

Edeline Agoncillo

September 8, 2019 Interviewer: Marco Luciano; Camera Don Bouzek

Q: Tell us where you were born and where you grew up.

EA: I'm born in the Philippines in the southern part. I came in a community where most of my neighbours are working abroad, like domestic helpers on Hong Kong. That's my trigger point to come to Hong Kong also.

Q: What do your parents do?

EA: My father is just a farmer, and my mother is a housewife. We are eight siblings. I am the eldest. My mother is the one who only took care of us while we were growing up. It's really hard growing up in the Philippines. We just take a walk going to school. We all go to public school in there. Life is really hard in the Philippines.

Q: Did you go to college?

EA: Yeah, I did. I had a chance because my auntie lives in Manila. I just cannot afford to see my parents. Our life in the province--it was really hard to be in my province. I did my best to go to college. So I asked my auntie just to be a helper also in her house in Manila in return of going to school. So I studied in Philippine Normal University, where it's also a public school, and I become a teacher.

Q: What do you teach?

EA: I was not able to teach. I really wanted to teach in the Philippines at that time, because I already have my own family. But the problem is I was not able to get in. It's really hard to get in or to be regular in the Philippines if you are poor and you don't know somebody inside the government. That's why I decided to go abroad.

Q: When did you go abroad?

EA: I went abroad when my son is four years old and my daughter is 2-1/2 years old. That was August, 2002.

Q: Did you come straight to Canada?

EA: No, I worked in Hong Kong for 12 years first as a domestic helper in one family before coming here to Canada.

Q: How did you apply to become a domestic worker in Hong Kong?

EA: I went to an agency. I don't know somebody also in Hong Kong; so I went to an agency. I loaned my own bicycle just to pay my placement fee coming to Hong Kong. I waited for one year. I waited one year just to come to Hong Kong to work as a domestic helper. You need to go to an agent before you can work in another country. I went and applied at an agency, and the agency look at domestic job for me in Hong Kong.

Q: What's it like in Hong Kong as a domestic worker?

EA: I think it's okay. It's hard for me as a mother, of course, because I was not there when my children are growing up. But I cannot afford to see them to be poor just like us also. I have to be rational or emotional. So, which one? I prefer to be rational. I have to work so that I can send money for them to go to school. But it's good thing that I was able to work in a family who are fair. I have my day off during Sundays, only Sunday, but Monday to Saturday I'm working from before they wake up and when they are already asleep. Basically my rest time is only around six or seven hours. My job starts at 6 o'clock or 5 o'clock in the morning and ends at 9 or 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock in the evening.

Q: What do you do during those hours?

EA: Everything. I have to prepare breakfast for them, bring the children to school, clean the house, do the marketing, teaching the children. Especially, because I'm a teacher also, I teach everything in their assignments. Basically everything inside the house – the budgeting, taking care of pets. They have their dog, they have their aquarium; so, everything. The kids, you have to wake them up in the morning and then you have to bring them down when they are going to sleep. Bring them to school, feed them, bath them, teach them the assignments, teach them everything in their assignments from school, and clean the house as well, maintain everything. It's just like domestic work.

Q: After working for 12 years in Hong Kong, what did you do?

EA: My boss or my employer in Hong Kong knew that one of my greatest dreams is to come here to Canada. When they heard that some agents are looking for factory workers in Hong Kong, my boss was the one who asked me: you can apply. So they were the ones who encourage me to go to this agent and apply for that job.

Q: Why Canada?

EA: I don't know. It's just that maybe it's the first country. I don't know. Maybe when I see my neighbours who come here in Canada, their houses in the Philippines are nice, beautiful. I think I didn't see any problem when it comes to Canada; you didn't hear any negative. The people are nice, the economy are nice. I didn't hear any corruption about this one. I just didn't see the news.

Q: When did you come to Canada?

EA: I started applying in 2012, and I got my formal paper in 2013. But at that time there's already that four year out rule. So my paper was pending at that time. I got my visa on January 2014 and then I was able to come here on July 2014--so a few months, almost half year, or more than half year.

Q: How much did it cost you to come to Canada?

EA: Lots. It's around 42,000 Hong Kong dollars or roughly \$7,000 Canadian.

Q: Where did you get the money?

EA: Borrowing the bank, loan my own house and lot. I loaned my own house in the Philippines just to come here to Canada.

Q: What happened when you came to Canada?

