

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH CASIANO CORPUS JR**

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 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



“When you talk to me about nonsense, I’m not going to learn from you. But if you talk to you in good faith, you’re good.”

Casiano Corpus details a rough childhood growing up in the Philippines, where society is highly socioeconomically stratified and the poor live a tough and relentless life. He recalls his parents working a number of jobs to support their large family, and as soon as he finished his primary schooling, also started working in construction. Corpus remembers nights where he slept on the floor of the construction dorms and ate rice with salt to get by. When his father was finally petitioned by his uncle to move to the United States, Corpus was reluctant to go at first, since he had a familiar life in the Philippines, but has come to love the United States and the life he has been able to create for himself. Immediately after moving to the United States, their family landed in Las Vegas, Nevada, and Corpus began working a number of jobs.

He started out as a busboy at a Chinese restaurant before deciding that he wanted to work in a casino and moved to Union Plaza. His current job is as a porter at Palace Station, where he has been for the past 31 years. He has also been working to unionize Palace Station and Station Casinos with the Culinary Union for the past twelve years. He talks about the hunger strike he organized, why he organizes with no fear, and what he hopes to see out of his efforts throughout the interview.

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March 28, 2023  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

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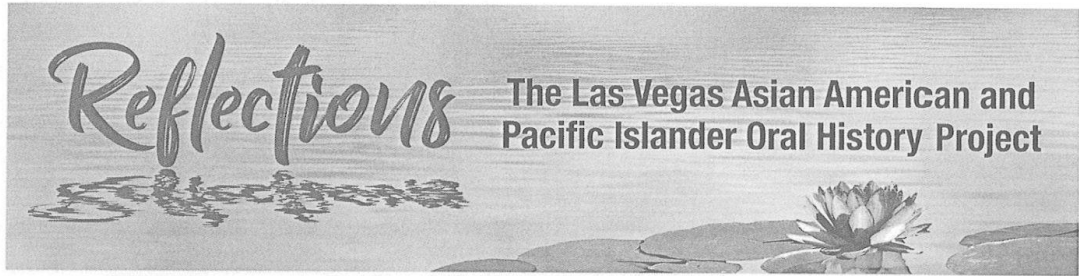
Casiano Corpus starts off his interview by detailing his childhood, his first jobs, immigrating to America, his life in America today, impacts of being a part of the union, the hardest parts of leaving the Philippines, his parents’ occupations in America, the importance of family, and the role education has played in their family values. ....1-6

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**Good afternoon. Today's date is February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023. My name is Cecilia Winchell. I am here with Stefani Evans and Casiano Corpus, Jr.**

**Casiano, could you please spell your first and last name for the record?**

C-A-S-I-A-N-O. C-O-R-P-U-S.

**Thank you.**

I'm a junior.

**To start off, could you tell us a little bit about your childhood, where you grew up, what your parents did, schooling, stuff like that?**

I was born and raised in the Philippines. My dad was a general foreman in construction, and my mom was just a stay-at-home mom. She doesn't work in the Philippines. I went to school in the Philippines from first grade all the way up to high school, but I was an undergraduate because I didn't take the CAT, which is the Citizen Army Training, so that was the curriculum for me in high school. Then after I graduated high school, I was going to go to Cali, but no money. My mom said, "You have to stay; your sister first," and they let my sister go to college first because she was a scholar. I said, "All right."

I was seventeen, and I started working in construction. It was a hard life. Of course, my daddy is a general foreman in construction, and we keep moving provinces, keep moving around. Then I started working in construction when I was seventeen until we came to the United States. It was a hard life, a very hard life. Just to survive, you had to work five days a week, and we'd earn ten cents a day because of the value of the dollar. That was the worst part growing up. Of course, I make a detour instead of going straight. That's my life. Because my mom and dad were not rich people, we struggled a lot. It's a sad life, but I just don't want to say. Sometimes you can eat once a day, and sometimes we had to go to this—what do you call this well where you fetch

water and everything, and sometimes you have little bugs inside that thing and you have to boil it. That's why it was a hard life.

But then my dad told me, "Hey, I'm going to take you to the United States." I was twenty years old. I said, "No, I don't want to go." Of course, I don't know nobody here in the United States. I enjoyed my life in the Philippines. He goes like this, "You better go." His brother was retired U.S. Army, so he petitioned my dad. For ten years we waited. Then he brought me because I'm only twenty years old, underage, so they can bring like twenty down. But I didn't want to go. I said, "What am I supposed to do there? I've got no education. Ain't got nothing." He said, "Just go anyway." So I did and I was glad. I was very, very thankful for my dad that I was here.

When I first came to the United States, while I was waiting on my green card, I was working as a mover, like apartment friends were moving out, and we're moving their things and everything. Then when I had my green card, I did apply for a job here at the union hall, and they sent me to a Chinese restaurant at the Union Plaza to be a busboy. It was a union house. I was still twenty years old at that time. I liked it. It was a hard job, but I was young at that time. Now I'm sixty years old.

I'm sixty years old and the experience that I had, if I remember my childhood in the Philippines compared to this, I am thankful for my dad and God that I'm here. Now I realize, damn, life in the Philippines is so hard. You're only making ten, twenty cents a day. Sometimes we go to school with no money, and our clothes are not that presentable. It was a hard life in the Philippines that I had.

One time my dad was in another province, and I think the money got delayed. I had to do the work. I had to go to the market just to carry luggage or bags for the customers to give me



fifty cents or one peso a day or two or whatever. Then I was cleaning buses or jeepneys just to survive. I don't know if you heard about these chicken fights, cockfights and everything. We had a stage over there. After all the events, then I cleaned. These are the kind of life that if you don't have anything in the Philippines, you don't have nothing. If you're rich, you're rich. If you're poor, you're poor. That's two different ways.

