

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH ELENA NEWMAN**

An Oral History Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

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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

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2020

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

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

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



“Guess where I learned how to write my name? In the sand because I don’t have paper. My dad and my grandpa will teach me how to write my name. I’m sitting on the ground and writing my name in the sand. If I make a mistake, all I need to do is do like that [making swiping sound] and then write again.  
No paper, no eraser.”

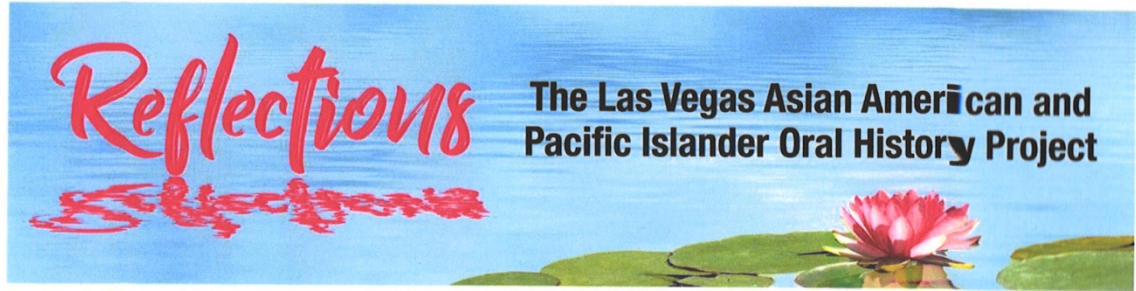
Elena Newman cheerfully describes growing up as the oldest of eight children in a poor family in the Philippines. Elena's father was a bus driver, and her mother sold fish and took in laundry. While her parents worked, Elena helped raise her younger brothers and sisters. At age eighteen, after college, she went to Singapore, where she worked as a caretaker for a disabled woman. Because the two women did not share a common language, they communicated by teaching each other: Elena taught English to the woman, who, in turn, taught Elena Mandarin.

After meeting the American man who later became her husband, Elena returned to the Philippines to await her visa to the United States. In this interview, she talks of her first impressions of Las Vegas, of working in Southern Nevada, and of her experience as a shop steward for Culinary Union Local 226. She recalls her family in and memories of the Philippines, and her face lights up when she speaks of her husband, Robert Newman.

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April 11, 2022  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

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Elena Newman 04/11/2022  
Signature of Narrator Date

Cecilia Winchell 4/11/2022  
Signature of Interviewer Date

**Good afternoon. Today's date is April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022. My name is Cecilia Winchell. I'm here with Stefani Evans, as well as Elena Newman.**

**Elena, will you please spell your name for the record?**

My name, E-L-E-N-A, Elena Newman, N-E-W-M-A-N.

**Thank you. Our first question just asks you to tell us about your childhood, anything from where you grew up to your family, early schooling, and where you're from.**

I'm from the Philippines. I was born and raised in the Philippines, province of Pangasinan, Dagupan city. It's a four-hour, five-hour drive from Manila. My parents actually were poor, were not rich. My dad is a bus driver, and my mom is just a vendor, sometimes accepting laundry to support us. I'm the eldest in the family. I have two brothers and five sisters. I went to school in Dagupan, Bonuan. The name of the school is Gregoria del Pilar School. Then on college, which is Computronix College, I finished two years.

Also, I worked as I'm waiting for my application to work in Singapore. I worked at a friend's restaurant for a year or so. Then after that I went to Singapore to work taking care of elderly. I worked there for seven years in Singapore. The thing is you can really save money because my day off is once a month, Singapore. Way back then it's a very little paycheck, but it helps. Also, while I'm working in Singapore, I learned some different kind of life, how hard it is. Of course, I already have a hard life when I was a little kid. Also, I learned a little Chinese, Mandarin, way back then. I have to, because the lady that I'm taking care of, she is paralyzed, and so I have to communicate to her in Chinese, and I have to teach her a little English, also, so she can tell me what she needs.

After that I take a year vacation to the Philippines. At that time, I'm waiting for my visa to come here to the U.S., which my husband now, he is the one who petitioned me. Before I

came here, before my visa, he already asked me if I wanted Las Vegas or California to live. One thing I asked is, “Where can I get a job right away?” Because that’s concerning. You have to have a job. My husband told me, “Vegas is nice because it’s a union town,” he said. I said, “Oh cool, I’ll go then to Vegas.”