EA: I first came here in 2014, in July 2014. I was very excited at first. When I first enter in that factory. . . Actually I applied in an industrial laundry factory. We wash all the linens of the hospitals. The factory washed all the linens of hospitals and some big hotels here in Edmonton. So, when I first entered, my expectation was really high. When I first glanced at that one it's like, okay, it's all high tech; it's clean. But the people are – it's multi-cultural; it's a culture shock. I was assigned. You want me to tell you already what's inside?

Q: We'll get there. How did you feel when you landed at the airport? Where did you stay?

EA: I was all ready. I came here with rice, because I'm scared there's no rice here. No, just kidding. I already contact some of the people here, some of my co-TFWs here what to do in the airport, because I don't know anything in the airport. We arrive in Vancouver and then we were left behind by the airplane going to Edmonton. So we were stuck in Vancouver for a while. Then the following day we came here in Alberta. One of the HR managers in that factory receives us or fetches us in airport. We have this flat already. We are six people in there. We were assigned in one flat, six people – two people in one room. They're quite nice, the accommodation is good. Even the carpool going to the factory, they already assigned for us; they have already ready for us.

Q: How many of you did the laundry facility get from Hong Kong?

EA: Actually I think it's more than 30. I am the third batch, and in third batch I think we are something like 25. The first batch, I don't know how many, and second batch, and then the third batch is 25 people.

Q: Did you go back to the Philippines before coming to Canada?

EA: No, I was not able already, because the agent already tell us, if you go back in the Philippines, then you can't come here because of the status in Hong Kong already. So there might be a problem, because they put already a visa on my passport; so they will see that one and question me. So I was not able to go back home before my flight here.

Q: So you didn't get a chance to see your family?

EA: No, I wasn't able. A little bit console is just that there's already the Messenger that I can video call them and see them. I can talk to them whenever I want. But it's not enough. It's not enough that you can just hear their voice; it's not enough. But going to Canada is one of the path that I, there's a chance I can get them. In Hong Kong there will be no chance at all to get them there.

Q: When did you start working in Canada?

EA: One day after. The first day I came here, July 14, and then 15 we went to get the Alberta I.D. and the health card, and then the following day we work.

Q: What was the first day of work like?

EA: The first day of work they tell me that I'm talkative. They already put me in cart makeup a little bit bigger than the other people. They put me in cart makeup department, so they already divided us where we are going to work.

Q: What is cart makeup?

EA: Cart makeup department is the one who fill up linens for the carts going to the hospitals.

Q: Tell us a bit about that company? What does it look like inside?

EA: Okay, I can tell everything. That factory has four divisions: wash floor, iron department, cart makeup department, and the OR. OR is the one all the linens going to the surgery in the hospitals. In wash floor, all the dirty linens from the hospitals go there for sorting, for washing. All the dirty things go there in the wash floor. In iron, that's where they sort and put it in the ironing machines, and it will be ironed and fold, going to the cart makeup department. In cart makeup department, there is these carts that are waiting to be filled. So I am assigned in there. We have a paper or a checklist what this cart is going, and what the linens are needed for this cart. We will fill up the linens needed for that cart to be bring back to the hospital. That's basically the routine.

Q: How is the laundry washed?

EA: It's all machines. It's all computerized. I haven't seen any suds in that factory, no soap at all; I haven't seen any soap at all. I think they have a chemist or something like that. It's lots, all in slings. You cannot see any soap already left in the linens.

Q: How many workers are there?

EA: Lots. In cart makeup department it's around 30 to 40 people. It's lots, around 300 to 400 people all over.

Q: Who are the customers or clients?

EA: The hospitals and some hotels.

Q: How much laundry do they get?

EA: All I can tell is just that in the biggest hospital here, it's got four trucks of linens every day. In one truck we have 40 to 50 carts, aside from extra orders. So it's lots.

Q: What kind of truck?

EA: It's a big truck, the six-wheeler truck. Lots. One cart is sometimes 500 pounds, 400 pounds each. So it's big.

Q: So there's 500 pounds of laundry in each cart coming from the hospital, and there's four carts in a truck.

EA: No, it's not only four carts. It's 40 to 50 carts.

Q: How do you get those carts? Do you pull it?

