

Adelbert Batica
Narrator

Lita Malicsi
Interviewer

January 26, 2011
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Adelbert Batica - **AB**
Lita Malicsi - **LM**

LM: My name is Lita Malicsi. Today is January 26, 2011. I am interviewing Adelbert Batica, who is more popularly known as Addi Batica.

Thank you, Addi, for your willingness to take time out of your busy life to be part of this interview process.

Please tell me when and where you were born.

AB: I was born on October 24, 1949, in Santa Cruz, Manila, Philippines.

LM: Who were your parents and where were they born?

AB: My parents were Arturo Batica and Leonila Saborrido. My father was born in the small town of Basey, Samar, and my mother was born, also in a small town, Santa Rita, Samar.

LM: What did they do and what were they like?

AB: My father was a medical doctor. He was the first in his hometown to finish medical school. My mother started out as a public school teacher, but had to quit teaching after I was born.

LM: What is your strongest image of your father?

AB: My father was a doctor, a writer, a poet, and a farmer all rolled into one, but, really, my strongest image of him was that of a doctor caring for his patients. They were all white people who wanted to see him at this clinic.

LM: Talk about the white people who went to your father's clinic. Were they locals? Were they foreigners? Or were they merely the figment of a little boy's imagination? Please explain.

AB: We lived in the town of Guiuan on the southeastern tip of Samar Island from 1951-1954. My father began his medical practice in 1951, and opened a small clinic close to the Guiuan Parish Church. At about this time, then-Philippine President Elpidio Quirino agreed to open the Philippines to the refugees who had been displaced during World War II. Among the refugees admitted to the Philippines at the time were Russians who were awaiting final resettlement in countries such as Australia and the U.S. The UN opened a refugee camp for these Russians in the island of Tubabao, Guiuan, Samar. Many of these Russians had escaped Stalin's rule; many also had health problems. And that's how they came into contact with my father. Aside from seeing my father in his clinic, my father would also make the rounds of the refugee camp in Tubabao. He took me along on some of his visits to the camp.

LM: What about your mother? What is your favorite memory of her?

AB: When I was a child, she would gather all of us kids, as well as my father, around the piano in the living room after dinner, and we would sing while she'd play the piano. There was no karaoke in those days, so we did our own family sing-a-longs.

LM: Sounds like you had fun evenings together in your home. Do you remember the songs you sang? Were they all Filipino songs?

AB: Both my parents played the piano, so Mama and Papa took turns playing and leading us in songs. Those songs ranged from English ones like the "Anniversary Song" to Waray-Waray serenades. Every now and then, Papa would belt out his favorite song in Spanish, "Mujer Ingrata" (a tango), a song only my brother Andrew (RIP) was able to learn by heart. Andrew who was two years younger than me, passed away on the 4th of July, 2009.

LM: How many children were you and where were you, Addi, in the lineup?

AB: I am the oldest of ten children, six boys, four girls.

LM: You had a big family. Are your siblings still around?

AB: Two of them have passed away, one sister and one brother.

LM: Where are your other siblings? Are they in the Philippines?

AB: Most of them are in the Philippines. I have one sister, though, who is in Germany.

LM: Do you visit your sister in Germany?

AB: No, I haven't visited her there, but she has visited us here.

LM: Describe your childhood home and where it was.

AB: Our home was in the small town of Basey, Samar, just opposite Catbalogan, which is the capital of Leyte. It was a two-story house. The house had a front yard and a backyard, and there were trees in the yard - coconut, mango, cacao, citrus, avocado. At least those are the trees I can remember.

LM: Did you climb trees when you were a little boy?

AB: Oh, yes, coconut trees in our backyard [laughter]

LM: You must have had a big yard.

AB: Yes, we did! In addition to the various fruit trees, we raised chickens in our yard.

LM: What dialect did you speak at home?

AB: At home, we spoke the Waray-Waray language, and the official name for our native language is actually Visayan, in Leyte-Samar. But, it's commonly known as the Waray-Waray language.

LM: What other dialects did you speak? Do you speak them here in Minnesota?

AB: I'm also fluent in Cebuano, because I went to school and worked in Cebu. I speak Cebuano with Cebuano speakers, and there are quite a few of them here in town. But at home, my wife, [Elsa] and I converse in Waray, because she's from Leyte.

LM: You speak Waray and Cebuano.

AB: Yes.

LM: Does your wife also speak Cebuano?

AB: Yes, she went to school in Cebu.

LM: Ah, so both of you speak Waray and Cebuano.

AB: Yes.

LM: Do your children speak any of these dialects?

AB: No, we actually tried teaching them Waray when they were young. They were able to pick up some of it at home, but as soon as they joined the larger community, they'd get confused because there were some who would be speaking Tagalog and, of course, others would be speaking Cebuano and Ilokano. So, overtime, they just gave up on the idea of learning the language.

LM: They decided it was too difficult, too confusing.

AB: Yes.

[laughter]

LM: What did you enjoy doing as a child?

AB: You know, the normal things that a kid would love to do- playing with my friends, especially playing Patintero on moonlight nights. It is a very popular Filipino game.