I live here in Vegas for twenty-one years, and I’m married twenty-one years. I’m so happy and proud of my husband. His name is Robert Newman, not the old man Newman. He is really cool, and he always makes me laugh all the time. We don’t have kids, but he has two sons. Him and I don’t have kids. Of course, before we got married, we already discussed that. As his age and my age, I said, “No. I have a lot of brothers and sisters, and I think I’m done with the kids.” It’s nothing about kids. I love kids. But I know it’s a very hard responsibility.

My first job was over at Hard Rock, housekeeper. I stayed there for, I’d say, three or four months, and then moved to job sales. The owner was Mordechai the Jeweler. For sure you know him. Mordechai is his name. That’s the owner of The Jewelers. I work over at Caesars Palace, one of his stores. Sometimes I work over at Venetian, one of his stores. They have also at Mandalay Bay. It’s just a rotation. **[Ed. Note: Vicki and Mordechai Yerushalmi started The Jewelers, Inc. in 1976.]**

On sales, of course, I’m working graveyard, and I know it’s hard to make a big sale when you work graveyard, and so I’m thinking of where I can have more money and good health insurance. As I’m looking, they have an opening at Mandalay Bay. They are building this new construction named THE Hotel. I apply and I got in as a housekeeper. Until now, I’m still a housekeeper at Mandalay Bay, Delano. I’ve been working with them for eighteen years, soon to be nineteen years as a housekeeper.



I was really happy when I got in at Mandalay Bay because it's a [Culinary Union Local 226] union hotel, and I do really appreciate how the benefits are. For me, when I got into the union as a member, I felt like it's an asset because you have good benefits, mostly health insurance, your pension; if you need something, like you wanted to start to buy a new home, they have a program for that also to help you to get a new house, and then it protects our job, too, if you are a union member, so seniority, all of that. For example, if they close down the hotel, we are still protected to our job, and, at the same time, we keep our seniority, and that's a good thing. I describe it like an asset, which is really good.

Until now, I'm still a housekeeper. I've been shop steward for eighteen years, seventeen, eighteen years. I did a little bit out of the hotel. They had a program here at the union to see if you are interested to do something different, and I said yes. I did some political, also, external, and then after that I have to go back to my job as housekeeping. It's kind of interesting.

**I'd like to go back a bit. I just want to flesh out your path a little bit more, how you grew up. Do you have any memories of your grandparents?**

My grandparents, yes. My grandparents, actually I really miss them. They're gone. My grandparents, he is a fisherman on my father's side, and my grandma accepts laundry in the church that people work at the church. Yes, they're very nice people. They helped us, too, when they were struggling. My grandpa, he teach me how to...like a survivor thing...how to catch fish, all of that, and how to build a fire on your own without a match. Way back then, we just live in simple things, not really glamorous. He teach me how to climb to take down the coconut, all of that stuff. It's kind of interesting to me. How to catch crab and shrimp, all of that. My grandma, mostly she tried to teach me how to do the laundry, but I'm not so interested.

[Laughing] More house jobs, and I'm more outdoors with my grandpa. How to cut open the coconut. It's like a boy thing. I grew up with my grandpa mostly like a tomboy.

**How did he catch fish? What did he use?**

He had that kind of sharp thing. I don't have to use a big knife, just...I don't know how they call it. It's a sharp thing. You just take the coconut and do it like that, and you pull it, pull the surface of the coconut, and then just crack it open. Get a stone, a big rock. It's kind of cool, actually. I like it. Of course, all the juice of the coconut will spill while you have to get a big bucket so it won't be wasted.

**What about fish and crab and shrimp?**

Fish, I had not a fancy fishbowl, just made of bamboo. He teach me how to make that because it's flexible, the bamboo. The string is not really a good string for fishing, and then he had a little bait. Okay, you dug some more. I dug in the soil, and worm come out. I take that, and we'd go fishing. He had a fish net. We had a raft to the ocean. Just throw the fish net and wait for a second, and then we have fish. When I was a kid, I'm outdoors, and I'm so dark because I'm out in the sun. Yes, it's nice and cool.

**SE: What kind of fish?**

Oh, it's different kinds of fish. I don't even know the name of it, but they're really nice fish and delicious. That's the difference: when I come here in U.S.; it's no longer fresh.

