

Danilo de Leon

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Interviewer: Marco Luciano; Camera: Don Bouzek

Q: Where were you born?

DD: I was born in Makati but I grew up in Caloocan. I'm from the Philippines. I came here February 2009 under the Temporary Foreign Worker program. I was hired by Bee Clean all the way from the Philippines. I was planning to fly to Japan or Ireland in 2007 when a friend of mine, who was a relative and a permanent resident of Canada whose father is working for Bee Clean, found out that I was interested in getting a job outside of the Philippines. He asked me if I would be interested in working as a custodian or janitor for Bee Clean. He told me it was in Canada, but he didn't specifically tell me where in Canada. So that's where I started my application here.

Q: What was it like growing up in the Philippines?

DD: I was born in the city and I grew up in the city. I came from a poor family. Before I came here, I was a cab driver; I had my own cab and was in a small gas retail. Life back home is so hard that you really need to work hard to bring your kid to school and to make sure that you have money enough to put on the table if you have a family of your own, and especially if you have kids.

Q: Why did you leave the Philippines?

DD: Aside from the government issues, the corruption of the government, there's a lot of graduates with a degree back home but there's not much job. The government didn't have a job for the people, and the issue with the corruption – that's the reason why they're in fact pushing out the people to go out of the country and migrate and work outside of the country.

Q: Did you have any educational background back home?

DD: I was a third year college in ? transportation back home.

Q: How did you come to Canada, and to Alberta in particular?

DD: In 2008 when I sent my application to Bee Clean, and May of 2008 when I received a letter from Bee Clean, it includes a job offer and LMO, Labour Market Opinion. On that package my name is in there and who is my employer, who were in Canada working. But they didn't tell me which location. So, because of excitement, I filled out the application and I looked at the job offer. There was an offer of \$12 per hour plus overtime pay after 44 hours in a week. They said on a contract I had to work five days a week, Sunday to Thursday, and Friday and Saturday off. After I filled out the application, I called the boss from the Philippines: the boss here at the Bee Clean office here in Edmonton. I informed him that I already fill out the package. They told me, okay we can now call the Canadian embassy in your country and they have a local courier that will pick up your applications.

Q: How did you actually find the job posting?

DD: It was a friend who told me about that, because his father works for Bee Clean; because there's less than ten Filipino workers for Bee Clean during that year. Most of their workers are from Mexico and Guyana, foreign workers. When they started to like the way how the Filipino work when it comes to cleaning, they started to get an interest to hire worker from Philippines.

Q: So your friend told you about the job, and what happened after that?

DD: I called the Canadian embassy in the Philippines and they sent Air 21, their designated courier, to pick up the package. After they pick up the package, after three weeks I got a letter from Canadian embassy in the Philippines, and attached on the letter is an endorsement that I have to go on medical procedures, because to be able to work here you need to undergo a medical examination with the designated medical examiners.

Q: When did you arrive in Canada?

DD: February 5, 2009.

Q: Straight to Alberta?

DD: I came in here from Vancouver, then Vancouver to Edmonton.

Q: How did you feel when you first landed?

DD: I was a bit excited. I was sitting at the airplane window and I see before the plane land in Vancouver I was surprised, because I can see all the lights. It's nice to see when you're up there. You see the straight lines, the highways, the city – it was beautiful. I was surprised because that was my first time to go out of the country and first time to get in the plane and first time to work abroad.

Q: Do you have a family?

DD: Yeah, I have two kids. But when I left home in 2009, I only had one. But my wife was two months pregnant with my younger daughter.

Q: What did they say when you left?

DD: I was really misinformed how is it working here in Alberta, or especially in Canada. I didn't know how is the temperature here. All I know is it was cold, and in Edmonton how it's too cold in here. My wife was pretty excited because the fact we know is, all we know is, after two years working in here, I can bring them here easily. That's all we know, and that's why we're excited. Then they said, oh, it's just two years, not really that long.

Q: Did you know anybody here?

DD: All I know is my friend's brother and father. So when I get here, it was them who picked me up from the airport. I came here with three other Filipinos who came here together all the way from the Philippines. So we came here on the same flight and we were working at the same company and same location as well. Yeah, it was my friend's family who picked me up from the airport. After we came here, the next day we went to Bee Clean office for orientation and pictures for ID.

Q: What were your work hours?