EA: We pull it from truck. Actually we have two kinds. One truck is already empty, or there's still a little bit inside; but it's still clean. One truck is in the tub. It's already full of dirty one. Mine is the carts with the empty ones that are clean; and then we will pull it. We have a loader, or they will pull it going to me, and I will weigh it and then go to the computer people. Then the computer people will scan it and then the computer will tell what kind of linens are needed for that cart. Then the cart makeup people will fill it with the linens. After filling it up, it will go to the scan out people, whoever is assigned to that weighing scale. He or she will scan it how many weights and then it will go back to the hospital again, or we will put it in one line and the driver will put it in the truck going back to the hospital.

Q: Do you pull it manually?

EA: Yes, we do, especially when I was assigned already as a lead hand. I was assigned as a lead hand. So I was the one who pull the cart, weigh it, and then put it to the computer people.

Q: Are the 300 workers in that facility migrant workers, TFW, or who are those workers?

EA: The time when I'm first working there, lots of people there are temporary foreign workers. Some of them are already residents. But most of them cannot speak English. It's just like you do your work, I will do my work. That's why they said it's a very unskilled job. It's low skilled. So that's why they are not allowed to have if they will sponsor you or put you something like that so that they can get you a proper paper to be a PR. No, they are not allowed, because the category of a laundry worker is not suitable to have a proper paper to be a PR. It's an unskilled job.

Q: Did you see any problems in the workplace?

EA: Yes, first I encountered sometimes the cart will come back with sometimes maybe stuff from the hospitals forget to get all the dirty ones; or they will rush to put it inside the cart. I was able to see some blood inside the linens. I saw needles still inside the carts. I saw some surgery tools inside the carts, which is sometimes alarming to me, because it's so scary. We have gloves, but it's cloth. Something might prick you inside; so that's why we have to be very careful when opening sometimes the cart. Especially if it's heavy, you know that it's still full. But usually, it's dirty. So, expect that it's really smelly with blood and with some human remains. No, it's not human remains. It's some fingers or something from surgery. I saw once. And sometimes I hurt my back in there. It's so heavy – 500 or 600 pounds. You pull it by yourself. Nobody will help you. It's quite hard also during winter. You have to pull it from the truck and it's frozen. The wheels are frozen. So you have to double your effort just to pull it out. You have to be very strong. One of the things also that I'm not comfortable in that one is that the fibres are everywhere. If you have allergies, if you have asthma, it will be very bad for you. If you will be also in the cart makeup department, it's hot and cold, hot and cold. Most of the time the doors from the back, because of the trucks coming in and out, are always open. Inside is hot, because of the iron machines. So it's cold and hot, cold and hot. Usually I got a cough in there. I'm coughing there for more than a year. Before I leave there, I still have my cough.

Q: Were you given any protection?

EA: They give us a glove once a month, but it can easily broken. It's scary also because there's a static. They give us a hairnet. And we have this shoes; it's quite heavy because it's metal. But it's to protect our feet from the wheels, because it's very heavy.

Q: Were you given health and safety training?

EA: No, they didn't give us. They just asked to read us. If you are good enough, you will read it. If not, then you will just copy from your workmates. Then just sign it and give it back to the supervisor.

Q: What did they give you?

EA: Just a WHMIS paper to answer it. I think we have a tour at that time, but it's just for the muster point and some departments – this one is the folding one and what the equipment is for.

Q: Have you witnessed any accidents?

EA: Yes, some of them were already sent to the hospital because they were pricked by the needles or they were cut, usually from the wash floor. One of my colleagues got a knee surgery because of the heaviness of the cart. It broke. So she had a hard time until she just quit. One of my colleagues also broke the, because I think the cart just rolled over her feet. Me myself, I'm coughing for more than a year because of the fibres, because of hot and cold, hot and cold.

Q: Did you tell your supervisor?

EA: Yes.

Q: What did they say?

EA: Just take a rest. Go to the doctor. Sometimes it's really hard to say to us, because they say, we don't have enough people to work, just take a rest for yourself or something like that.

Q: Does the workplace have a union?

EA: I think they don't have. No, they don't. They're scared. I don't know. As a temporary foreign worker, it's hard to investigate those things. For the word temporary, they will easily kick you out. If you don't have any next move, it will easily kick you out, because of the word temporary.

Q: What would they kick you out for?

EA: If you complain. The mentality is just like, "you're only temporary here and you have only two year contract. If you don't look for another employer, then, after two years, we will give you a plane ticket and send you back where you belong or where you came from." So that's why we have to behave.