**CW: Do you know how your parents met?**

My mom was actually working in one of the family. She is a helper. She mentioned to me that they're from another country. Then my mom went to school at the same time as my dad. They went to the same school, and so they met and got married. When I see the picture of my mom

when I was a little kid, she has very nice long hair and very nice attitude. That's how they met up and stick together.

**What was it like helping to raise your seven siblings?**

OMG, yes. It's a lot of work, yes. When my mom is doing the laundry and my dad is out working as a bus driver, then I have to do the cooking. Here you do the stove, heat. In the Philippines, no. You had that thing, and you had to gather whatever you can gather from the yard, like sticks, leaves, whatever, coconut shelling, and then use that for you to fire so you can cook or get a charcoal. You make your own charcoal if you want to grill. It's very hard. We had very little to eat because it's not much way back then. Way back then, the thing is so simple. You can eat porridge, porridge with no meat. Just put a little vegetables, cook rice with a lot of water, and you can eat already, or cook rice with a whole bunch of water and then add a little sugar, and you can eat already way back then. It's a hard life, but we survived and, also, helped them with their needs, help them how to write and read. Until I see how hard it is, that's how I pursue to go to Singapore so my paycheck will go to them. All my paycheck mostly I send to them. Only thing left to me is fifty bucks Singapore money because I only have one day off in one month, so I really don't go anywhere. It's just for me to buy something that I needed for personal or medication, something like that.

**How old were you when you moved to Singapore?**

I'd say eighteen years old, right away, because I can see how my brothers and sisters is having a hard life. I don't want to see them having a hard life. I try the best I can to help them, but when they have their own family, then that's how I stop sending money because they already have their own family. But sometimes if they really need help, like emergency, then I still send money to them.

**What was the difference between living in Singapore and living in the Philippines?**

Living in Singapore, I would say you have very little freedom because you're always working. I'm working early morning, and by the time I go to sleep, it's already—actually, it's not a really good sleep because when the person that you are taking care of wakes up needing something, it's kind of on and off sleep. For me, I will describe it like twenty-four hours. Sometimes when their grandkids come, they needed help to take care of the kids, and then I did the same thing, too. My life in the Philippines, there's freedom, but it's a tough life. I would say if you want to work in the Philippines, you have a very little paycheck, salary, versus working in Singapore, at least a little bit more there. Of course, more job, more hours. It's kind of tough. The only thing is the freedom and you're away from the family. I missed them a lot. That's the only thing, homesickness. You know that homesickness is...But until then, for seven, eight years that I was away, homesickness. I think when I arrive here in Vegas, then my homesickness is gone because I'm already with my husband. We got married here in Vegas. Too bad the name of the chapel, they changed it, but still...yes.

**Do you have any favorite happy memories from when you lived in the Philippines?**

Yes. When I was a little kid, I can do whatever I want. I can play whatever I want. Mostly, I played volleyball and basketball, but not the girly type of play. The parents way back then, "You can't do this; you can't do that." When my parents are not around, then I play basketball and volleyball. I do the bicycle, all of that stuff. Of course, they can see when I'm out doing boy stuff because I get burnt. Yes, that's the fun thing that I had, which now I miss it.

**What was schooling like back in the Philippines?**

Schooling back in the Philippines, actually I didn't have uniform because we couldn't afford to get a new uniform. My mom, what she did, she saw the curtain to the bus. It looks the same for

the uniform of the school. She took that to the tailor and sew it. Someone, a friend, has an extra top, and they give it to us. I only have one uniform to go to school. I don't have shoes. I wear slippers to go to school, and I walk to go to school. You have to get up early morning just to go to school. When it's raining, you use banana tree to go to school.

**SE: As your umbrella?**

We couldn't afford umbrella or anything. If you have a big plastic bag in your house, yes, you can use that so you don't get wet going to school. Of course, I don't have shoes, so I don't have to worry about wetting my shoes because I'm wearing slippers. I walked, I would say, from here, the union, to Palace Station to go to school.

**SE: Wow.**

Yes. I don't know how many kilometers, but yes, back and forth going to school.

**SE: How long did that take?**

Oh, until I finished my grade school, sixth grade.

**SE: How much time in the day did that take you?**

I go to school every day.

**SE: I mean from the time you left the house until you got to the school, how long was that?**

I would get up at six o'clock in the morning and then start walking because the school would start at seven in the morning. I have to walk fast or run. By the time I get to school, I'm all sweaty. Of course, the teachers are really nice, and then they let you rest and give you a piece of bread for you to eat in the morning because they know I haven't eaten. I miss all my teachers from when I was in grade school. They're really nice in helping us especially if they see we are struggling.