DD: What they did is the next day we went to Bee Clean head office and they read what is in the contract. They said they're going to follow what's on the contract – the \$12 per hour and overtime pay after 44 hours is what they said. I grew up in a family of migrant workers. My father works in Saudi back in '80s and I have sisters who worked in Japan for seven years; and I have a brother who works in Qatar and Brunei. It was way different here, because all of those countries that I mentioned, accommodation and food is free: but not here. That's what the manager of Bee Clean discussed with us – we are not going to provide you the accommodation. They said they already looked for a place where you're going to stay, and it's up to you if you want to live with yourself or when it comes to food if you want to separate your food or share it with them to save some money. That's what they said.

Q: Describe your average workday.

DD: I start 6 in the evening. We work on graveyard shift. That's one thing too. They didn't tell us that we're going to work on graveyard. They didn't tell us about we're going to work the graveyard, and they didn't tell us that there's no night differential. As far as I know, if you're working at the graveyard, there must be a night differential pay after 12 o'clock. But we were sent at the University of Alberta and we start working from 6 p.m. to 6:30 in the morning; not 6 o'clock, but 6:30. We get off at 6:30. From 6 to 11 we go on a different building, and 11 to 6:30 we go into a different building. We were told in the office that we're going to get paid for overtime. But when we were on the site, the manager and supervisor is saying different about pay. They said, oh, this is your extra hour. You get paid straight here, and when you go to your

next building you get paid straight as well. Basically we're working 12 hours but we're at the site from 6 to 6:30 in the morning.

Q: What kind of work were you doing?

DD: That's one thing too. In the contract it says light duty cleaning; but it's not just light cleaning. I had a routine to do from this building to this building. But if they need you to work with the guy who's doing the waxing and stripping, you have to go with them. If they need you to work with the guy doing the carpet steam cleaning, you have to go with them.

Q: What problems did you face while working with Bee Clean?

DD: On the first two weeks they treat us very nice. They see how we work, how we does the job, and they say they like it. It comes to the point that they ask me: do you want to work extra hours like Friday? It is an overtime Friday. If you want it, then I can give you Friday's schedule. So I said, of course. I'm here to work; I'm here to make money for family. Aside from the fact that the money that I make here, I spend money for my rent and food and for phone bill. I need to have my own phone, and aside from that I have to send money back home for my wife and my kids. It seems like the money that I'm making is not enough, and I'm not saving any single cent. That's why when they offer another shift, which is Friday, supposed to be a day off, I decided to pick up another shift, which is for Friday. So I ended up working six days a week, 12 hours a day, and every night, but at the location 13 hours.

Q: That means you were getting overtime.

DD: Yeah, I was supposed to be. But we're just getting paid straight. So what they did is they split the payroll. You have the 6-11 hours here and you have the 11-6 hours on another building. There's one time that when they figured out that I can do steam cleaning job, when the two guy went on holiday, they sent me to work on steam cleaning, carpet steam cleaning, by myself. I have to go on a different floor and different offices, different conference room, and auditoriums. I have my truck mount, I have my cart, I have two pails of hot water, I have those chemicals, I

have the pre-spray bottles, I have the long hose for the truck mount, and I have the steam clean handle. I did that by myself.

Q: Are you trained to do that?

DD: No, back home I kind of have an idea on what is steam cleaning. But I was not really trained. Basically, I just get experience here when they said, oh we need one guy to work with this guy to do the steam cleaning. So that guy teach me how to do the proper carpet steam cleaning. So, when they went on holiday, they said, oh this guy can do the carpet steam cleaning; he can bring one guy to work with him. But I ended up working by myself. Some lead hand saying, why did you take this job? This is a \$17 to \$19 job, but they only paying you \$12. I said, I can't say no, because I'm a foreign worker. If I say no, they might reduce my hours or they might fire me. So, that's why I can't say no. All I have to do is, as long as I have a job, as long as I'm working, I have the money to put food on my table and to send money back home for my family. That's all my focus on those years.

Q: Have you ever had an accident at work, or safety concerns?

DD: There were a couple of times that I trip on myself; I hit the tables. If you're doing the carpet steam cleaning, sometimes you have to move the desks, the chairs, the tables. So one time I put a chair on top of the table. I was doing the steam clean, and I didn't realize there was a table behind me. So that chair fell on my back. Good thing I didn't get an injury from that, but I felt pain, because it hit my shoulders.

Q: What did you do?

DD: I told my supervisor. He just told me, sit and have a rest – there's no blood; it seems like you didn't get an injury.