Q: Was there any supervisor or boss who actually told workers that?

EA: No, not that word. But they said that if you want to stay here in Canada longer, look for another employer, because we will not be able to renew your contracts anymore. Most of my colleagues just go back in the Philippines and get their plane ticket and go back in the Philippines or Hong Kong or where they worked as a domestic helper.

Q: How long did you work there?

EA: In K-Bro? More than two years. Before my contract ends in K-Bro, my agent was applying for international student for me, and K-Bro was just happy enough to give me 20 hours a week to work.

Q: So they didn't renew your work permit?

EA: No, they said that to us at the beginning already. They said that if you want to stay longer here in Canada, look for another employer or look for another job, because we will not be able to renew your contracts anymore. I think the LMIA at that time was already 1,000 and it's hard for them already to get LMIA because it's quite expensive already and the qualifications are: I think they tell me K-Bro cannot get any temporary foreign workers already anymore.

Q: So when your work permit was expiring, and you wanted to stay, what did you do?

EA: With no relatives at all here in Canada, with no associations, I was culture shock when I first come here because I just saw houses, no people moving around. In Hong Kong it's very busy. I don't know anybody. All my colleagues are just temporary foreign workers also, just like me. I just scroll in the computer and then I look for the word LMIA, and this agent popped up and said, we can help you with LMIA. I went to this agent, and the best way for me is to become an international student. At first I hesitate, because I myself is already a teacher. So why I have to go back in school? I'm already 40. So at first I hesitate. I have to go back? Why? I have my children to raise; I have my family to support; I have my house to pay every month. But he said, no, this is the best thing for you. You can get your children. After graduation you can apply for postgraduate open work permit. He was the one, that agent was the one who enlightened me about the postgraduate open work permit in here. So I give my full trust to that agent, and I pay a lot.

Q: What did you pay?

EA: In that agent, nearly \$4,000 just to a study permit alone. He was able to secure a study permit for me in Solomon College, so I studied in Solomon College in 2016 April. After a year, I learned that Solomon College is not eligible to apply for a postgraduate open work permit. We learned that one because some of the people who applied or some of the students, just like me, temporary foreign workers who started in that school, applied for a postgraduate permit and all of them were refused. At that time I'm looking for someone who will help me. It's good thing that there's Migrante, and Migrante was the one who opened us the doors for ECLC, for Catholic

Services. They were the one who help us to reach out to some people who can hear us. We are 22 students in my batch in my class, and all of us are temporary foreign workers. Half of that class came from that agency.

Q: Why did they enrol you to Solomon College if they knew it wasn't eligible?

EA: Actually no, at first he asked me to select between two schools. It's just only MaKami College or Solomon College. The first thing I asked is, how much is the tuition fee for that school? Solomon College is a little bit smaller or lesser than MaKami College. It's \$16,000 tuition fee but it's \$2,400 or \$2,600 for the books. So it's a little bit lesser. So I went to Solomon College. But when I enter Solomon College, I was able to pass their entrance exam. They asked me from what agent I've been, and I told them the name of my agency. They put the name of the agency on top of my paper. I think they have a mutual agreement or mutual understanding that I just realized when we have already...

Q: What course did you enrol in?

EA: My course is Hospitality Management; it's a two year course. It's an intense course--every month one subject, every month. It's under American Hotel, something like that. Every month we have this final exam. After every month after exams, if the result of the exam is you failed, you have to take again. If you're going to retake, you have to pay \$200 again. You have four tries to have a rewrite, and after four tries of trying the exam and you failed, you're already out of the course. If you're lucky enough to pass in the four, you pay already the \$800. In one course you have to be very careful. But it's so hard. It's one book every month.

Q: How much did you end up paying? Did you finish it?

EA: I did. But the last course that I took, they didn't pass me already. They didn't give me the diploma. I have my certificates every month. Every time you pass the one course, they will give you a certificate. So I have certificates, but I don't have the diploma, because the last course I wasn't able to pass already.

Q: How much did it cost you in total?

EA: All in all, it's roughly \$18,000 or \$19,000, because I pay \$800 already for my retakes. It's roughly \$19,000 to \$20,000, something like that.

Q: Where did you get the money?