Guess where I learned how to write my name? In the sand because I don't have paper. My dad and my grandpa will teach me how to write my name. I'm sitting on the ground and writing my name in the sand. If I make a mistake, all I need to do is do like that [making swiping sound] and then write again. No paper, no eraser. That's how I learned how to write my name. It's kind of cool, actually.

**CW: How did you meet your husband?**

When I was working in Singapore, I saw him, and we talked. He asked me if I'm interested in helping him be a secretary because he's doing import and export in the Philippines. I said, "Yes, why not?" The only thing is I don't go to the Philippines often. It's just communication, and I tried to help through communication to the Philippines. That's how we met up. He said, "Okay, I'm going to file a visa for you, and we can get married in U.S." I said, "Okay. As long as you're not married, okay." Of course, he told me he has two sons, but already grown up.

**When you first arrived in Las Vegas, what were your first impressions?**

Actually, when I arrived, I arrived in L.A. airport. When I'm at the airplane, I sit by the window. When we are ready to land, I say, "Oh my God, what are those lights?" It was the backlight of the car, many cars. I said, "Oh, there's cars everywhere." When I land to the airport in L.A., I say, "Wow, this is very nice." Actually, Singapore airport is really nice, too. I like it. It's nice and clean. The street is clean. Food is cheaper. But when I arrive in L.A., I say, "Oh, this is more huge." We stayed overnight in L.A. and then drive back here to Vegas. I felt like, oh, this is new to me. I have to adjust the way of living. Of course, the time frame, night here is morning in the Philippines, so it's hard to adjust when I got here. Also, the food, which I'm already used to Singapore food, Chinese food. I said, "So, what are we going to eat?" The first thing I eat is hamburger and taco. I said, "Oh, no, no, no, that's not food." I'm looking for a hot meal, real

food. My husband understands what I'm looking for. I have to cook. But when I found the buffet, "Oh, this is more even cool. I don't have to cook. I can eat whatever I want." The feeling that I feel when I arrive here is, oh, I can eat so many things. I can go to job because right away I was looking for a job so we can help with the finances.

I said, "Is there any other Filipino here?" He said, "Yes, you will see them." But sometimes it's for you to judge how you're going to feel if you see your fellow country people. I said, "Okay." I felt like...because it's just me and my husband. For me, it felt like a big opportunity for me to grow even more, like the way I felt when I'm working in Singapore and on my own. I did grow, and I learned some things that you can do and not do. When I arrived here in Las Vegas, I kind of already know the don'ts and the way you're going to survive with your own. I felt like an alien, actually, because I'm by myself and I don't have family here. It's just me and my husband.

**Did you know about unions before moving to Las Vegas?**

I don't know about union before, but before I came here, my husband told me, "If you want a job right away, come to Vegas. They have union." But it didn't really come to mind to ask him about the union. Then when I applied over at Mandalay Bay, or before even that, I'm hearing already about the union. Of course, I didn't really pay attention to it because in the Philippines, they have union that I'm hearing, and it's really different to the union here. Of course, maybe it depends how they... You hear on the news propaganda...they say unions are corrupt. That's how they word it in the Philippines, maybe so you don't join the union, right? Now I figure it out when I was working at the union. Oh, okay. Then when I applied at Mandalay Bay, they say, "You've got to go to the union office and sign up." I said, "Okay." That's how I ask, "What's the benefits?" They explained to me the benefits. You are protected, which is good. My husband told

me also the same thing that if you join the union, it's good for you because you are protected, and the company can just easily...because they like to fire people with no reason, right? That's how I describe the union: It's a very good asset.

**In the twenty years that you've been here, how have you seen the casino industry and unions change?**

Casino industry, they always change. When I arrived here, not many houses, not many tall buildings. As you can see, it's so much now. Way back then, the casino industry, they pay us...How much when I started? I don't really remember now when I started working at the Mandalay Bay how much I started per paycheck, but right now we're getting good money. Of course, company is always changing their rules and their policy. They like sometimes to give us a hard time. Even though they give us a hard time, we have the union that we can tell them what is going on, and then they tell us what to do. Then we get together and discuss the matter, what the company is doing, and we report to the union because if you don't report what the company is doing to us, to all the employees, the union won't know. We have to report to them, and the union will actually really do something for the employees to help us what we need. Like screwing up our seniority, something like that, or if you need a vacation and they don't want to give your vacation on the day that you wanted. They want it on how will be convenient. It's our vacation, and so it will be our choice. For something like that, yes. If they fire you for no reason, the union is always behind us to support.

