

Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)

Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Manny Lacson

Interviewer: Don Bouzek

Date: November 005

Location: Brooks, AB

My name is Emanuel Lacson. I came from Pampanga. It's 66 km from Manila.

We have 7,700 islands and 100 kinds of languages spoken.

What languages do you speak – the national language Tagalog?

They call it Pampango, that's our provincial language. Tagalog, yes. Most Filipino speak 3 languages, their provincial and our national. And the second language is English.

Why did you come to Canada?

I love Canada because it's maybe a peaceful country. In history in our country, I almost every day go to library or reading books like that. The statistic shows in the world that Canada is the best democratic country in the world. So I chose Canada as one of my destiny to get.

When was this?

I'm 43 now, so I was 33.

What was your work in the Philippines before you left?

My job in Philippines is I finished schooling as electronics technician. It's 2 years course.

Mostly in Philippines there are poor people. I fixing black and white TV mostly, and colored and electric fan. They don't have any air condition there. Electric fan they are easy to fix. At the same time, I plan to go here in Canada. I want to help my sister and brother, sending some money Philippines. And I have a dream, maybe one day I'll become rich, I will help many people.

I came first to Vancouver. I stayed there for '95 up to 2002, so 7 years.

I work a lot of job. I became ? driver in downtown Vancouver. I became ? in electrical department. I became laborer too, factory workers. Maybe a few part time, like dishwasher. When I first came in Canada I became dishwasher in White Spot Restaurant on Kingsway. Then I tried to go to school, like computers learner and food safe. Two days course like that, I'm trying to improve myself. That's why I decided.

... when I came here most Filipino who came here are not refugee. They came here as immigrant. You're supposed to have a degree or technical job. My intention to work here as an electrical or electronics department, or electrical job.

... in Vancouver I cannot get a job like the one I want. I want to work as electrical technician. Besides I showed to some companies that I have experience working in Saudi Arabia for 3 years as an electronics technician. And I work in a seminary in Japan for 6 months. I don't know why...But me I keep on working hard for my family. Whatever it takes, maybe I'll work, because I want to survive my family in Philippines.

I have my first wife and 3 kids in Philippines. I send them money and they are in schools now. They're okay.

Before I came here I took computer lesson, and tried to use the computer. I saw this advertisement from computer, that they are hiring in this company. So I decided to go.

What is your work at the Lakeside Packing plant in Brooks?

My job is they said one of the difficult and heaviest job in the plant, in slaughter. They call it first transfer. I lift the legs, or sometimes they are too low and you have to lift and put the hook. At the same time they are running together, so they having timing. If you make a mistake or you did not make the hook, the line will stop. The whole line will stop, and everyone will stop working because of you. I work there for 3 years now, and I got injured 2 times. The shackle, the roller fall on my shoulder, and until right now my arm is

still sore. I work there, I broke my finger. The doctor said, this must be cemented for 3 months. One month my black hat keep on saying me, so I decided to remove it. It's very difficult to work with them. They don't consider you like if you are broken or something, they don't care.

For me, I keep on doing this because I want a real job, full time or lifetime job. But in this case I will not go back to Lakeside until we have a contract.

It's a leg. One leg is hanging and one is down. That down I'll put on the hook. After that the one after me, the other guy, remove the shackle. The one I put is going up, so the other one now will go down. Every 12 seconds, 5 cows in one minute, non-stop.

Because Philippines is mostly American company, I know union. When you are union they treat you nice, or they give you some housing loan. So I know what a union is. So when I came here the union is coming, so I try to get involved. I know what union is. I know what some American company doing to my country, that's why I want to maybe more get involved, and make a movement in the Philippines too. Because some of the American companies, just money, money. They kill our river, they are getting black. The American company don't care about how they put their toxic waste there in our river. They don't care. We in Philippines are very rich in river. Every map you have river, because it's a lot of islands. Nobody will get hungry in Philippines if we use the river. Because one piece we can multiply a thousand eggs, and every... right? And we can use the river for transportation, like low tide you can go down and high tide you can... But the Americans, if they are helping us since the beginning, they teach if you want to help somebody, it's not that you give them a fish. You teach them how to catch a fish. But the Americans they are taking advantage of us in Philippines. I know something corruption, they want some money under the table. So the company will kept running even if they close some ? in the river.