When I came here, I was so happy. I was like "Now, I'm good." My dad passed away. My mom died. Now I have to stay by myself because I have four boys, as a matter of fact, older than you. With my first wife, we had two boys. Then we got divorced. They are thirty-five and thirty-four now, and they've got their own families now. With my second wife, I've got another two boys. They're thirteen and fourteen. She is Filipino. I think both wives are good, but the only thing is just me, and I accepted it. First time I came to the United States, or the first time I taste everything, I was fevered. My first wife, to tell the truth, the family was well off. They've got a little money. When I was working, I said, "I don't even care." I turned twenty-one, twenty-two. I didn't even care about my kids. I didn't even care if I got divorced at that time when I was with my first wife. I got my paycheck, spent it all. It was a good life with the first wife. Now I realize. I tell everybody, if you've got a good wife, a good lady, keep her because you will regret that. I didn't regret it because my second wife is good, too.

But now I'm here. I work at Palace Station. I've been there for thirty-one years as a casino porter. Then we had the organizing campaign. The organizer came to my house and asked me if I wanted to be a committee leader. She explained everything to me about what's going on and everything, and I liked it because it's getting better for the family. I become a committee leader. I'm organizing people inside Station Casinos, which is not easy to organize, especially Stations. But all the time I'm thinking about the future, the life. I told myself, "I'm going to

finish this fight until we win this contract against Station Casinos.” It’s not easy, but you’ve just got to keep on talking to them.

The union taught me a lot about life. When they organized me, then I realized how to deal with people, to speak with people, to communicate with people. Before, I don’t even talk to people. I’m just a hardworking man. It’s just life. I think I woke up when I was thirty-five. At that time, I was like, okay, this is it; life has to go on; life has to be straightened out; everything has got to be good, which is okay.

It’s not easy to be in a country, like mine, being poor. If you’re wrong, you’re wrong if you’re poor even if you’re right because of the money. That money talks at all times. If you’re rich, you get what they call justice. But if you’re poor, nothing. I even experienced sleeping on the floor, like we do in construction is sleep on the floor. I don’t know if you guys experienced it because you guys are here, and I figure you guys were born in the United States. I even experienced eating rice and salt by itself for a week. That’s how hard my childhood is.

But my dad, once he told me to come over here, I don’t want to leave the Philippines because it’s where I grew up, and it’s where I know all people and have friends there. It’s tough. Life in the Philippines is tough if you’re poor, especially if you grow up in small provinces which is... the government, they don’t even know, they don’t even care about the people in the small provinces. Not until a person matures and becomes the person we become to recognize all these people in the provinces. Not until all these YouTubers become YouTubers. They want to be popular, and then there is no time.

My life in the United States is good now. That’s why I said I love United States. I learned a lot from United States. Maybe if I did not come to the United States, maybe I’m already dead

because I start doing all these bad...doing all these illegal things. Right now, I'm sleeping and sometimes if I think about that, I wake up like this, wow. It's like a nightmare.

My mom was a good cook. When we worked in the construction, she cooked for the people. We got a little income there..

My dad, as I said, is a general foreman. He takes care of everything in construction. But when he came to the United States, he didn't last that long because he got pancreas cancer. When he got diagnosed with that cancer, it is already all over his body. I told him, because he always told me, "You've got to fight all the time." That's what he told me. Now he was in the bed, talking to him. When you get pancreatic cancer, you start to bloat. Everything was just depressing, deflated or something. But when he died, everything went back to normal, like the stomach goes down and everything. But when he had the pancreas, that was dangerous.

But when my mom died, that's the thing I don't like. I took her to her doctor to get just a test, high blood pressure, whatever. She said the doctor recommended her to go...Right there by Eastern, what hospital is there? Valley or whatever. I said, "Okay." At that time, I had to go to Reno, Nevada for a reunion. I said, "I'll be back because they're going to get your test and everything." I'm the one who drove her to that.

When I came back, I was very surprised because I don't know what I'm going to see at the hospital. I don't know what happened. When I came back, she was all on these tubes, but she was okay. I said, "What happened?" She died. She didn't ever come out of that thing. I told my sister, "It's not my fault." My sister said, "No, it's not your fault." I said, "But why is that? When I bring her over here it's just a test. Why everything went crazy?" Tubes and everything. Anyway, she died. Part of that I blame myself because I don't know why. That's what her doctor said, so I had to follow. But I thought it was just a test.

Now we've got to be strong. We've got to stick by family. I've got seven brothers and six sisters. Some of them are already dead. They're in the Philippines, most of them. There are three boys, the older ones. It's a life that I can never forget. Sometimes you just have to do what you've got to do to survive. You steal. You beg. That's what life is all about. When I was growing up, going into the market and cleaning all this just to survive, just to eat for one day. I tried all the hard work in the Philippines, but I am thankful that I experienced all that because when I came to the United States, I did use it. My body was used to hard work. Now that I'm a casino porter, [laughing], I tell everybody, "This is an easy job, guys. This is nothing. It's like if you guys that complain about this job, you wouldn't even last in the Philippines, bro. You wouldn't even last. I'll give you guys two months, three months." Blisters here. The first time I worked construction, I got blisters, whew. Just like you, you've got beautiful hands. But once you work in that construction, everything is manual, shovel, things. You're tampering all this. I was waddling and it was painful. It was very painful. Then sometimes when you do some floors and everything, the cement puts holes in your skin, whew. The fact that you have to eat, you have to feed your family, they have to do that. Now look at my hands, all tired. I'm proud of it. Everybody is proud of being who you are and what you are. That's why I tell everybody, "You've got to be proud of who you are and what you are no matter what you do." That's what I tell my boys all the time, "Finish your education, man, because education is number one. Once you've got your career and everything, you're not scared. You're not afraid. You're not scared to whatever. Don't be like me. I don't know anything about all this except labor work."

My dad is a hardworking man. He's shorter than me, but they respected him. One of my sisters did very good in college. She's in New Zealand. She's got a good life. And one of my sisters was a teacher, two of them, in the Philippines. All the ladies, they become successful, but

they guys, ugh, Lord have mercy, it's all showing off. That's why I told my boys, "You don't go to school because you want the Jordans, good jeans, and good shirts. For what?" I told them all the time, "You don't go to school to show off. You go to school to learn." I told them, "If I'm going to buy all this, I'm not going to send you to school. You know why? What? You're just going to show off, man. You're not going to learn nothing." That's why I tell them, "Do your homework." But sometimes I leave them alone. My wife's crazy.