**What do you enjoy most about living here?**

Work. Work and my husband. Every day of work, housekeeping, it's a tough job, but it's fun because you will encounter different kinds of people all over the world. It's kind of interesting to meet other people from different places. You will learn different things. If I see Asian people,



yes, they're so very nice and kind. That's the most thing I like about, very kind. Kindness, you can't take that away from us as an Asian or Oriental, the kindness. Nothing against others, Caucasians or what. But, yes, we are born and raised in kindness. Yes, very kind especially if we see elderly people, we show them a lot of respect because that's how we are being brought up.

**Do you still celebrate any traditional Filipino holidays or festivals?**

Not really because by the time I got here, it's just me and my husband. If there is something that I hear that is celebration, like festival, when that happens, I'm working, not off, so I couldn't really attend that. I feel like, oh, if I have to call off, then my paycheck will be less because I'm into work. But then if it is my day off and I heard there's something going on, like festival for Asian community, yes, I try to attend that and support.

**Do you cook?**

I cook. Used to be I cook, but since I was a little kid and already I'm cooking all the time, then I told my husband, "Maybe I need to give a little rest with cooking." I cook very little, but mostly my husband does the cooking. He is a good cook. Sometimes if he asks me to cook a special dish, then I cook, like *pancit*, the noodles. Noodles and the chicken, chicken adobo or beef stew, the Filipino way, yes. We do some grilling. I'm not a good cook; my husband is. But, yes, it's edible. [Laughing]

**Do you consider yourself religious?**

I'm a Roman Catholic, so yes. My parents, my uncle, auntie, they're all very religious. For me, when I was a little kid, yes, but when I arrive here in Vegas, I would say I didn't go to church anymore because for me wherever you go, God is with you. You can talk to him anywhere you are, everywhere you go. He is always beside you, and you can talk to him for any minute. I know God is with you, he's listening, and I know when you ask something, yes, he will grant your

prayer. I'm working Sunday, so I don't really go to the church. But, yes, I do believe in God. Being really religious, I would say in the medium, not high level, but I believe in God, yes.

**Since living in the United States, have you ever experienced anything racially discriminatory against yourself or heard from others?**

No. But when I just arrived here in Vegas, because it's just me and my husband, I'm really excited if I see my fellow country people, Filipino. I say, "Oh, hi." I say it in our language. Suddenly, they will tell me, "Oh, hi." I will speak in my language, and they say, "Oh, I'm sorry, I don't speak Tagalog." I say, "Oh, okay, that's fine," and I'll speak in English. Then sooner or later, I will find out she speaks my language. That's okay. I'm just like, yeah. But other people, no, I don't feel any discrimination or harassing, like that. They're pretty good. My coworkers at work, we have Korean, Chinese, Mexican and from India, all over, Boston. They're very nice people, very nice. We support each other. If other people need help, it doesn't matter what is your language and where you came from. We help each other, and we support because we are a team. You go to work every day. It's like a home, and so we're like a family. We help each other. If some are in trouble, okay, let's go help.

**How did you learn English?**

When I was a little kid, I see this man coming because we live by the beach. Our house is across the beach. We see this. I say, "Grandpa, look. That guy is very tall and white." He said, "Oh, they're from other country, but they speak a different language, English." I say, "Do you speak English, Grandpa?" He said, "Not really, just a little bit. But once you go to school, they can teach you." I say, "Okay." They gave me a book to read in English. When I went to school, they teach English. I said, "Oh, this is the English that my grandpa was talking about." They teach us in English when I was in grade school and at college. I said, "This is cool." Then when I went to

Singapore, then I can teach my *álma*. I call it *álma*. I can teach her English, and then she teach me Chinese. When I was in grade school, I studied English. Actually, they say it's our second language.