EA: I loaned my mother's house. I loaned, and then I work really hard in here. I don't have any life in here. I just stay at home, work. Even my clothes here are still from Hong Kong, and I'm just lucky that some of my friends here give me the winter clothes. Or some of them: I had the chance to be a member of everything free that you can ask some of the people here to give you this one; you need this one. I cannot afford to buy; I cannot afford. So, until now, it's hard.

Q: What happened after you and your colleagues were rejected for the postgraduate work permit?

EA: Some of them went already to some provinces. Some of them pay again to the agents to give them LMIA. Some of them go back to school again, and some of them marry. Some of them marry the permanent ones with good status already here in Canada. As for me, actually I was lucky to have an LMIA from this quadriplegic women. But I quit. I was also abused in the job. I was able to secure a job as a caregiver, but my hypertension was triggered in the job. So I have to quit.

Q: How long did you work there?

EA: Six months, seven months.

Q: What was it like working as a caregiver?

EA: It was hard. She's a quadriplegic woman, a 300 pounder with an OCD. Basically she's awake during the whole night, keep on eating and eating. She will sleep at 8 o'clock in the morning and wakes up at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Her day basically starts at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and ends up at 7 o'clock in the morning the next day. Between that time, you have to give her injections, because she's also a diabetic, a very diabetic woman, and give her pills. I'm so scared of choking her, because she's a quadriplegic, and she's a very big one. She refuses to wear any diaper. So every time she will go to the washroom, you have to carry her or have to put her in the sling and then rush her to the washroom and then put her down in there and be careful, because she can move only the head and the pinky one. It's so hard for me, because I'm alone. So I quit, because my health also was jeopardized in the job. My blood pressure at that time become 240 over 120. So I have to quit. I can take care of her, but I cannot, because you know Filipinos are very tolerant. We have maximum tolerance with job. We love to serve, but the problem is sometimes we have to consider our health. So I have to quit the job, because my health already is deteriorating at that time. I become bigger, but my heart weakens.

Q: That was after being a student?

EA: Yes.

Q: You are part of a group of students that complained against Solomon College. Can you tell me about what happened prior to filing the complaint? Where is that at now?

EA: With the help of some people, it went to the right people actually. That problem of temporary foreign workers to being international students became an issue, and luckily it went to the right people or the right association and organizations here in Canada and our problems become heard. It was heard by people. With the help of Migrante, with the help of some people, they were able to give us some people who can enlighten us about our case. They sent us to some people, like Alberta labour union or labour association who give us talk about temporary foreign workers and about international students and something like that, and about the Edmonton Community Legal Centre also tell us about those things. So with those people who heard our stories, it comes opens up and becomes a lawsuit. We were just lucky to have

this Mintz Law with Avnish, our lawyer, and we filed it already last year. It was amended and amended, and actually it was certified. It was certified already as a lawsuit last May. We were lucky and we were happy. Hopefully we will be able to have our justice soon. So we're praying and hoping for that.

Q: Who's involved in the organizing that?

EA: Me myself, some of the people, some associations. Some of my classmates are just waiting, just need some talking, just need some awakening. So with the help of some associations, with the help of some MLAs, with the help of some organizations here in Edmonton, we have this confidence already to tell our voice, to tell our stories what happened to us. Because of that they said, oh, you have a lawsuit, you can sue. I was just lucky enough to be their spokesperson. This is my story. I have nothing to hide. This is what happened to me. My expectation when I was in Hong Kong was turned upside down when I first came here. I thought that all the people here are nice. I thought that when I come here I don't have any problem anymore. I thought that when I come here I can pay already the debts that I have already in the Philippines. But it's nothing until now. My status is still, I can't still go back in the Philippines. I can't even send my children here. I can't even go for a Christmas in the Philippines. I can't even see my children grow until now, and I'm already five years in here. The sad thing is, I was able to go back in the Philippines only when my husband died. I'm already a widow right now and supporting my children and still paying my debts in the Philippines. That's why I'm here. I'm talking to you with my story, and I'm not scared of it. I'm not ashamed of it. That's what happened to me here. Sometimes I feel that I'm an educated woman. I'm a teacher. But you know what, I feel like they make me stupid. They make me that I'm dumb. Just only lately I saw, oh, I can apply by myself. I can do it by myself. Why they have to ask me to pay for this one? I thought this country is very nice, but it's not. You have to be very tough. I'm trying my best not to be tough, to be talking to you, to tell you my story. I have to be very strong. If not, who cares, or who will help you? Are they going to know that this is happening to you? No. On behalf of my classmates and on behalf of all TFWs that have been victimized by this one, I'm here to talk for them as well. It's not only for me; it's also for them.