When I first came here at twenty years old, '83, in '83, Vegas was so small. There's nobody in Vegas, man. It's a crazy life. Drinking, everything. I was single at the time. I became a busboy, working as a dishwasher, and then working as a hard count. You know what's a hard count, right? There used to be coins here in Las Vegas. I used to pick up money underneath the machines every day. I scaled money, too, and I scaled money to wrap all the coins, eighty thousand, a hundred thousand a day. I put that in the scalers. I give them the ticket. They have all these computers that tell how much money is in the bucket. I do all that. It was a hard job. It used to be hard working a hard job. Busboy is okay. Porter, right now, it's okay. I've got money for rent and everything like that. I'm just going to go straight; that's all there is.

All my family in the Philippines is not...because we're all separated, thirteen of us. The one that went to my aunt, because my aunt has seven pensions from the military and everything, so they could pay the college. The one that went to my dad and my mom, that's the one that's suffered, including me. But I don't regret that. That's my parents. You're just going to have to do whatever, and that's life.

One of my sisters became a beggar on the street. When I hear she became a beggar in the street, I was very surprised. I was like, "Why? What happened?" She was right there on the bridges asking for money. That's what they told us. She's got so many kids, she's got to survive.

Then one of my brothers, he died in his sleep, two of my brothers did. When he was sleeping, he got a heart attack, and he was trying to catch his breath, and he died. The other one, I don't know what it is. It's like an aneurysm—what do you call that in the back? They were trying to massage him. He fell asleep. He didn't wake up no more. I wonder what it is. The older one just fell. I think it was an aneurysm, and he just fell and died. Two of my brothers died in their sleep.

That's why you've got to enjoy life, man, because you never know. Hard life in the Philippines. I'm not going to lie. It's a very, very hard life. As I said, if you don't belong to a wealthy family, you have to do what you've got to do to survive. It's not like here. When you work construction here, you get all these machines that lift all these booths and everything to build that. There, you have to carry it on your shoulder, man. Six, seven people carrying that thing. You know how heavy that is, this trash and everything? They carry all that, eight people, early in the morning. You start from eight to four. They're making twenty cents, thirty cents a day. Five days a week. But the only thing about these poor people in the Philippines, even if they don't have anything, they're still happy. They are happy for what they've got. Because if you value the dollar, the dollar right now is dollar and dollar to fifty-five, which is going to be twenty. Ten cents, that will be like we're making eight in pesos a day, so that's ten cents. You're not even making three hundred pesos a week. You're only making three hundred, maybe, at the most. That was in...I was born in '64, and I came here in eight...Life is hard in the Philippines if you're poor. That's all I can say.

Maybe if you're smart, if you're a student, if you're smart, and you're a genius and everything like that, then they're going to give you a scholarship. Then you got free tuition fees.

Because in high school, you have to pay. Here, it's free. When you go to high school in the Philippines, you have to pay the tuition fees. Elementary school is free school. There is not a fee.

I go through a lot in the Philippines. I even run away from home. I got involved in a...and I almost died. I got involved in stealing stuff just to survive. I almost got shot. Thank God, he didn't pull the trigger, a security guard, because we were stealing stuff from the construction just to get some money. At this time, it's not to survive. This time it's because of what you would call craziness, I guess, being young and being...

My mom is a good mom. She takes care of thirteen kids. My dad is a good dad. The only thing about them is that they're not wealthy. They don't have no money to support the family, so we have to be distributed to our aunties and everything like that, the other families, whoever wants to go to school and finish their school. The remaining people that stayed with my mom, those are the ones that suffered a lot. But I have two sisters there right now, and me and my brothers, there are four of us here.

My other sister almost died two years ago. She survived. I don't know what happened. They said she was just eating sweet and everything, and she just fell. We went over there, and I talked to her when she was in bed because everybody was already crying. I told them, it's like, "Hey, they're giving her another life. Look, they're putting everything in your mouth, in your face." But she wasn't breathing on her own. I would whisper, "You've got to get up. You're stronger than this." It was like a stroke. She used to work, and now she can't work no more because she don't...

It's just like my wife; she had a stroke, too. That's why my wife is not working. She had a stroke three years ago. She used to be a maid at Stratosphere, strong. My wife was strong. She was a maid. If you're a maid, you have to be very strong because you've got to carry beds,

everything, eighteen rooms a day. Eight in the morning, I drop her off, and she called me. It's like, "What's wrong?" She said, "I feel dizzy. I don't feel good." She took an EO, early out. I was by the Stratosphere, and she started throwing up. She was hugging the...I picked her up. I said, "You can't walk." She can't open her eyes no more if you have a stroke like that. I look her and say, "You can't open your eyes?" She was throwing up, throwing up. I take her to my apartment, laid her down, do the old-fashion way that I know. I gave her hot water, massage her, give her tea, but the only thing I notice about her is that she can't wake up. Her eyes are not opening. Every time she laid down...[making choking sounds]. I said, "Enough." I called the paramedic, and the paramedic told me she almost went into a coma. It was her high blood pressure. Her blood pressure was two hundred something, almost died. Then she went into Sunrise. She didn't have the stroke that day. She had the stroke the next day. I went like this, "Ugh." I know this is going to be hard for me. I took her to rehab for nine months back and forth. I was so tired. I was working graveyard. Back and forth, back and forth. I would take my boys to school. Now she's not working. Her face was like this, moods like this. Her eye, this is like this. The way she walks, her balance is not...She is limp. I told her, "You went to rehab for nine months and..." But her mouth is like this, and her vision is...Everything is just gone. But at least she's alive. Right now, it's not a normal thing no more. But she said, "I want to go back there." I said, "Nobody is going to hire you with that kind of look because they don't want to be liable for what happened to you." I told my wife, "Now I'm just the only one who works." It's kind of tiring, but it's okay. It pays the bills. That's why I tell everybody where I work, "If you've got a good life, a good everything, don't abuse it, man, don't, because life is short. Enjoy it, don't abuse it."