**I'll pass it off to Stefani.**

**SE: You mentioned that when you came here you knew some "don'ts." What were some of those don'ts?**

I'm going to give you an example. Kids in the Philippines when I was a little kid, when your parents want to discipline you, they tap your hand with a ruler or something, but not here when you are disciplining your kid, not here. That's the one thing I saw: You cannot hit your kids. Of course, I don't have kids, so I don't have to worry about disciplining my kids. In the Philippines, when somebody is fighting and the next day they're okay, no police come, no police. Over here, just a little bit of things, then police will come and take care of you. Those are the don'ts. To be nice and not to get involved in police situation, like that. Just very simple little things, then they get involved, the police. For me, maybe that's kind of a big threat for us because in the Philippines you don't need the police. You can just settle it with, what we call, *barangay* \_\_\_\_\_, which is head of the community, and you guys can do like a peace talk.

**You mentioned that you drove here from LAX, L.A. [Los Angeles International] Airport.**

**You drove here with your husband. Was it day or night when you got here?**

Night.

**Oh, wow. When you first saw the Strip, what did you think?**

I say, "Wow, a lot of lights like a Christmas tree." Before we go to the apartment, he took me to Las Vegas Boulevard to see and have an idea. Of course, at night, a lot of pretty lights. "Wow." I said, "Wow, I'm in a different world," so to speak because when I was in Singapore, I don't go

out at night. I just stay in the house or the facility. Yes, it's very nice. I'm just like, "Oh, look at this tall building." Of course, they have that also in Singapore, but it's unique also here that you can see, for example, the Stratosphere building. My husband teach me because I'm not driving yet when I came here, "When you get lost, just look for that Stratosphere building, and you'll know where you're at." I said, "Okay." I take bus when I go to work to Hard Rock. For me when I see it, "Wow, it's so pretty."

**Where was your first apartment here?**

Over at Decatur, somewhere in Decatur and Sahara. It's a two-bedroom apartment.

**Not far from the Stratosphere.**

Not far from here, yes. Yes, it's a nice community.

**How did that neighborhood look compared to the neighborhood that you were used to, say, in the Philippines or in Singapore?**

In the Philippines, I can grow vegetables, but not here because it's an apartment. I said, "Oh, apartment, you just stay where you're at." There's no yard or anything. The Philippines, we have yard. Then I don't pay rent or anything in the Philippines because we have our house and the lot, but here you have to pay the rent. That's the only thing: There's no yardwork. Guess what? Because we do have water pump in the Philippines, I said, "Where's the water pump?" It's a faucet. I said, "Oh, this is good. I don't have to..."

**You mentioned also that you were a shop steward. Can you tell us how you became a shop steward, and then tell us what some of your duties are as a shop steward?**

When I just started at Mandalay Bay, I worked swing shift. A lady named Lisa, I know she is doing something, but I don't know about the shop steward thing. I can see she's writing down something. She comes to me and says, "Elena, I'm going to hand you this piece of paper. Can

you please follow up for me what is going on? I'm going to give you the list, and just follow up with the supervisor, the manager about this turndown." I said, "Why are you giving it to me?" She said, "Because I'm going to do a leave of absence, and I'm going to be out..." She told me she was going to be gone for a while working here at the union. I said, "Oh, okay." I take the piece of paper. I didn't know her responsibility. I didn't know she is a shop steward. I didn't know I'm getting her job. I didn't know she is transferring it to me. I just said, "Oh, okay."

I go face the floor manager. And then, "Elena, are you shop steward?" I said, "What is shop steward?" She said, "Because you have all the issues in the paper." I said, "Well, at least she handed it to me. She told me to talk to you about what is going on. I'm doing what she told me to do." She said, "Okay, you are maybe committing to be shop steward." I said, "Well, whatever shop steward is. We need to talk." I told my manager, "We need to talk."

Then I told Lisa I was going on. She said, "Elena, you can take care of that because I'm not going to be at work for a while." I said, "You're not coming back? Now what?" She said, "Well, I give you all the names to take care." I didn't realize she was giving me her list of twenty people because they have this list of twenty people as being a shop steward. Whatever the problem is, you have to help out and see what's going on.

### **Each shop steward is responsible for twenty members?**

We have a list of twenty, yes. But I didn't know I was shop steward that day. Then I see this lady talking in Spanish, but I know she doesn't work there. I asked my coworker, "What's going on? What's the lady saying?" Because they are speaking in Spanish. They told me, "I don't know. I don't speak Spanish." Because we are Filipino. I said, "Excuse me. What's going on? You must speak in English so we can understand this." She said, "Oh, I'm so sorry. What's your name? You're Elena? Oh, you're Elena. Lisa was talking to me about you." I said, "Oh, so you know

Lisa. When is she coming back?" She said, "Oh, no, she's not coming back yet, Elena." I said, "How do you know my name?" She said, "Yes, because she mentioned your name." I said, "Oh."