Q: Are there any other dangerous jobs that you've done?

DD: Yeah, sometimes we're asked to replace the bulb – that's a 15-foot ceiling. So what we did is I have to grab the desk, and then on top of the desk, I have to put a chair, and then I stand up on the chair to replace the bulb. We don't have a ladder. If there's a ladder, you have to go down--let's say you're working from 7th floor; you have to go down on the main floor to maintenance office to grab the ladder. Then you have to go up, and it takes time. At the end of the day, I have a routine to finish. If I didn't finish my routine, they will give me shit.

Q: Changing bulbs is not a cleaning job.

DD: I know, but, like I said, I can't say no. They ask us to do something--we have to do it, or else I might jeopardize my job, my hours. So, at the end of the day, it will backfire on me.

Q: Tell us about how and why unionization started in Bee Clean.

DD: First, there were a couple of lead hands or supervisors who is treating us, the workers. . . because there are some old folks working with us, East Indian people, like 57 years old. That lady always yell on those East Indian people, and sometimes he have a stick. There's a couple of guy that he always giving a hard time on them. But those guys are her go-to guy; if she needs something to get done, she calls that guy. But if that guy didn't listen or didn't do what she wants, she has a stick and hit them with a stick. One time I ask her, and I said, that's not right. She said, what do you think is right? What is right for you? That's not your business. Do what you need to do. This is not your business. She said, "Go away! You don't have the right to say anything in here."

Q: How did the union come into the picture?

DD: What happened is when there's a lot of issues of unfair treatment, abuse, and misuse, all the workers decided to talk about it. What happened is, when we found out. . . No, it all started when Bee Clean get audited from the government. Bee Clean called an emergency meeting at the site and said, the government is questioning the payroll, asking how does we pay you. So, from now on, we're going to pay you overtime. We said, oh, that's good, because we're only

getting paid straight per hour. So, for us it's more money, because they said overtime. But it ends up we're getting less instead. Me, if I work 12 hours a day times \$12 per hour, that's 144 hours. If you compute that in two weeks, you know how much money you will end up, minus the CPP, minus the provincial and federal tax. So you know how much money you will end up. But when we calculate it, we get less. We start questioning the supervisors, and the supervisor is pointing on the managers. But when we go to the manager, he's pointing to the accountant. When we go to the accountant, she said, I'm only basically comparing into the hours which is on your timesheet. So, when I asked her, can I see my timesheet, she said no; you can't. I said, why? That's my timesheet. I know I have the rights to see it. I want to make sure that I'm putting in the right hours that I'm working. She said, you have to ask permission from the head office. Since then, I decided to write all the hours that I'm working each night. Then each time the supervisor that's not in the office, I took the daily schedules and the timesheet who's working in the building, who's working on the night shift. So I kept that as my record. When they found out that we're start talking and questioning them, they said, stop it or you might be sent home. I said, why? We're just questioning and asking you about the lost wage that's happening right now. They said, we're going to fix it, give us some time. So we give them two weeks. After two weeks nothing happened, so short again. The money they owed to us piled up. Without our knowledge, the SEIU, Service Employment International Union, is already gathering information and evidence against Bee Clean, and they started working to bring in the union.

Q: What's your role in the unionization of Bee Clean?

DD: What happened is they talked to me after they have talked to three Filipino workers. They told Merryn Edwards, who's working with AUPE--she was the organizer of SEIU before--, they told Merryn that Danilo has papers to show and to support. Merryn came to me and at first, because I didn't know her, I was confused because of what's going on. After we start questioning, and experience harassment and threatening us sent home, some words that we don't want to hear when it comes to work. So I didn't trust Merryn on our first meeting. Then, the second meeting, she came into my place on my day off, Saturday, and she started showing me the pictures who did she talk to and if I know those people. She showed me the names, the pictures of the people who's working with him. She said, you might have seen these people

pretending like an employee, but they're not; they're working with me. They're looking after your concerns, they're looking after the issues, they're looking after the workers, and there's protection here. So that's where we started what the strategy to do. We started to talk from Vanessa. One of the people that help us too is Rod Loyola, who's now an MLA of Edmonton Ellerslie. He was in as advisor. So Rod Loyola came and meet us. When he hear our stories, he was upset and really disappointed. He said, I can't imagine that it's happening here at the U of A. He said, this is something that we cannot tolerate; this is unacceptable.

Q: What happened when the employer found out you were starting a union?