Right now, at Palace Station, we're organizing and I'm talking to people, what's good about all this. I said, "It might not be me that I can get a contract. I might not taste this contract. But I'm organizing all these young ones. Fight for this. Fight for you guys. Fight until...Me, I'm seven more years. Maybe I might retire. But this is for you guys. This is for your kids, for a new generation to come here at Station Casinos. You've guys got to fight for what you've got so that you have respect." Because we're fighting for respect and dignity. Sometimes you don't know what you can depend yourself, you can't. That's why I tell these young ones that's coming in and coming out, thirty, twenty years old, "I'm Casiano. I'm a committee leader here. We've been fighting for twelve years here. I want you guys to fight for this." But the main factor of all this organizing is fear. They're scared. But I keep talking to them. I'm just going to have to go by their fears sometimes to communicate. I know they're afraid, but sometimes you can't be afraid. It's like, "You don't know. I'm from the Philippines, man. I've been through hell in the Philippines. But I know this organizing is good for me and my family and everybody's family. You cannot be afraid, man. You've got to fight." They say, "What can I say? I'm just one person." I say, "I'm Asian. I'm from the Philippines. I don't know nothing about this organizing. But when I found out the good of this, I will push this all the way. It's good for your family and the future generation. I will fight for that because I know how hard life is. I experienced it." I said, "This job you got here, this is nothing. Cleaning tables, this is nothing, bro, compared to what I experienced in the Philippines." I worked construction. We do it manually in the Philippines. Sometimes we eat, sometimes we don't. People won't give you money in the Philippines.

The other thing about the Philippines is this: You know your neighbors even if they don't have nothing to share, so it becomes like family. You can go to somebody's house and eat. Then

they start drinking, which I don't like that because they start doing...they drink. Boy, it's a hard life, and you guys are doing this. Spend all this money on your family instead of drinking it. My life in the Philippines is not that good. [Laughing] Here in the United States, I'm driving a car. [Laughing] I'm driving a car. I've got shoes, clothes. In the Philippines, sometimes I even walk in the street barefoot and everything, not unless they blessed you.

Anyway, there is another thing about my life in the Philippines. I was an altar boy. I was a Catholic. I was an altar boy. I served a priest and everything, and that's why I learned respect. In the Philippines, we had these strays that every six o'clock at night, they rang that bell in the church, and you have to get these elderly people's hands and put it on your head as a blessing.

You saw it. The place where I came from is so hard. I never forget that. I told you sometimes when I'm sleeping like this, my body just...I don't know what it is. I don't know what you call that, like if you think about the past, your body just...It's like, *whew*. I just go, *whew*, and then I remember all these people in the Philippines that are surviving, and, *eh*. I experienced when my mom and dad did not send money to our province. I experienced all three days, all week, just salt and rice and a little vegetables. Then what we'd do with the water, I told you about the wheel. That wheel, you have to clean it out, pitch it, put in a tin, and boil it because there's mosquitos in that thing.

That's why I said to everybody here, "You guys are lucky, the luckiest people in the whole world that you're in the United States of America. If you go this Third World country, you won't even believe because I don't know if you're going to survive." I thank God. I thank my dad and my mom, especially my dad and my mom that they bring me over here.

When I first came here in the United States, I want to go home, in '83, because it was snowing in Vegas. Yes, there was snow in Vegas when I first came. And I don't know nobody. I

don't know anything about the English language, and I've got to learn it myself. I told everybody, "I did it because I listened to people." I talked to you guys, the people that speak English and everything. That's how I learned my little English. If I wanted to talk to the Filipinos all the time, I might not learn, so I talked to everybody. "Hey, man, you can teach me."

I had an experience one time. I went to a 7-Eleven, and I said, "Excuse me, sir, can I get mutches?" "What's mutches?" A match. I learned pronunciation, diction and everything in the sentences, whatever. It's different. Slang words and everything like that. Sometimes I don't even understand. What is he talking about? He's talking too fast. I don't understand what he's saying.

At least I thank you guys in the United States. I'm in United States. United States is my country now. My hard life is in my native country, Philippines. My good life is here. Now at least I've got something, not that much. I want to be a billionaire. I want to retire.

But anyway, that's what we're fighting for at the Palace Station now, all these contracts, respect, our dignity inside Station Casinos, not just inside Palace Station, the whole Station Casinos, future generations to come, young ones. I would love to see Station be unionized before I leave Station no matter what happens. Even if I could get a new contract, I'd get nothing to leave, but that's fine to me. At least I fight for what I believe. The organizers are the ones who taught me a lot. They send me all over just to speak people about my experience, about my life, how I feel about this organizing. Hopefully my mom and my dad are proud of me.

There's another thing that we did one time. I did fast for seven days, without eating seven days, right there by Palace Station. The only thing we do is drink water for seven days. There are about thirteen of us, or seventeen or eighteen, something like that, and we fast for seven days. In the first three days, I thought I was going to quit because you only drink water. After the three days, you're good; you're body gets used to only water. When you fast, it looks like your body is

back to normal. Your high blood pressure, everything is back to normal. You don't feel pain. The pain is gone. Yes, what the fasting can do to you. But you lose weight. You're going to lose a lot of weight. The only thing we do is sleep or pray.

But because of the people that come and support all of us, that's what makes me strong. If I see all these kids come into this fasting, the kids make me strong because this is what I'm fighting for, my kids, my coworkers, everybody, to better their life, to get everything what they want, so nobody will suffer anymore.

After that fasting, one week after that, that's the thing: I felt something. I'm eating, but I get weak because my body didn't get used to eating again. I felt like I'm going to collapse. I go, "Oh, my goodness, this is not..." Now my legs were shaking. When I was fasting, I'm good.

It's a tough life, man, as I said. I'm fighting for my family, my kids, my coworkers' families, and everybody else that wants to have a contract at Stations. And hopefully Stations would wake up and, "Hey, let's give them what they want." This has always been a union town, always been a union town, Vegas.

I've always believed that if you just believe in yourself, you'll always survive, you'll always come up with something if you just think. I think all the time. That's why at this time, the whole organizers, the whole union people, they had organized me, taught me who am I. Right now, I can talk to you guys. Before, I never talked to no one. I don't even know how to talk to nobody. But when they organized me good, they let me speak, fight, and things like that, the good of this; we've got to do this, we've got to do that.

That's what we're fighting for at Station Casinos, and hopefully we get it this year. It's a fight. I told them it's not going to be easy; it's going to take all of us, all of us, all the people at Stations. It's not going to be just me, me as a committee leader. It's got to be the whole nine

yards. You've got to be right there. You've got to represent yourself. You've got to unite; that's why they call this the union because the union are us. People are the union. If we're strong, they'll give up. But if you show weaknesses and everything, they'll squash all of us, man.