At that time then, I realize they are transferring me to become a shop steward. We went to training. We have a training for shop steward. Then I graduate as a shop steward. We have a list of twenty. You can have more if you want to, if you can take care of all of it, to help them if they are getting in trouble, if they are being written up for something that is not fair. A lot of my coworkers, they are afraid to say something, so we have to be there for them.

**Lisa identified you as a leader.**

Yes, kind of, yes. But I don't know what she saw in me to become a leader.

**Obviously, she did. Are you the only member of your family who is here in the United States?**

Yes, I'm the only one. That's why I mentioned earlier that I feel like an alien because I have nobody except my husband.

**How do you keep in contact with your family?**

Way back then, letters, no Facebook, no Messenger, no nothing, so letters. It takes a long time, the mail to get to my family, so just letters. But then when they created Facebook, Twitter, all that, then, yes, Facebook, and then I can see their face through Messenger or the Viber app, something like that, that's how we communicate. Of course, sometimes...I'm not into Facebook a lot because I feel like I'm getting more stress especially if they say, "Oh, we need this and that." I think I was over with it. But yes, it was nice to see them through chat video.

**When was the last time you visited?**

The last time I speak to my sister and nephew and niece, even though I have a lot of nieces and nephews, the last time was last month, and it's good to see them on the video chat, but it feels different if you see them in person.

**When was the last time you went to the Philippines?**

Ten years ago. It's very expensive to go.

Where are you from, Korea?

**CW: I am Chinese.**

Oh, you're Chinese, okay.

**SE: How long is the flight?**

It depends on the route. If you are layover on Hawaii, I say sixteen hours. But then if you're going to be stopping over in Vancouver, I think it's more hours, like seventeen, eighteen hours because you've got to stop at Vancouver for an hour or so. It depends if you, of course, go for a cheap airplane ticket.

**You lose a day when you come back. You gain a day when you go, and you lose a day when you come back. But you've got two days of travel at each end.**

Yes. Half of your day is going to the province because I live out of Manila. Everything is too far apart.

**You've got, say, five days of travel.**

Yes. It's not really much if you only go two weeks to the Philippines with your kind of budget. It's too short. People like to go one month. That's why we save a lot, and that way we have money to spend with family.

**When you think of a smell that takes you back to your childhood, a food smell or a cooking smell, what is that that takes you right back?**

Fresh air. Yes, fresh air. Fresh vegetables and smell of the ocean. If I drive to California, we go to the beach and just sit out there, like Huntington Beach, and then I remember my childhood because I'm always at the beach catching fish.

**And writing your name in the sand.**

Yes, yes, yes.

**Is there anything we didn't ask you that you'd like to talk about?**

Yes. When I was going to school, I have a very hard, let's say, bully, maybe because of my eye. They call me names, blind and other stuff, because of my eye. I only have one eye. My left eye is burned. Yes, I hear a lot of name-calling when I was a little kid. It's not the end of the world, so I passed that. It's over. I wish I can turn back the clock so that it won't happen about that eye. It happened when I was two years old. I don't even remember it. There was no one watching us when I was two years old and that happened because way back then you can leave your kids without any adult, but not here.

**Was it an accident?**

Yes, it was. They said I was blind. My ball went into the big basket, and the basket has a stick that sticks up. By the time I reached my ball, the stick went into my eye. They couldn't take me to the doctor right away. By the time they take me to the doctor, my left eye is already closed, and it's too late until it opened up. When they open up my eye, it has a big white scar like a cataract. That's the thing when I come here in Vegas, I got a job and I got health insurance. My left eye hurt. I had a blister, so they had to do surgery. Good thing I have a very good insurance to cover my surgery for the eye. Then I did a cornea transplant twice already. I didn't know if they had a cornea implant. It depends how long it is, and then they have to replace it again. But



they told me I wouldn't be able to see because it didn't learn how to see because it happened when I was only two years old.

**Your eye didn't have a chance to learn from your brain or vice versa?**

Well, when they cover my right eye, I can see you, but it's blurred. Sometimes if you're walking over here even though you're talking, I couldn't see you. The perimeter over here, I can't see because I can see on the right.

**Wow. Thank you so much.**

Thank you.

**CW: Thank you.**

**[End of recorded interview]**