albertson's, usually chicken breasts. Chicken breasts are usually regular price three dollars and ninety-nine cents per pound, but when they have a sale, you can get it for ninety-nine cents per pound, and so you're saving a lot of money right there. Also, the steaks, I wait for a promotion every week, and then I buy a lot and stock them. You get anything you want with less money, and you can save the extra money that you don't have to spend for food. Maybe your budget is a hundred dollars only, and so you would be able to do that. But if you don't do that, pretty much you'll be spending a lot of money for your groceries in general.

**Do you think you gained this money saving trait in the Philippines, or do you think you adapted to the United States because everything is a lot more expensive here?**

I would say I adapted here.

**You learned all of this through just living here in the United States?**

Yes, yes.

**What do you wish more people knew about immigrants or others that are new to the United States?**

I wish they would learn more about maintaining their good credit so that they will not struggle financially.

**Also, how do you feel about people who live in the United States, and what do you want Americans to know about immigrants?**

I wish they would appreciate us more because we do basically a lot for them, immigrants being farmers or a sales job, things like that. There is somebody to do that for them.

**An example would be the food industry. A lot of the workers in the kitchens are immigrant workers, right?**

Yes, that's true.

**Because nobody else wants to wash dishes or serve other people. Yes, I agree with what you're saying.**

**For my final question, what are the two or three most important things that people could do to make the process of coming to the United States easier for them and, also, something that would make our community better?**

That's a hard question.

**That's okay. What are two things that you want to tell people going through the immigration process? What are two tips that you want to tell them that are going through it right now that are trying to come into the country that will make their lives easier?**

Perhaps, as I mentioned before, a good education and then come legally. I think a good education would be very helpful.

**I agree. That's all the questions that I have, mother. Again, thank you for your time. I appreciate this interview.**

You're welcome. I hope I answered okay.

**You answered really well. Thank you, mom.**

You're welcome.

**[End of recorded interview]**