That's what the union is all about. That's why I love the union. That's why I'll fight them because I remember all these things in the Philippines, and I don't want to go back there no more like that. It's a tough life. Everything is a struggle for me when I was in the Philippines. No food, no money. We even slept, because we don't have a house, in a construction site, my family, in the woods with no mosquito nets with lots of mosquitoes and stuff like that. As I said, if you're poor, you're poor; you can't deny that. You're just going to have to fight. But if you're rich, you've got everything.

**SE: You mentioned that some of the workers are fearful.**

Oh, of course.

**What are they afraid of?**

They're afraid of their supervisors. They're afraid to get fired, of course, even me. But I said, "You're just going to have to face them, man. They're not the one that's paying you." Stations are paying them. "You're just going to have to fight. Because once you unite, these people are going to fold because we're stronger than them." Some are so afraid they don't even want to talk sometimes. Once I organize them and they know what I'm fighting for, they walk like this, make a detour; they don't want to see me no more. Especially when we're at a TDR and everything, if I say *hi* to them and there's a supervisor, they don't even want to say *hi*. That's how fearful these people are. They're afraid. I was like, "Why are you afraid? These people, Station Casinos, Stations are paying them. You've got to unite, man. All the time, you've got to unite. You're immigrants, you're immigrants, everybody is immigrants, come on."

See, some of the people there, they think sometimes when you do that all the time, especially me, I'll do that all the time to them, they think I want to be a hero. I said, "I don't want to be a hero here. I want to fight this just because of my family and my kids so that I can survive, I can pay everything that I get. I get good insurances and everything, and just because of your families, too, and your kids. That's what I'm fighting this for. That's my reason. I'm not trying to be a hero. Why should I be a hero? I don't know anything about this. But when I know the goodness of this, the better of this, it's all about life. I'll fight for that, man. I'm not fighting you that we're going to fight, no. I'm fighting it to better our life, bro. We're friends."

But I like organizing. I like them getting mad at me. That's cool. [Laughing] They will get mad at you when you organize them. We used to do house visits and everything. They will house visits. They even close their doors. They slam the doors in your face. It's like, the Fertittas are not here. This is your own home. [Laughing] Can you imagine that if you're scared at your house, at the casino how fearful that can be? At your own house, you're scared. You're afraid. Can you imagine if you're in the casino, man? But some people are strong. They want to fight. They did house visits so many times. I've never seen so many people that are afraid. But I don't know. I told them, "You can't be afraid at your house, bro. Just give us a little time to explain to you everything that's good for this. Then you decide." Sometimes they let the dog out. [Laughing] That's fear. That's what I'm talking about, fear. If you're scared at your house, what makes you think you're not going to be scared at work? If you don't want to talk to me at your own home, what makes me you think you're going to talk to me at work? Maybe you just say *hi* to me. But when I start opening my mouth about this...

But it's always been some conversation between us. I let them open up, see what's their problem. Then that's the time when I attack them like that. When they say, "Oh, this insurance is

bad.” Then I tell them, “That’s exactly what I’m fighting for, so that you can have a good insurance, you can have good everything.” Sometimes I tell them, “I’m an immigrant, man. I came from the poor country home. How about you? I have a home. I want this. I want this bad.”

**How long have you been trying to organize?**

Going for twelve years now.

**When did you do the fasting?**

Oh, I forgot about all that. That was seven years. I don’t know. You can ask them because I forget.

**What happened with that? How did Station Casinos react to the fast?**

Mean.

**How did Station Casinos respond to it?**

Mean.

**Mean?**

Yes, because we were fasting outside right there by the parking at the 7-Eleven, and they were cooking steak on the top of the roof, and you can smell it, and we’re hungry. We’re fasting and they’re cooking. [Laughing] I told them, “This is it, man. See that? They don’t care about us.” We’re glad we’re employed here, but you’ve got to earn that respect so that you can have that dignity before you leave this place; it’s intact. Look at them, they’re cooking, but we’re here starving. How mean can that be? That barbeque smell is so good because they’re on the top of the roof cooking, deliberately.

**Have they ever done that before, cooked on the top of the roof?**

No.

**Special occasion?**

That was the occasion.

**What was the first time that you approached someone to organize? How did you do that?**

Pick out a committee?

**Yes. How did you do that?**

One of these organizer, they came to...I told you they were doing house visits when we start the campaign, so they knock at my door. They introduced themselves and said, "Hi, I'm Miss This. I'm from the union. We're trying to organize a union contract." At first, it was like introduce yourself and everything like that, and they invited us in. To me, it's not new. It's okay because I've been through a strike in '87. Remember—have you been here?—citywide strike in '87? I was marching downtown. But I was twenty years old at that time and didn't know anything good about the union. I was a union member, but it wasn't long enough that I was in the nonunion houses. They approached me, and then they explained to me what's good and everything. They invite us to a meeting over here. That's the time I become...and then we become a committee. I like it a lot. I'm not afraid. Like I said, I come from the Philippines; I'm not afraid. That's how we become a committee. They visited us at the house all the time, and they talked to us. They explain everything that's going on with everything. If you want to be on the committee, then they're going to explain everything what's good. That's how I become a committee leader until now. I'm still doing it inside. It's been twelve years, but I said, "Hey, one of these days, one of these days, we might get ours. The only thing, we're just going to have to unite. That's all there is." That's fear. It's being afraid. That's always there. I can't take that away from them.

As I said, "Look, you should be afraid in your own country because you've got no rights." You should be afraid in your own country if you've got no rights. If you make a mistake, if you mess around with these rich people, they'll just kill you for nothing. You're done. That's



why in other countries, these human rights, they don't believe in human rights. Only human rights if you're rich. They've got human rights. If you kill rich people, they have human rights. But the poor people get nothing. That's why I told myself, "Now that I'm here..."

That's why some of these people are mad. They said, "Cass, are you an American?" I go, "I am because I'm an American citizen now. I gave up that green card." [Laughing] They get mad at me. I say, "You can be one, too, man. You can be one, too, if you want." And they say, "Oh, he's still from the Philippines." I say, "I know that, but I'm an American now. I don't care. I'm proud to be an American."