DD: What they did is first they work on the East Asian community. They said, this union will just get your money; this union interest is your money that you're going to give them every month, not really a job. If this union gets in, we will lost the contract with U of A and you'll lost a job; but we'll still have a job. That's what they said. So they intimidate the East Indian community. So 90 percent of East Indian at the site backed out and said they don't want to join us.

Q: Was the unionization successful?

DD: Ya. When started the tabling at Hub Mall, first we get the student attention. The student said, it's unfortunate that those abuse happen at the U of A. They said, we didn't want to hear or see that the workers who clean their classrooms and faculty offices; they don't want to hear those abuse. They were disappointed too when they hear that those abuse happen at U of A. So they sign up, because on the tabling there's a petition where if you support the union, you sign up. When we get the student and the Student Union, then we go to the faculties and the employee of U of A.

Q: Then you had a vote – how did that go?

DD: What happened is before the election, when the union figure out that Bee Clean is doing dirty tactics, the union told us, now they're being aggressive on you guys. So we need to do something that makes them back. What we did is we called the media people and put up a press conference and exposed them, with the help of the media, and with the help of people from the community, from Latino, from ? community, from East Indian community, and some

government employee like the former premier, Rachel Notley, who was MLA of Strathcona. She was part of it, and there was a lawyer who helped us too; her name is Yessie Byl. She was the one who helped us file a case at Bee Clean to the Labour Board and then a civil claim as well at the Provincial Court of Alberta, and she didn't charge us any single cents.

Q: What were the dirty tactics that Bee Clean did?

DD: What they did is they sent out all the supervisors, lead hands, to look after us, to go after us. In my case, two managers and two supervisors, every night they came into my building and talked to me. We heard that you guys wanted to have the union. If you really force it, we will report it to the head office and we will send you home. You're going to lose your job. If I were you, I'm going to stay away with those guys and stop working to have a union here. It's not going to happen, that's what they said.

Q: Were you involved in working on the first collective agreement?

DD: Yes.

Q: How did it go?

DD: It goes so well, because what happened was we brought up the issues. First thing that I don't like on the worksite is we don't have a decent place to eat. We don't have chairs and tables; we don't have rooms to eat. On break time, you just go and sit on the ground and find a place where you can eat. They don't have a decent room with tables and chairs for us to eat. There are some microwaves in rooms at U of A, and you can use it. But there's no decent place to eat. When they had an election, they said they don't want it; the union will not get in. But it turns out it's a landslide. So they have no choice than to accept the union. There must be a steward from the worksite who will represent the workers when there's common issue between the workers and the supervisor, or workers and the lead hand. You have to have a steward to mediate and look after the issues.

Q: Did you know the stewards at that time?

DD: There's a couple that I know. There's one Filipino guy; I forgot his name; and there's one African lady: her name is Tarik.

Q: Are you happy with the contract? Are there issues with the union?

DD: What happened is when the issue at the U of A goes out in public, the Bee Clean management kept quiet about the issue. Press or media people went to the Bee Clean office and asked them questions, but nobody speak on behalf of the company. But they remain quiet. After a week, someone from the Bee Clean head office went onto the radio station and asked for apology, saying it was a miscommunication on the part of the accountant and the managers and supervisors. So that's what they did. That was October, and my work permit will expire on December. When that happen after that issue, after they were exposed, the ESDC cancels their privilege to hire a foreign worker. That's where they stop hiring foreign worker because of that issue.

Q: When your permit is expiring, did you stay legally?

DD: Yeah, I still work. But after the press conference, they stay away from me. They don't talk to me. It seems like I was there; but I'm not. They just give me the key to do my routine, and after that nobody goes back and check my routine. Nobody goes on the building when I'm working and ask me anything. They just let me by myself, because they said, this guy gonna be gone soon. So we'll just let it be. Before my contract with Bee Clean expires, I decided to look to a different company, because I didn't save enough money. The hardest part of working in a different country is to be away with your family. It's not the job; it's the loneliness when you're away with your kids, with your wife, with your brother and sister. That's the hardest part. I was thinking of going back home. But I said, I didn't save enough money. After that incident, the government sent a third party that will calculate workers' overtime compensations on how much money we could get. After we get the money from the employment standard, I sent it to my wife and my kids back home. I said, I didn't save for 22 months working here with Bee Clean

and being away with them, I didn't save enough money. Before I came here, I sold my cab. I sold my carwash. I sold everything. I said to myself, if I go back with this money, how will I start again? So I decided to stay and find another employer or another company.

