

Mike Cartasano

Interviewer Don Bouzek, camera Randy

MC: I was born in 1946 in Manila, Philippines. I grew up in Manila and went to Quezon City after six years, and I started in Quezon City Project 4 for grade 1 until graduating high school.

Q: Quezon City is quite an active city.

MC: Yea, it's a big city outside Manila. Before it's the capital of the Philippines, and then they put it back to Manila.

Q: Did you study anything in particular in school?

MC: Oh yes, I went in different university in Manila after graduating high school. I went to Philippine Maritime Institute and took up Nautical Science for a semester, and then I dropped out. Then I went to University of the East to take up Engineering for two years. Then I got married and stopped schooling for two years. After I had my first boy, I went back to school to University of the East again and took up Machine Shop Technology, and I finished that one. After graduating, I went to university again to MLQU, Manuel L. Quezon University for Education for first semester and then I shift to Commerce.

Q: The standard of education in the Philippines is very high.

MC: Yea, as far as I know. But here in Canada they don't accept your graduating in the Philippines of Engineering. You have to upgrade your education at a university here in Alberta.

Q: That was during the Marcos period, with a lot of political stuff going on.

MC: Yea. When I was born I know that the president at that time is president Ramon Magsaysay. Then he got into an airplane crash, and then comes president Garcia, and then after Garcia Marcos, and that's it for 20 or 21 years.

Q: What was life like for people in the Philippines at that time?

MC: I remember when I was still in the Philippines people had the middle class, lower class, and the upper class. But when I grew up there's only two class – the lower class and the higher class. I belong in the lower class.

Q: Many things weren't available to you, right?

MC: The only thing I don't have there is the car. I did to try drive one time but I can't because too many people on the street.

Q: When you were at university, was there some student activism against Marcos?

MC: Yes there's some like rally against capitalism, against the Americans. But I didn't join that rally. I'm a married person and a working student at the same time, so I had no time to join the rally.

Q: What were you doing for work while being a student?

MC: I worked in a big company, Philippine Refining Company, and I'm industrial machine operator.

Q: Why did you decide to come to Canada?

MC: There's a big change between the Philippines and Canada here. Education is not really, there you have to pay everything. If you get sick, you can't just go get into the hospital unless you have a down payment, even though it's a matter of life and death. You have to show money.

Q: Many people here take education and healthcare for granted.

MC: Yea, education and healthcare is the one, and the future of my kids.

Q: Did you know people here in Edmonton?

MC: Yea, my mother-in-law was here, sister-in-law. My sister-in-law first came here in 1967 and in 1968 she's asking me and my wife if we want to come here in Canada. I said, I have a steady job and wife is in the college, why we go there?

Q: What made you change your mind?

MC: When the government start to, you know what I mean. Then by that time it's hard to come here. Just to apply takes us four years, just to process our paper. We apply here as independent immigrant. My sister-in-law from Calgary give us the support.

Q: When you got here, was it difficult to find work?

MC: Yes. Back home I didn't clean the washroom, but when I come here the first time I cleaned the washroom I was crying in the washroom. I said, why did I come here in this country? Back home I worked in a big company doing some industrial machine operator. I don't clean washroom back home so I said to myself, why did I? But I think of my children and said, it's for my kids. We came here in February 1989 and I got the job in March.

Q: Was it the job with the schools?

MC: No, I first started at McDonald restaurant by Kingsway. They're saying maintenance work so I thought it's going to be like the one that I'm doing back home. I didn't know that it's a janitorial job.

Q: So you kept looking for other work?

MC: Yea, I did apply at different hospital and the school board, but they won't take me because I have no certificate. So I went here at the ABC and took this building service worker course. After graduating for seven weeks, they hired me at the school board.

Q: And you've been with the school board ever since?

MC: Yea. That was 1990.

Q: At the same school?

MC: No. When they hired me I'm a temporary and go different schools if they need somebody to work. Somebody's absent in that school, they sent me there. I worked eight hours a day as a temporary, then I applied to be permanent in one school. That is East Glen High School, that's where I got my permanent position.

Q: That must have been better than working at McDonalds.

MC: Oh yes, the salary is double. When I hand my resignation letter to the manager, they won't let me go. They said, no we want you here. I said, okay I will stay here if you're going to give me the same wage the school board is giving me. The manager said, okay we'll let you go, and good luck. I said, thank you.

Q: Were you active in the union at first?

MC: Before, I don't want to be active in the union here, because a friend of mine every weekend we go fishing. So I said, I don't want to get involved. Back home I'm involved in the union. I did try to run for board of directors in our union in the Philippine Refining Company for board of director of basic management. I'm not lucky to be on that position, but they put me to be steward in our department.

Q: Now you're fairly active in the union. What changed to make that difference?

MC: The one who's always encouraging me to join the union, he's the one who is retired now, our former vice president Eddy Isol. He was asking me, come on let's go and attend the meeting, just attend the meeting. I said, maybe next general membership I'll be there. I had an appointment to go fishing this weekend. After a few general membership meetings, then somebody from the floor nominate me to be on the grievance. That's the first position that I got into for CUPE Local 474, to be on the grievance. After asking if I want to stand I said, I decline, and thanks to my nominator.

Q: Do you find the work rewarding?

MC: Yea, especially if there's grievances. Right now I'm the chief shop steward, before I'm on the grievance committee. If we have an interpretation of grievance and we won that case, it make my heart beat.

Q: Do you think healthcare and education are a big part of what the union needs to be doing?

MC: Oh yes. Whenever we have rally for the education, I'm there, or the healthcare. There was one time we went doing this ? for healthcare.

Q: So you see public education as important?

MC: Yea, and healthcare. It should not be put in the private.

Q: How old are your children now?

MC: My eldest is 35 and my youngest is 17 and she's in university.

Q: How many children do you have?

MC: I've got five – three boys and two girls. And I've got four grandchildren.

Q: What things will be important for your grandchildren as they grow up?

MC: To finish their study. Education is number one.

Q: Did all of your children go through university?

MC: When we came here, my eldest was 21 years old, so there's no way he can go to university. Right now he's working with Edmonton Public School Board too. My other son, my second, is working in Royal Alec. He upgraded his high school here. My girl is married and got two kids. They moved to Fort Mac because the husband is working there. My youngest boy has just finished the Civil Engineering Technology at NAIT, and my 17-year-old daughter, the youngest, is in university taking up Science.

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

MC: All I can say is Canada make a big change in my life. I hope that it will stay like this, public education and public healthcare.

Q: A lot of people who were born here take it for granted.

MC: We have experienced the private for profit. If you don't have money, even though you're dying, they won't give you any remedy or whatever. That's through experience.

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