It's life. It's life that you're just going to have to fight until that is done. Whatever you believe is right for you, you're just going to have to fight, win or lose.

**You mentioned that you had been an altar boy in the Philippines.**

Yes.

**Are you still religious?**

Oh, definitely, ma'am. But when I first came here to the United States, I don't know which one is church because there are so many religions. I don't know which one is which. But the only thing I do now is just pray. I'll go to church. I think I believe that He listens to us. God listens especially when you go to church by yourself, when you talk to him one-on-one. I think miracles happen. Me and my wife one time, we didn't have no car, and my boys were just walking. My wife carrying groceries, taking the bus. Then I went with her in the church, and she was praying right there, and I was looking at the pieces and crosses. I went like this. [Demonstrating] "Just give me any kind of car that runs. I don't care as long as I can take my boys to school, groceries, and do the laundry. Just give it to me." But I'm not saying [inaudible].

The next thing I know, one of my friends are like, “You don’t have no car, man?” I’m like, “No.” I get a call and told him I don’t have no money. “You don’t have to pay me right now. Just pay me on an installment basis.” And he did give me the car. I thought, this is strange, this power. He gave me the car.

Then when it broke down, I was taking the bus to Palace Station back and forth, again. I said, “I’ve got no car again. It breaks.” Then this one guy that works there goes like this, “Why are you still here?” I said, “I’ve got to wait for the bus, man.” “What happened to your car?” It’s like, “The engine just blow up. I’ve got a car.” [Laughing] He went like this, “Excuse me?” I’ve got a car, but it’s broke. I said, “I can’t afford it. Ain’t got no money.” “Pay me when you get the money.” Now I’m driving that—it’s okay—2006, whatever. It’s riding.

That’s why I say, God, life is like... There are some good people out there, lots of good people. There are some bad ones, but there are some good people out there. I believe in God. I believe in the power of God. That’s all I can say. I don’t know if you believe in that cross that saves. I do now. I do.

In the Philippines in the church, we have three masses, morning, noon, and afternoon, the night. I was an altar boy. I was right there. I did everything. Dead people when you make... I don’t like doing mass on dead people, man, no. I know how to serve them that bread, the wine they got. They’re spoiled; those priests are spoiled, man, yes. Oh, my god, I’ll do the robes. They’ve got everything. I said like, “Jesus Christ, they’re so spoiled.” There is this priest over there that got all this. Every time we got a first mass on a Sunday morning, we’ve got all these nuns and the priest and altar boys and the choirs. The choir sings. The nuns are there, and the priest. I prepare all their stuff and everything. They’re just so spoiled, man, yes. You go to their room, and their room smells so good, and they got their own maids. Yes, they’ve got their own

maids. They've got their own food delivered to them all the time. The only thing they do is preach.

Just like when I was working over here at the courthouse, as a janitor in the old courthouse, because now it's a new courthouse on First Street, all that public defender's offices. Those people are spoiled, too. Those public defenders? Oh, my god. We clean all the offices and everything. I never seen it. They've got all brand-new stuff in there. Oh, man. This is what you call life, man. You just sit there, get all the goods, fight for the case and everything, whatever they want. All the old computers, they just throw them away. If they want one, they got one. But I tell myself, "That's my tax." [Laughing] I used to be cleaning the courthouses, doing janitorial job.

**SE: You mentioned that your mom cooked for the construction site.**

Yes.

**What was your favorite food that she cooked?**

Fish and vegetables.

**How did she cook it?**

She fried it. That tilapia, she fried it all the time. Then we had adobo. She got these vegetables. She cooked pretty good.

**Do you cook?**

No, never learned. I can't stand cooking, either, especially when I slice that onion. It makes me cry. I was like, no. One time I cooked with my two first boys. I cooked some hotdogs, and I burned the hotdogs. And then eggs. They have no choice; they have to eat my cooking. That's all I know: Rice, Cup Noodles soup, and the rest, no more.

**Is there a place in town that has good tilapia or adobo?**

Yes, a lot. There is that Seafood City right there by Flamingo and Maryland, and there is one right there by Smith's on Maryland, right there on the side; they call it Sariling Atin, and they've got so many Filipino foods there.

Once, I was cooking this fish filet, whatever, and I called my mom. I cooked it, and it smokes. I called my mom, "Hey, I think I'm going to burn the apartment. It smokes, man. It's in the frying." She goes like this, "Did you put an oil in it?" It's like, "Nope." [Laughing]

But my second wife, she cooks good. She cooks good, this one here. She is a good cook.

**You came to Las Vegas in 1983?**

Yes, ma'am.

**Why Las Vegas?**

Because that's where—what do you call this thing when you petition somebody? That was it. Philippines, L.A., and Vegas. But my main thing is Vegas.

**The uncle that sponsored you was in Las Vegas?**

Yes, ma'am.

**Why was he here?**

No, no, no. My uncle? No. He was already in the Philippines. He was already retired. He just petitioned my dad. But the one that supported us and everything, I think it was my aunts that live in Vegas.

**She was here first?**

No. My uncle first and then my other uncle and then my aunts. They were here first.

**What did they do?**

The other one, she died, but she was a bus girl. My other uncle was a bartender at Sahara. That's how we...because then you have to make sure that when you get petitioned and everything, somebody is going to support you here because somebody is working here.

**Were they union jobs?**

Oh, yes, both of them are union jobs here.

**When you first got here and you worked at the Chinese restaurant in the Union Plaza, that was a union job?**

Yes, ma'am, it was a union job. But the place that I worked there, they're only renting the place at the Union Plaza. But because Union Plaza was union, they were included. They were renting a space. I was paying union dues at that time.

**And then what happened with that job?**

I decided to go to work for the casinos, and so I quit my job there. I think I went to Holiday as a hard count worker.

**Where you counted the coins?**

We're picking up money on the floors.

**And that was at the Holiday Inn?**

The Holiday Inn. It was the Holiday Inn.

**How long were you there?**

I think it was six months, because it's hard work. Vegas, before, is cheap; we're only making seven dollars an hour, and it was hard work, and it was scaling money and everything.