LM: How would you describe Patintero? How is it played?

AB: Well, how would you call it? It's a catch-me-if-you-can. There is a starting point and there are kids who guard its point. Until you get to the end of the line, if you're able to reach that, that's your goal.

LM: Does it have a required number of players?

AB: If I remember it correctly, there was no required number of players. We just played it. In fact, I remember when I was young; the whole line stretched one block. That was what we had to navigate when we played. [chuckles] The more players we have, the more difficult it is because it takes longer to finish, but it makes the game more exciting. It was a game for everyone. It is a game of speed, agility, teamwork.

LM: And the ability to bluff and it is free!

Let's talk about your grandparents. Would you know where they were born?

AB: I never knew my paternal grandparents because they passed away before I was born. But both of them were also born in Basey, Samar. I knew my maternal grandparents, of course. They had the gift of a longer life, and they lived with us for a few years, so we became close to them.

LM: Am I right in saying that there was a time when you had three generations in your household?

AB: That's correct. During my elementary years, my maternal grandparents lived with us, as well as two uncles and one aunt.

LM: What did you enjoy the most about your grandparents?

AB: Well, I learned a lot from them. Because both my parents were busy with their own lives—my mother was very active in church, my father was always busy at the clinic—I spent more time with my grandparents. My grandmother was the one who helped me with my homework and she was the one who made sure that I did my schoolwork. My

grandfather, beginning when I was in fourth grade, started getting me acquainted with the Spanish language.

LM: It was your grandfather?

AB: Yes. My father was also fluent in Spanish, but my grandfather's English was very poor, so he decided to start conversing with me in Spanish, and I started learning it early on.

LM: So, in addition to Waray and Cebuano, you also knew Spanish.

AB: Over time, I was able to pick up Spanish and I would converse with my father and my grandfather, mainly, in Spanish.

LM: That's very interesting.

Describe your most important friendship or friendships when you were growing up in the Philippines.

AB: I would say the friendships I developed in elementary as well as in my high school years are the friendships that have lasted. Every time I visit the hometown, I still get in touch with my elementary school buddies. Of course, it's different with the friends I made in high school, as they're scattered across the Philippines and some are here in the U.S.

LM: Where did you attend high school?

AB: I attended high school for the first three years at the Seminario de San Vicente de Paul in Calbayog City, which is about one hundred miles north of my hometown.

LM: Weren't there any high schools closer to where you lived?

AB: There were high schools in Leyte, of course, from my hometown across the bay, and there was a local high school in town. But I decided to give seminary life a try.

LM: What influenced your decision to study at the Seminario? What were your seminary experiences?

AB: My parents wanted me to have a solid Catholic education, and in their mind, minor seminary was just the right place for that kind of education. So in June 1962, I began my studies in Calbayog City, about 170 kilometers (106 miles) from Basey. I was now in a highly structured environment, and my life (and the lives of other seminarians) revolved around the dynamics of Worship, Study, and Discipline. Our academic curriculum included the study of languages (English, Spanish, Latin) arts and literature, history, mathematics, and sciences. We were also encouraged to take an active part in sports, as

our professors believed in “Mens sana in corpora sano” (A healthy mind in a healthy body). While many of my classmates preferred basketball, I took an interest in soccer.

Our day began and ended with prayer. Mass was at 5:30 a.m., followed by breakfast at 6:30 a.m. After breakfast, we were required to perform our daily “obedience’s,” or cleaning up certain sections of the seminary building. Classes began promptly at 7:30 a.m. Of all the courses in my freshman year, it was the study of Latin that proved to be the toughest. We had an all-Spanish faculty in my freshman year, and boy – were they a bunch of disciplinarians! Those Spanish priests really pushed us to excel in everything we did. In their view, excellence was something that could be achieved only through discipline.

Looking back at my seminary years and the kind of challenges I had to face, I can only say that I’m really blessed. I wouldn’t be who or what I am today without my seminary training.

LM: You mentioned something about your mother being active in church.

AB: Yes.

LM: Did you attend church or religious services regularly?

AB: My parents were regular churchgoers. My mother was a member of the Catholic Women’s League. My father was a fourth degree Knight of Columbus. And, of course, all of us tagged along with them to church. When I turned eight years old, I started as an altar boy.

LM: How long did you serve?

AB: Until I finished elementary.

LM: Was that your earliest memory of church?

AB: Actually, earlier than that. My earliest recollection of church would have to be when I was four or five years old when one of my brothers was baptized.

LM: Were you baptized in the same church where your brother was baptized?

AB: No, I was baptized—you wouldn’t believe it—in the San Pablo [Apostol] Parish Church.

LM: That’s in Manila.

AB: Yes. At the time that I was born, my father was still trying to finish medical school because his studies were interrupted by World War II. My mother went to Manila to join him and, of course, I still get teased by some of my siblings that by some accident or stroke of luck or whatever, I was born in Manila.

LM: My next question is about Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Is this place meaningful?