Q: So your dream before coming to Canada has changed now in 2019.

EA: Yeah, Canada make me tough; Canada make me strong. Canada makes me think ahead. Canada makes me select the people that you will rely to, select the people that you will go to. Canada makes me select the people that you can only trust. Canada makes me strong woman; do your rights. Nobody will help you in the end. I'm here already. I will fight for it. I'm here. I don't have any plans to go back in the Philippines. I'm here already. I don't want to go back in that very poor community. I love that community, but being poor is what I hate. Going back to the farms where you will just wait for the rain, no irrigation at all--I cannot afford to see my parents like that. My parents are already senior citizens. So they are counting on me. I have to be very strong. I don't cry in front of them; I cry by myself at night.

Q: What is your status now?

EA: A caregiver status, just like that until this year. So this is September, until end of November.

Q: What's going to happen then?

EA: I'm waiting for something else. I have this humanitarian application which I did by myself already. When I went to some agent also in here to help me apply for humanitarian application, they're asking me for \$7,000. I said no. Luckily I went to ECLC, Edmonton Community Legal Centre, even though they're very tough. I was very tough. I always cry in there because they're pushing me to do it by yourself. Catholic Services is helping me to file it. I do it all by myself, and I have this one ream paper application for the humanitarian application. Post office don't even have enough envelope for that one. So we put it in a box. It's ongoing right now. I passed it last April. They sent me already a file number, and please help me pray for it.

Q: If you haven't received any news about the humanitarian application by the end of November, what will you do then?

EA: I will be here, keep trying. I'm here. No matter what, I still have my debts to pay; I still have my family to feed; I have my children to support. What can I do? I will not go anywhere. I'm here. I have my case to follow up; I have my case to fight; I have my lawsuit to fight.

Q: If that happens, you may not be able to see your children anymore.

EA: We have Messenger; we have this video call. That's tough, but the time will come. Let's hope for the best. Let's wait for the miracles to happen. I know somewhere out there some people will still help me. Something might come up. I'm still waiting for that one, and I will not get tired trying, applying, and begging. I'm a victim. So, why should I surrender? I'm a victim.

Q: What motivates you to continue your fight?

EA: My children, the words of my parents, and when I see the list of my debts in the Philippines that every month I have to pay this one. Every time I see the title, the certification that I have a loan in the Philippines, it gives me a push more. That's my fighting inspiration. If not, the bank will just get my parents' house. My parents are already old, and there's no healthcare in the Philippines. There's no benefits for the old in the Philippines. So my parents are just counting on me to buy medicines. So I have to be very tough. I have to be very strong. It's just lately that my parents know what happened to me. It's just lately, when the lawsuit was already certified. But before that, they don't know anything about me. I don't want them to worry about me. I get some papers from them; for my humanitarian application I have to get some letters from them. So they know what happened; I just told them the story. But prior to that, they don't know anything. So I told them already. They always say, okay, keep pushing, be strong. I'm just happy that I told them already what happened to me, because they always ask me to be strong. They always advise me to keep pushing and don't worry about my children; don't worry about them. They're doing their part in that already. So the burden on me gets a little bit easier to know that they're doing their best to be good in there. So I will do my best in here. It's just only me.

Q: When you had accommodation while working at the laundry, who owned that apartment? Did they make an arrangement with the landlord?

EA: They arrange it with the landlord. When we first came here, it's already being leased by the company and it's ready for us already. Our payment for that rent for that apartment is being taken by the company. So every month we don't have to worry about paying directly. The company will take the payment on the rent from our salary to pay for the landlord or the owner of the flat.

Q: You mentioned getting an Alberta Health card when you first started working at the laundry. Can you talk about the limitations of that, and what your status is now? What access do you have to healthcare here?

EA: When I first got my health card, it's just that you can go to the doctor free – just the usual one. I still have that one until now. I still have my health card. I'm still a member. I'm just lucky to have a doctor who help me a lot. Since I have this hypertension, I have to have my medicine every day for my blood pressure. It's quite expensive and I don't have any insurance at all. I'm just lucky that my doctor will give me for two months, sometimes one month, free, because the doctor I think have the privilege to get freebees from the company. So he give me every time I will visit him; he will give me some freebees, some free medicines for me to maintain my health. Some of them I buy myself. So it's just until now I have. I'm just counting my time, saving my medicine so I can still have for in the future as long as I still have my status. I keep buying as long as I still have my health card. But they sent me a letter already that my health card is expiring soon. So I don't know what to do.