**Then you went to?**

Imperial Palace.

**And what did you do there?**

I become a casino porter. All my jobs are graveyard jobs, so I was only working on graveyard. I was at first a casino porter, and now I become a shampooer. Then they sold that place, Englestad. It was a cheap job; they pay real cheap because I can't even make twelve dollars, can't even make fifteen.

**And that wasn't union, either?**

Yes, all the departments I worked for are nonunion departments. Imperial Palace wasn't union work. You know who owns that place, right? Ralph Englestad. He's a German guy. We used to shampoo that third floor, or second floor, and he used to have all kinds of—behind that door is all kinds of German cars because he was German. Very casual, very simple guy. He walks with us on the floor. Just a big radio, jeans, shoes, and everything. But he lives all the way up to penthouse, nineteenth floor. I remember all that because we used to shampoo that thing.

**You shampooed all the carpets in that.**

Oh, man, that's a hard job because it's not just you buffed it, you have to rake just to make all that carpet stand, and that is a hard job. Then we waxed floors, strip and wax. You strip the whole floor, and then you're going to wax it two, three times. All my jobs are not as hard as the Philippines. The Philippines was hard. That was the hardest work I had.

**When the Imperial Palace sold, where did you go?**

I got fired before they get sold. They fired me. I forgot why. It was a very strict casino, man. For example, you take a break. Not even two seconds over break, they're going to write you up right away. It was a very strict casino at Imperial Palace. I was young. I was with my first wife. I don't care. They give me write-ups and graveyard. I just look at the newspaper for one second, two seconds. I was like, "Now you're going to write me up, come on, man. It wasn't even that long." I said before, I don't know anything. I don't know how to talk to people, bullshit. They give me

that thing, the paper. The next day, they called me in the office. It's like, "You did this. You did that." They've got witnesses and everything, the big dog, the manager. I said, "Ma'am, excuse me. Am I fired?" She goes, "Yes." "I don't need to hear you. I want my check, uniform. I want my check tomorrow because I'm going to look for another job." After that, like one year, they all get fired anyways. I heard from one of my friends that all the people lost their guests. What goes around comes around, what can I say?

**Where after that?**

Palace Station. I don't even expect that I'm going to last thirty-one years there. I was expecting just three years at the most because that's the most I can work in a casino, three, four years. But then I realized that enough is enough of this craziness. Now I have to respect them. "Hi. How you doing?" That's what people like. "Hi. How you doing? Okay." I just do my work and everything like that. I was working for twenty-five years on graveyard at Palace Station.

**Are you still on graveyard?**

No, ma'am. When we had the pandemic, they closed that buffet. I used to clean that buffet. Then they transferred me downstairs when the pandemic hits, and they close it down totally. I like graveyard because it's quiet, not too much boss. You can hide. [Laughing] They only got one supervisor. If he's in the east, you go to the west. [Laughing] I was just doing my work. I do my work, and they appreciate that. Then the pandemic hits, and that's the time that we got moved around. I'm working swing now.

**Has management punished you in any way for your activity, for trying to organize?**

They suspended me one time because, they said, no call, no show. You know how this works, man. All these people that come from other casinos? They come from other casinos, and they go

to Palace Station, different things, different attitudes, different everything. I was working graveyard at that time, and they said I got a no call, no show.

**What is that?**

That means I did not come to work. That's what they said.

**You didn't call. You didn't show up.**

Yes. I told them, "Can you explain it to me, why is that a no call, no show?" Because they said to them that I start at eleven o'clock. At eleven o'clock, when you clocked in, it's still not twelve.

It's still not graveyard, so that's your day. I told them, "But I work graveyard. If I clocked in at eleven, my graveyard shift is the next day. I was off last night. I didn't come to work last night. I clock in now for graveyard, not for swing. I'm not working swing." It's a miscommunication.

They gang up on me. I said, "I know why you're doing this, because of this. I know. Every time we talk to the huddle, I'm trying to stand up for the people. The way you guys are doing things are wrong." I said, "You can't do that, man. You can't just harass these people all the time because there is an unfair labor practices that you guys practice in this place." I don't know if they know that. That's the time they gang up on me. So I said, "Okay, it's not a problem to be suspended." When they suspend you, it looks like you're a convict, man.

**How does that work?**

Oh, they come to me. They called me, but the union already told me, "Cass, they're going to suspend you." I was like, "Well, we're going to fight for this. I know what they're doing."

When I came, they took my badge. "Can I have your badge, your I.D., everything?" Then they said, "You can't be around Palace Station unless you're going to get kicked out. You can't even pick up your check." I said, "Okay, I know."



I was there twenty-five years the first time they charged me for that because of my activity. I spoke to the union and everything, and the union fight for it and everything. They suspended me for four days and suspended me for one day. Then they called me the next day because the union said, "Let's go. Because there is a reason you suspended this guy. This is a strong organizer inside. You guys have no reason for this." I think that was the next day they called me. I would love to be suspended for a year so I can get backpay. [Laughing] I told them, "That's it? Not even a day?" That's why I'm fighting. I said, "I was ready to go work for you guys with the union." It's like, okay, they might suspend me for a year because you know how Stations are. Everything, they're going to make it last. I said, "I know it's a winning case."

Not even a day, they called me back. I said, "I'm disappointed in you guys." Not even a day. I wanted them to suspend me for a year because I know I'm going to be working for the union now. I don't have to clean anything. Just drive the car, house visits, and now I'm relaxing. And they called me back. I said, like, "Huh? I'm back already?" I'm not ready to go back because I love... they paid me anyways. They gave me the twelve hours that they send me home. The other two supervisors tried to get me, brother. I went like this to them [making clicking sound]. "Wrong dude to fuck with, Homes." No, I'm just playing. I was shaking there saying, After all that, after all that disrespectful that they did to me, I was like, I'm going to disrespect you, too, but I'm not saying cuss words or anything, profanity or anything like that.

Every time I see something wrong, I'm going to go to HR. Every time they say something, I go to HR. I had this guy disrespecting me in front of his employees as a supervisor. Now they moved him somewhere. That's how powerful supposed to be, we are. But these people don't want to listen. I said, "I can't fight this myself. It's got to be everybody. That's how powerful people, workers are. I remember when President Marcos got kicked out in the

Philippines. Who kicked him out? People's power. The power of the people kicking him out. That's how people are strong. We've got everything, bro. You might get fired, but that's okay."