Q: Were there any other health and safety issues at Bee Clean?

DD: There's a lot. As far as I know, whatever you were doing, light duty or heavy duty cleaning, first there must be an eyewash station. Most of the time, workers are exposed. Let's say you're cleaning the ceiling; you're cleaning the fixtures. Those dirty and dust came off that can cause into your eyes; but there must be an eyewash station. There is an eyewash station, but there's not much. If they don't have an eyewash station, there should be at least a spray on your cart. But there's nothing.

Q: Was that resolved by the union?

DD: The union addressed those issues to them. But because I only have two months time left when union get in, I didn't know how does it goes.

Q: When did you leave?

DD: My last day with Bee Clean was December 4, 2010.

Q: What happened after that?

DD: What happened after that is on my last day the East Indian community, when they found out I was on my last day of work, some of them were crying. All of them gave me a hug, and they thought I'm going back home. On the morning before I returned the keys and the uniforms to my supervisor, some of them gave me souvenirs. Some of them talked to me on the bus and on the train. It's kind of sad, because you've been working with them and you build up a relationship – a friend, a father, a mother relationship – with them. The workers at the University site is a mix of cultures. There's Guyanese, there's Latino male and female, there's

Indian male and female, and the Filipino community. It's a good opportunity to experience working with different people and at the same time learn their culture and some language.

Q: How did you feel about leaving, after helping to get the union?

DD: I was disappointed. On my personal view how is Canada, I thought working in Canada is really different from working in the Middle East. We heard lots of bad stories and bad issues on the Middle East; I never thought I would experience that here in Canada. It kind of disappoint me because Canada is established and a well-known country, a respected country. But I didn't know that those kind of abuse and use have happen here; and personally I experienced those here. I kind of disappointed. For me it seems like the government didn't really had – they're not asking a perfect program, but they're asking on a program that should be set up equal rights and equal protection. There's no agency or department that would look back and check on the worker situation. All the government did is they set up programs for a guest worker, but no office or agencies that look back on how the program goes and how's the worker situations. So that was make it disappointment.

Q: Were you ever afraid of fighting back?

DD: At first I was afraid because I didn't know how I would get the support of people behind me. When we started the union, 100 percent of the workers are interested in joining the union. But when the management started intimidating, 80 percent backed out. On the first or second day of intimidation, 10 percent back out. We ended up three Filipinos and five African, so eight. We had more than 115 or 120 workers at the location. I was afraid, because I don't know those people. I don't know them well. I just met them here. Back home, if you go against big company, your family and friends won't see you the next day. So that's what I'm scared of. But Yessie Byl told me, don't be scared on your safety; you'll be safe here. Whatever you're thinking or whatever's on your mind, that's not going to happen. It's just that this is Canada. You experience this thing, but trust your experience. Your experience: now you know that those things will happen to anyone anywhere. That's what she said.

Q: So you left because your work permit expired. What's your status now?

DD: I lost my status but I have a PR in process.

Q: As a non-status worker, how do you work?

DD: That's the thing. Many workers here, when they experience abuse and misuse from their employer, some of the workers left the job or run away from the employer. Most of the workers who lost their status are working under the table or working for cash. But there's also a reason. Because you don't know who you are dealing with, because of your situation, it's just like you're grabbing on the knife just to get away from your employer, just to get away from them. You know the fact that that employer didn't fit you well. That employer, you don't know how long you going to be with them. So it's unsure. You meet someone who promise you a job. We'll pay you cash. But some of them also take advantage or bring you to location someplace to work. They'll discuss the amount of money, how much you get every week or every two weeks. But sometimes some of them run away with your money. You're dealing with that situation with those kind of people. On the other hand, you can't go to the police or authorities to complain. If you go to them and complain, the first question is, you're undocumented, you don't have the rights; why are you working? So here comes an immigration issue. So you're violating immigration policy, the so-called IRPA, Immigration Refugee Protection Act. So you have no choice; that's the thing. Sometimes some of them ask you to work for them. But we'll pay you like \$5 or \$7 an hour. What else you can do? You need to survive.

Q: Undocumented migrants do not have healthcare. What do you do when you get sick?

DD: I can't go to the doctor. I don't have access to healthcare. Any medicine that I can buy over the counter. Sometimes people that I know I ask them a favour.

Q: What if your application is refused?