Q: When you worked at the laundry, were the language barriers of some workers a health and safety concern?

EA: Yeah, there's a big issue. It's good that I can read clearly. It's good that I can understand those words. It's good that I can speak English well. But the problem was that my coworkers don't understand those things. Those people that can't speak English, those people that can't

read English well, they were assigned to the one that's just a very easy job – just packing those linens, counting one to ten with those linens, and then put it in a bag. Me at the time, I was assigned already as a lead hand. So my job is very complicated. My job was very hard. Maybe because I can speak English, I don't know, or maybe I can understand very well. I can understand computer a little bit. So maybe that's why they assigned me to that one. But the category in that job is the same as the one who is packing those things, who is putting it in the bag, who is counting one to ten. It's the same like mine – we are all laundry production workers. Whether you're doing the hard one or you're doing the easy one, you're all the same. The salary is the same also.

Q: How did those with low English skills deal with safety issues at work?

EA: I haven't encountered. All I know is just that they will put them in one place, and the whole day they're just standing there counting the linens and feeding it into the machine, and that's it the whole day. They will put the break; they will check the time; oh, it's break, and go to the break, and go back and then feed again, then eat lunch, then go back and feed again. That's it. That's the whole routine. There's nothing much to think about that one. Maybe you're physically tired, but not your mental one, unlike in my job that physically, mentally, and emotionally you're drained.

Q: How difficult is it to send enough money home to pay down your debts?

EA: I'm so scared to tell, because my job right now is . . .

Q: Just in a general sense.

EA: I have to send a total of 30,000 a month Philippine peso. It's roughly \$700 to \$750 over a month just to pay those debts and to support my children and my parents, pay their medications, everything. Because my parents are already elder or senior citizen, they have their maintenance every day. My loans in the bank is around 30,000 a month Philippine peso, around \$750 Canadian dollar a month.

Q: That's what you send home.

EA: Yes, what I have to send home. It's not I want; it's have to. It's compulsory.

Q: Do you have loans in Canada as well?

EA: No I don't. I'm scared. My mind is just I have to pay my rent every month; I have to pay my phone every month. I don't mind about eating. I'm still fat. I have friends that give me food. But I just have to make my life a little bit easier. It's not easy, but I have to think. I have to put my mind that my life is easier. No, it's not. It's just a mindset. It's hard, but that's life.

Q: When you worked for the woman as a caregiver, were you given any training in lifting or anything?

EA: No. Actually, when I was in Hong Kong, I took care of two elderly people for six years, 86 and 92. It's easy. Even though I don't have any training about that one, it's okay. I have my medicine. I can speak Chinese. But when I took care of this quadriplegic, yeah, I can easily understand her. But the physical work was really hard. I don't know anything – what's this lift? What's this crane? Even giving her the injection was banned by the CIC when they asked her if I'm giving her. When I apply for a work permit they asked if I inject the insulin and they said yes. They said no; she's not allowed. But still I did it, because nobody will do it for her. The lifting thing: some neighbour or the husband just teach me how to do it. But it's quite hard, 300 pounds. She's very, very big and she's 5'9" or 5'11" in height. She's quite tall, and she's quite heavy, and nobody told me how to do those things. Maybe it's because I'm a helper, and I can easily learn. That's usually what we answer in the job interview – I can learn easily. So I learned easily in that one. The hard thing is just the manual job, physically draining. It's really hard, especially when she peed or she pooped in the bed. That was tough. You have to be very careful, because she might fall down in the bed. She hates smell, because she has an OCD. Everything must be in order; everything must be organized. Even she's in the crane, she will ask me to open the fridge, and you have to organize all the chicken, pork, beef, cooked foods,

vegetables. You have to write it down one by one. It's just like in the factory, first in, first out, first in, first out, always like that.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

EA: I think I give already my story. I'm just thankful that there are some people just like Migrante who is helping me or helping us right now, who is guiding us right now, and who support us right now and channel us to the right people. Migrante was the one who taught us that there are some people that can actually help us with our situation. I'm just very thankful and grateful for that one. So thank you so much.

[END]