It's fear, man. It's all about fear. You're just going to have to organize. That's what we do; we organize, organize, organize, talk to them. But I'm targeting the young ones now. I say, "Come on, talk to, man. Let's go. Let me explain it to you." Thirty-five, forty-five, forty years old. The seventeen-year-olds, I leave them alone. I'm going to retire. If you're sixty years old like me, I'll leave them alone sometimes. But I said, "If you want to fight, then let's fight. At least we can give these kids security in life, good things. At least they'll be proud of you." But that's just me, man.

**From 1983 until now, you've been here forty years?**

Yes, ma'am, in Vegas.

**Tell us about the changes you've seen in the city.**

A lot. A lot. Downtown before? There's nothing in there. Now they have all these bars, canopies, and everything, and casinos are individually owned. Now they merge, especially in the street.

There is no Mirage before. There's a lot of changes in Las Vegas, a lot.

**How about in terms of jobs?**

Before, when it was '83, jobs are just like that, man [snapping]. You can get fired, and they hire you the next day. That's how quick the job is. There is no drug test. The only time I had one time is a polygraph test. I went to Imperial Palace, and they give me a polygraph test. That's the only one. But after that, like right now, you've got to go do a drug test; you've got through everything. Jobs were very easy. As I said, you can get fired here, and they hired you the next day. It's individually owned. Now they merged. I think there are only two or three owners in the Strip casinos and everything; so is downtown, they've even got casinos downtown. But before,

Imperial is owned by one person. The Mirage, only Mirage. Union Plaza, only owned by one person. You know who owns the Plaza and the Cortez, Jackie Gaughan. He died. He owns that place before. Sam's Town, Sam Boyd. It's individually owned. But now they just merged. When you mess around with this company here, now that they merged, you can't apply for another job. It's hard. You've got to go through all these drug tests, everything now.

The problem is now when you're hired, you can't get a full-time job. Right away, they only give you part-time.

**Why is that?**

That's how it works now.

**What's the difference between—**

Eighty-three?

**Between a full-time job and a part-time job besides the hours that you work?**

You only work three days a week; that's a part-time job. In a full-time job, you work five days a week.

**What about benefits?**

These part-time people got no benefits; that's the problem right there. These five days, of course, they've got benefits and everything because they work eighty hours a week. This one here, it depends. You get to have thirty-two hours so that you can get insurance and everything.

**A part-time job is usually how many hours? Maybe thirty?**

Yes, something like that, very small. Casinos are very smart. They're going to put you in at thirty hours so you can't get insurance and everything like that. Three days, sometimes two days a week, that's how it goes now. On-calls, part-times, they just call if they need you.

**If you're working on-call and you work more than thirty-two hours in a week, do you get benefits, or no?**

You're still considered part-time. It's got to be a permanent thirty-two hours every week. That's the time you can get insurances and everything. But if they only call you, like, one, two, three, that's what you call a part-time on-call. Tough, huh? I used to work at seven dollars an hour. My paycheck, I couldn't even pay my food, three hundred dollars. I was making maybe three fifty minus tax. Can you imagine three days, six days minus tax? You're going to need a roommate.

**Do you have any relatives here in town now?**

Yes, ma'am. I've got my cousins and my aunt here.

**Is this the aunt that was here when you came?**

No, this is not the one that supported me. The one that supported me died. But this is my cousins' mom, my dad's brother, and I've got my cousins.

**Do you see them often?**

Yes, all the time just to say *hi* to them. "Hey, how you doing?" I phone call them and say, "How you guys doing?" That's it.

**When you first came, what cross streets did you live near?**

Bad neighborhood. It's right there by Stratosphere. It used to be Vegas World. It used to be Stratosphere. The Naked City. It's right there by... You know where it's at. It's right here, this neighborhood. I live right in this neighborhood here. I live in Boston Street.

**Still?**

No more.

**How long were you there?**

I was there about two or three years, four years.

**And then where did you move, just the general area?**

Oh, I was all over Vegas. I was in Washington, a street right there by Washington and Bonanza. I'm all over. North Las Vegas and everything. I'm still in a ghetto neighborhood, but it's okay. I'm at Maryland and Karen. [Laughing]

**You stayed pretty central.**

Absolutely, ma'am, yes, I did. Oh, I forgot. I lived around here when I first came because my aunt get a house right here by Boston. They tore it apart. There used to be McDonald's here, all over, and there used to be beggars. The Strat used to be Vegas World. You know who owns Vegas World, right? Bob Stupak.

**And then he built Stratosphere.**

No, he did not. He sold that place. I think he sold Vegas World, and then they become Stratosphere and everything. But he's the owner of one of the casinos that they criticized him because all his machines are pennies. They said he's not going to make money. He became a billionaire because of the penny machines. When they ask you, who did it? Bob Stupak. Nothing but pennies.

**I remember that.**

Yes. Remember, he's still got a park over here, his name? Bob Stupak Park right here? No more.

This was a bad neighborhood, man, but it's good now, I think.

**Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you wanted to say?**

I think that's it. That's all about my life. It's not that much of a...It's just a struggle at first when I came here. When I first came here, I didn't know English, nothing, taking the bus, being a busboy, and learning from Americans like you guys on how to properly speak the language to know how to pronounce the words, and still, now I can't even pronounce the words right.

**You do a good job.**

I appreciate that I'm here in the United States, and my family, and trying to talk to you guys, well-educated people. It's an honor and a blessing.

**Thank you so much.**

I would always tell people, "When you talk to me about nonsense, I'm not going to learn from you. But if you talk to you in good faith, you're good."

It's a blessing and it's an honor to be with you guys. At least you talked to me about my life. That's all I can give you about my life. It's tough, and now it's good. It's not good, but it's good because I'm here in the United States. As I said, people like you will make people more in their common sense because you guys are very well-educated people.

**Your story is very powerful, so thank you for sharing it.**

Thank you. Thank you very much. I appreciate you guys and thank you very much. Nice meeting you guys. Thank you, ma'am. Thank you, sir.

**[End of recorded interview]**