DD: I have no choice – go back home or go underground and work, as long as I can find a job, as long as they don't caught me. That's one of the greatest fear of the undocumenteds – when they get caught. We know when you get caught, they can detain you or ask you to go home. We don't know how those process goes, how long it takes, and we don't know the situations of those undocumenteds being caught by Immigration. We have no idea. All we know is it's a scary situation when you get there.

Q: Where do you get the energy to keep on fighting?

DD: First are my kids. Second, I want the people who's working here, I want them to be informed and educated on their rights. I want if I could do something; I want a change that will benefit the people. In the first place, the program, the government benefitting on the program. Why? We workers work here; workers pay taxes. The money that workers make is spent here. They send money to their family because me as a father, that's my obligation to my wife and my kids, to support them. There's no really clear avenue or pathway for permanent residency. There's an equal pathway or ways for permanent residency. When I came into the program, janitor is a low-skill program. When you look at nanny, it's also low skilled, but nanny has a pathway for permanent residency. But a low skill doesn't; there's no pathway. When they open up the immigration for provincial nominee, not all the people working here are qualified. Some people working here lost their status but still they're looking after the guest workers who come in. Why the government fix the issue? The workers who lost status here, why they don't give a chance get those undocumented workers, give them documents, have them work, have them live a life that? Nothing. Undocumented workers work anywhere to make money, but on the back of the hand there's always a fear. But if you are a legitimate worker, documented worker, you fear for nothing.

Q: Are you still hopeful that you'll get your status?

DD: Yeah, I'm still hopeful. But, like I said, I don't know any one of them and I don't have the power to convince them have me stay here, let me stay here. If I only have a voice.

Unfortunately, to make a change for the program, there's a lot of change we have to talk and we have to work on.

Q: So you haven't seen your children for ten years?

DD: The last time I saw them was 2013. When I came here in 2009, I went home on vacation in 2013. To be away from the family for a long period of time, for four years, and to be with them, you can't explain the joy when you see them, especially my second child. She was in my wife's womb when I left them. So, when I saw her at the airport, she was staring at me. I hug her, but there's no response, because she doesn't know me well. She just see me on social media, like Skype; we use Skype for communication and video call. Back in the days, like I said, my father working in the Middle East, it took two to three weeks before we get his mail or voicemail, and it will take another two or three weeks for him to get our response. Overseas callback in his day was very expensive, but good thing right now, because of technology. It's way easier. But still, the hardest part in workers' life, aside from struggles and problems and issues, is to be away with the family. That's the hardest part.

Q: How long did you stay for your vacation?

DD: Forty days. A day before I left home, I was with my two kids. There's a couple of things on my mind: come back here, or stay there. If I stayed there, how would I insure their future? how would I send them to school? How would I start all over again back home? So I decided to come back here and work, because that way I can send the money, and the money that I make here can be used to send them to school and keep them studying and have food on the table to eat.

Q: What did your eldest child say when you left again?

DD: Oh, she was crying. That's a hard thing.

Q: How old are they now?

DD: My oldest is 19. She just turned 19. My younger one is turning 10 in September. It's hard. But if I have a choice, I would stay back home. But, like I said, it's the economy. It's the life; it's the corruption in the government that pushed me to go out of the country and work.

Q: Unlike here, it costs money to send your children to school in the Philippines.

DD: Back home for a father with two kids, for you to eat three times a day you have to make 700 to 750 pesos a day, which is \$18 here. But when I left home, the minimum wage is less than 400 pesos or less than \$10 here. Eight hours job back home – because back home we base the wage on the day for eight hours work, not compared to here, which is more money because we base the pay here by the hour. If you convert the money, like today the minimum wage in Alberta is \$15 per hour; if you convert that to Philippine money that's times 38. One hour here is more than eight hours work back home. So there's a big difference. But, like I said, I make good money here but I pay for my rent, my food, my bills, and I have to send money. At the end of the day, still I save nothing.

Q: Explain a bit about the school system in the Philippines.

DD: The reason why most of the Filipino speak English is we have a good educational program back home. From kinder, there's an English subject; kinder to college, there's an English subject. Back home we have our own national language, which is Tagalog. Aside from Tagalog, we have lots of native language like Ilocano, Cebuano, Visayan, Ilonggo, Kapampangan. Those languages are used in provinces, but in the city it's mostly Tagalog; that's our national language. But we were teach to learn a foreign language. Back in the days when I was high school and college, we have a Spanish subject. But they abolished it. They keep the English as a universal language or international language. That's the reason why most of the Filipinos speak English.