Some of them, like in part of the country beside us, sometimes my heart, I don't know why this rich people they want more money. Those are working banana plant, they spray some chemicals. I saw in newspaper, they call it militant newspaper, the under the table newspaper hiding. Some of them become sick because of those one. The owner just kick them out. They don't care. They serve 20 years to their company, spraying some chemical on their banana, and they export that banana here. I don't know why, these people are rich already, they want more and more and more.

This is what happen. I work here. Because I know there is no union inside, so I just try. I say, I want to save some money, and maybe I'll upgrade my schooling in the school ?. So I'm planning like that 3 years, save money and go to school. But one of my friends, he gave me a calling card about the union. He said, if you want union call this number. One of my friends called the union. Then directly I talked to organizer Archie, I will support a union if I can.

We won the first vote for union to come in, it's 51/49%. Then it takes the tactics of Lakeside then tried to convince some other people, 5 people, to get the first contract. Then we decided to, because I'm on bargaining committee. Then a few months they don't want, they delay, delay, delay. So we decided to make a strike vote. Strike vote we won a lot of margin, 70/30. That's a huge one. So again, we continue bargaining after that one. Then what happen again that one, the tactics again. They just want to be getting winter and the people will get... so that's tactics like demon tactics: those people will get tired or something sickness on the outside. For me that's tactics of not human being. Then the second, what's the third one? Then this one again at the, no the mediator come with us and they want us to settle down. But it doesn't work. Then another guy, DIB, Direct Inquiry Board, he write a recommendation with us. He talked with us one weekend, then he returned to us after 60 days. He gave it to Lakeside and us. We approved that one. For me it's a little bit low standard, but it's okay for us. Then the people decided the want, but

Lakeside doesn't want that one. Then they offer another one that is worse than DIB in the first contract that they won. It's not good, for me it's not good.

The government in the first strike, July 20? We don't understand why the first, that day 19th, I called all my friends we go outside. We are very strong then. Maybe our supporter then is 1,600 people already, 1600 people ready to strike. Because they know what's happening, and they want to change too, all of those people. Suddenly the government stepped up and stop that one. They said it's a law, that it's illegal. I don't know why the government is telling that one. It's like some other reporters here in Brooks. I told them, why you write this down? Because Lakeside say this one, so we write it down. If they said this one is criminal, do you write it down that it's criminal? Before you make judgment, everybody, government, Lakeside, or something who are you. If you are intelligent person, investigate first. Why these people want to strike? They should investigate it before they stop us. Why these people? All I can say is that. Investigate first.

Between those one? After that one, because they sent us the DIB, Direct Inquiry Board. The Direct Inquiry Board will make recommendation to both of us that... what's the problem, and the same as Lakeside. Then they combine those and make a recommendation for both of us. That's the time we accept that one, the people at Lakeside. That's 90% we accept it, and the people working in Lakeside. 90%, and Lakeside rejected. Lakeside or Tyson is the one who's making the trouble. Every company here, like Excel, Cargil, they have almost the same contract. This DIB makes it's a little bit lesser, but we already approve it and want no strike or something like that. We accept that one. Any kind of contract, I don't know why this big company there is no union contract. Like Maple Leaf, Excel Beef, Cargil. It seems like, for me it's clear. The owners doesn't want union. Union for me is all fairness, and union is equality, respect and dignity. That's all we want. Nobody can stop that one, with the union organized.

First day of strike... Before that one we have a crash conference in Calgary. We are waiting to some of the calls from the government and some officials, to call with us what's the news. Because we already given them a strike notice for 72 hours. Still we want some negotiation or something to change, but it never happens. So we decided to give them another 3 days or one week more or 2 weeks more. But the problem is the winter is coming. Some of the workers they are already mad or hunger. They want strike now. Before July 20 till strike, maybe 300 workers they fired them. If they know you are supporters, if you make mistakes you're gone. It's a tactics. Now we're coming back. Many people now signing with us, and it's okay now. We're getting better now.