Q: At Bee Clean, were you working alone on your shifts?

DD: Most of the night I'm working by myself. Let's say on my routine I'm doing the main floor, second floor, and third floor. I'm doing the heavy routine. There's a lady working with me; she

will start on the third floor going down to the main floor and start from main floor working to the third floor. My duty is to sweep and mop the rooms and the hallway, arrange the table and chairs, and the lady is doing the light cleaning duties – clean the board, wipe all the dust on the desks, replace the garbage bag, replace in the women’s washroom where they put their napkins. So they’re the one doing it, and clean the mirror on the office and the classrooms. But yeah, most of the time we work by ourselves. We only see each other because we meet at one point where we have to grab the key. Each of us have our own key; that key is your access to get into the classrooms and offices. At the end of your shift, we meet at one room where the supervisor or lead hand is waiting to get the key back from us. Then after that we have to go to another building, grab a key, and work by yourself again.

Q: What protection did you have while working?

DD: There’s no such protection if something happened. There was one lady who was trapped in the elevator. We only figure out that she was trapped in the elevator when the peace officer came into the building. Nobody knows where she is. She was trapped on the elevator in the Education building for more than two hours. We were surprised in the middle of the night, peace officers came in and looking after her because they don’t know which elevator where she was. We were surprised how come they didn’t know. There’s an intercom in there. But they said, I don’t know. It’s a technical problem on that night, and that’s the reason why it caused her to be locked in the elevator as well. If something happen to you, nobody knows unless the supervisors or lead hands look for you to grab the key back. If a break-in happens or someone did something to you, you don’t know what to do. There was an issue of a break-in happened into Tory Building, where a couple of guy came in. You know those vending machine? They break the vending machine to grab all the chocolate bars. There’s one time that people who’s not working with Bee Clean wore a Bee Clean uniform and went into the lunchroom and walked away with a worker’s bag.

Q: How many floors do you take care of?

DD: Mostly three or four. You have to look after 14 rooms each floor, not including if there's an office or conference room you have to do it. But on the conference room, basically what we do is mostly vacuum the carpet, because most of those conference rooms and offices are carpeted so we have to vacuum it. But in the classroom, sweep and mop.

Q: Were you given any training about the dangers of the chemicals?

DD: They said it's training, but it's just they will give us flyers to read. It's about WHMIS. They will just give you those papers and it's up to you to read, and it's up to you how would you understand it. It's unfair, especially for East Indian people. East Indian people, some of them don't speak English, most of them. So if they don't speak English, it's pretty understandable that they can't read. It's really hard for them. When something happen, you see something bad happen to him, you don't know what to do because you can't understand him. You don't have a way of communicating to each other, because we speak a different language. So all you have to do is run into a different floor and grab people or someone that can understand his language.

Q: How is the Temporary Foreign Worker permit tied to the employer?

DD: First thing, a guest worker is not taking the jobs from Canadian. That's what most of the Canadian is claiming. They said, you guys taking job from us. No, it's a job that you don't want to do and we, as a guest worker, are doing it. For an employer to hire a foreign worker, there's a process for them to get a foreign worker. First they have to publish, because according to the program, the employer must initiate or hire a local first. They need to hire a local from here. If they can't find any, they have to go to ESDC to apply. First thing they have to do is they have to post a publication. They have to post on provincial, local, and national. There's a certain time and certain days or period of time. Once they did that and didn't get any local, then they can go back to the government and tell them, look, this is what happened. I post this; I put up ads; nobody applied. If there's someone who applied who are not going to meet my schedules or it's going to cost me more, at that time the government can only give them an opportunity to get a foreign worker. But after that they have to apply. Now they call it LMIA, and it cost money for the employer too. The employer will spend money for the LMIA and while those paper is in

process for the employer to get worker, either he will hire an agency or third party that look for a worker. Some of them, they make money out of it. Let's say I'm your agent; you need a worker. I get a worker in Mexico or I'll get a worker from Philippines, from any Asian countries. You pay me. I charge them money. Some of them, they don't let employers know they charge from \$5,000 to \$10,000 to get a guest worker. But that amount of worker, before the guest workers get the worker back, how long it takes. There must be an issue to fix in hiring a guest worker, in giving the right employer the privilege or opportunity to hire a guest worker. If they can't control it, the government can set up an agency or program that's transparent, where the government will get the guest worker for the right employer. In that way they know and in that way they have the obligation to monitor, because it was the government who bring him here. If some things happen, if I was recruited by the agent, if some things happen to me the agent can walk away easily. If I tell to the government that this agent charged me that much money, then there's a possibility that I could lost my job because I brought it up in public or in authority, and authorities will go down first to employer and the employers will point to the agent. So it's a complicated issue, and at the end of the day it goes back on the worker. So, for me, the protection must start first with the program. We need protection; the government of Canada needs a worker. The protection must start in the program.

Q: You mentioned doing some work with Migrante. Can you explain what Migrante is, and what you're doing?

DD: Migrante is an international organization. It's a Filipino organization but the mission of Migrante is to help the vulnerable workers and the people who are in it. When I came here, I don't know if I had an issue with my employer, I don't know where to go. What Migrante did is facilitate an info session to educate the worker, let the workers know where to go, let the workers know their rights. So those are the basic things that Migrante does with the guest workers or the foreign workers, aside from connecting them to the right people and the right agency when it comes to issues and problems on the work location with the employer. So those are the things that Migrante does.

Q: Through that process, have you been able to offer some support to workers?

DD: Yeah. Say I knew someone who is being abused by the employer. What we does is we give him advice on what to do and where to go – say Employment Standard and Edmonton Community Legal Centre. Before you have to send them to Employment Standard, there must be people that knows the labourer’s rights and labour laws of Canada and Alberta. So we send them to ECLC, and ECLC have those volunteer lawyers who can give them a specific and proper advice on what to do when it comes to their issues and problem.

Q: Have you had examples where you’ve been able to change the circumstances for someone?

DD: Yeah. I met a guy here in Edmonton; he works in Fort McMurray. He was a foreign worker. Because of the recession happening up north, he was one of those thousands of workers to lose job. When he got here, he stays in our place and helped him what to do to find another employer. There’s no guarantee that his company will call him back, because when a layoff happens in a company and when they call back the workers, the first workers they will call are the local before the guest workers, or else the local working class will question them: why you’re taking them first, when we’re from here? You need to prioritize; you need to get us back before them. So I helped him out how to start a different job in a different company here. Good thing he found a company and now he’s also a permanent resident of Canada. Aside from that, because Migrante works with a settlement agency as well, if we know that someone is qualified enough to apply for permanent residence, because here to be qualified for permanent residence first you must. . . That’s one thing we also question, is why there’s an English proficiency test, which is so expensive. For me to work here for two years, to survive here in three years, you’re good enough to work, you’re good enough to stay. You don’t need to go into that proficiency test, because even you challenge a Canadian, there’s no guarantee that he could pass that test. It’s also profit for the government. So for me, that proficiency is not necessary. If the certain guest worker is skilled or good enough to work and gain the Canadian experience to be qualified for permanent residence, we convince them, don’t go to immigration consultant because they charge you money. Immigration consultant will help you with the paperwork, retainer fee \$4,000. Follow-up \$100 every time you ask a question, \$100. So that’s a lot of money. All they have to do is gather information and fill out the papers. So what we do at

Migrante is assist them and send them to the settlement agency or people who could help them fill out the application form free of cost. So they save money at the same time. There's also a lot of issues with the immigrant consultant as well. Sad to say, there's one guy who was also charging lots of money. He's a Filipino from our own community, but yeah. And some consultants also taking advantage of that. It's just a lot of money and they will just information from you. So that's something that must be rectified too.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to say, that myself or Marco didn't ask you?

DD: If I had a voice or a say for a change when it comes to program, first if you're being invited and qualified enough to work here in Canada, the government should ensure a status for you. You come into Canada as a worker, you don't have a permanent resident. But on your paycheque, aside from tax there's a CPP. The previous Immigration minister who does the Four-in Four-out Program, he made a mistake on that. Thousands of foreign worker were sent back home. But how would they get the money back from their paycheque that they paid on CPP? That's something too. Like I said, there is a big job or a big issue to fix about the program to ensure the safety, the protection, the thing we call transparency of the program. There must be a change, not just a change, a huge change to do. They can go collect information from the workers' experience of those issues. They can get the employers involved as well, but the good employers, because we know some of the bad employers will keep the bad side hidden. We cannot change those issues or fix those issues just in one day or one week. There must be a period or there must be a collective work and collect information to put together.

[END]