It's trying to spread rumors like immigration cannot help you, if you join the union. If you are immigrant or refugee, they said immigration will not help you if you join the union. A lot of different things. If you make mistake, they will fire you. A lot of rumors, I almost forgot those rumors. They have a lot of tactics.

Yes, I'm a landed immigrant.

The immigrants they're targeting too. Because they want to become a citizen. So they are targeting those landed immigrants and refugee. Not only the refugee, also the new immigrants came here. That's why they are afraid.

They said if you join the union or join the picket line, the immigration official will not help you to your papers. They say, if you want to go get your family here or you want to become a citizen, you have a problem. And their tactics is they said, you will earn \$200 a week in the union. They will not give you \$10, where they get their money? That's the rumors spread. So the people they are afraid for joining us.

Yes, that's wrong. Lakeside is like that, is always playing dirty. Scattered lie, every time lie, lie, lie. We union, we trying to make honest the people. That's why people came to us, because we saying the truth. Some people who join us to now, they notice that Lakeside keep on lying. They know.

Around 50 people, 50 or less.

Like Sudanese, they are one of the most populated here.

The people? No, they are not supporting us. Because Lakeside make an influential dirty works here. Works like bravery in this town. Lakeside ?, he gave \$1 million to build that one, donation. And some other like Global Immigration Center they give some money, \$20,000. But that's nothing. How about those people who cut their finger? Why you don't help those people? Why those people who die you don't even prayed for them for one minute? How about, like, we are Catholic, sometimes I cried with my heart. It's like good Friday, we work. See, you are a demon. Why these people, why you don't respect their religion? Good Friday this company is working. In Philippines, Good Friday the whole week we are not working. We are telling them that, why are they doing this against our belief? Good Friday, if you don't go to work on Good Friday, you're fired. They are bad, this is no good.

Yes. They want their rules. Like here in Canada, why you want to holding our neck? We want to release your hand to our neck, and we do our job nicely. Why you don't treat us fairly? Same in Philippines, why you destroying our river? It's common sense, even you just see it. With this company, why there is a toxic waste place there in middle river. You can see it, you can just look. It's common sense. Same as this one. Imagine 100,000 people already in and out of this company. That means this company's bad. It's common sense -- 100,000, that's in the book.

Oh yes. Because right now, before I have a lot of friends and I know a lot of people. I knew a lot of people that they are try to call themselves brother and sister now. They hugging each other. But before, inside, they cannot do that. Because that's Lakeside wants, they don't want you to become close. Because if these companies are allowed to become close, they will organize some sports activities or something you get organized

like that. It doesn't want that. He wants people to be keep fighting each other or something. He don't want to make it one as a worker.

All I can say is like this. Because the company is like this, they want to divide all people. Because sometimes they are, all I can say is maybe this is discrimination. Because a lot of people favoritism inside. Look at me myself, or some other hardworking people. I work already 3-1/2 years, I work well in my job. No late or something, the 3-1/2 years I work. But one guy besides me, ? working he became blue hat, he became green hat. Some of their friends, they don't know even how to use multimeter. They put them in electrical department. They know me, I'm a graduate from electric. Why, see? ... with me. I experience it and I saw a lot of guys same thing. So it's no good too.

Oh ya, that's why we won that one. Many people are working people, they work 10 years. Still their job is still there. He's getting older, why don't you give him a little bit... Why don't you give him a chance? We are all human beings anyway.

Why are you willing to keep on with the strike?

Maybe I love to do this one. For me, there's a lot of reason. For me, I want to, maybe I want to eliminate slavery, racism and discrimination in this land, Canada. For me, Canada is a model country. It's a modern country, it should be a model in this world. We want to show to them, to all who don't believe in slavery, don't believe in respect and dignity, we will show to them that we can do this one. We can change the world. We can change Canada. No more slavery, no more racism, no more discrimination. We are all equal. Second, for me walking is one of the best exercise. That's why I'm still fit now. I'm 43, my body's in good shape still, because I keep on walking. I'm not using my car sometimes. Sometimes I go to the grocery 3 km, I just walk. For me walking is good too, so it's fun.

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Maybe one day I'm dreaming that no hunger in this world, because of these people who are rich already, they want more rich.