AB: Actually, I would start first with the Seminario de San Carlos in Cebu City because that's where I went for my first year of philosophy study after graduating from high school. Then, after that, I went to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Seminary in Sariaya, Quezon. Both of those places, San Carlos as well as Our Lady of Mount Carmel Seminaries, were very meaningful. I was beginning to mature, and becoming more conscious of the issues confronting the Philippines at the time.

LM: What were those issues? Could you be more specific? How did those issues influence your life?

AB: Living in a small town in the Philippines, one saw poverty in a daily basis. However, it was a poverty that some might call "tolerable," as it did not drive people to the point of despair (at least not in my hometown). But going to the seminary and being involved in apostolates and outreach programs for the poor opened my eyes to something beyond my imagination. Our professors belonged to the Congregation of the Mission, a religious community founded by St. Vincent de Paul, and whose main mission was charitable work among widows, orphans, prisoners and generally, the poorest of the poor. It was from that point where my transformation took place.

I was no longer simply satisfied with handing out assistance or encouraging the poor to "keep the faith," but was asking questions like "Why are people poor?" My inquisitiveness only intensified as the student movement blossomed in the later 1960s and issues being raised outside the walls of the seminary and in the streets of the Philippines found their way to our discussion groups within the seminary. The Vietnam conflict was raging, and so was the talk about agrarian reform, workers' rights, academic freedom, and the like. The winds of idealism and nationalism were blowing, and yes—they were also blowing our way and some of us couldn't help but be part of this new-found spirit. Needless to say, my seminary colleagues and I eventually got involved in conducting teach-ins and even found time to participate in rallies and protests. I had become an activist, and there was no turning back. Even to this day.

LM: Even to this day, undoubtedly. But did you really want to be a priest? Was that why you attended a seminary?

AB: Well, I thought so, and it could have been that I had priests on both sides of the family. My father had an uncle who was an army chaplain. My mother had two uncles who were priests. Her older sister was a nun. So I was around priests and religious when I was very young. I think it was only natural to fall under their influence.

LM: In your heart of hearts, what did you really want to be when you grew up?

AB: Actually, I toyed with the idea of becoming a doctor. But, my father didn't believe that I was cut out for it, and over time, I realized, too, that it was not my calling.

LM: What made your father think you were not made to be a doctor?

AB: I do remember him telling me one time that there was no way that I could pass anatomy because it also involved cutting up cadavers and seeing a lot of dead bodies in the laboratory.

LM: And you were not into those kinds of things?

AB: Ohhh, no. And besides, at that time, my father was the only doctor in town, and he would answer calls in the middle of the night and, maybe, once or twice in the same night he would make house calls. To me, it was a very hard life. It is a very prestigious position in town, of course, but it required a lot of sacrifice.

LM: So what did you want to be?

AB: Then, I toyed with the idea of becoming a lawyer, and that's why I wanted to study liberal arts after I left seminary, to gain pre-law credits so I would qualify for law school.

LM: Then what happened?

AB: I hadn't even finished liberal arts when on September 21, 1972, the whole country was placed under a state of martial law...

LM: By Ferdinand Marcos.

AB: Yes, by Ferdinand Marcos.

LM: Addi, would you describe the government and the country during the imposition of martial law.

AB: The government, under the administration of Philippine President Marcos, was characterized by massive authoritarian corruption, despotism, nepotism, and political repression.

LM: And human rights violations.

AB: Absolutely! My studies were interrupted and I had to go into hiding because I was very politically active as a student.

LM: Was that the time when you were taken as a political detainee?

AB: It took a few months, maybe at least three months, before the military finally caught up with me and took me to the detention camp.

LM: We are going to go back to that. I would like to know more about your political detention. But for now, let me pursue another subject.
What was your first job in the Philippines and how did you get it?

AB: My first job was as a merchandiser for the Philippine Refining Company, which is a subsidiary of Unilever. Our next door neighbor at the time, was a sales supervisor for the company and he offered me that job. But, let me back track. Maybe a few months before I was offered this job with the Philippine Refining Company, my father died of a heart attack after making his last house call. So, really, the burden of supporting the family fell on my shoulders, being the oldest son and the oldest in the family. So I took this job with the Philippine Refining Company.

LM: Do you remember how much you were paid for it?

AB: You won't believe it, but I was paid 200 pesos a month.

LM: What was the dollar equivalent at the time?

AB: At the time, 200 pesos would have been maybe \$60 to \$70 dollars.

LM: A month?

AB: Yes, a month.

LM: That was in the year,....

AB: Nineteen seventy-two.

LM: Do you remember what the minimum wage was, at that time?

AB: The minimum wage was seventy-two pesos and fifty centavos.

LM: Let's talk about a softer, warmer aspect of your life. How did you meet Elsa?

AB: Actually, she and I met in 1970 when I was taking some college courses at the Divine Word University in Tacloban, Leyte. I met her through a friend, a town mate, who introduced me to her.

LM: So that was in Leyte?

AB: Yes.

LM: What attracted you to Elsa?

AB: When she was in college, she was actually active in a lot of the campus activities, like oratorical contests. There was also a time when she was a member of the swimming team. When we met, she enjoyed having discussions with me. She was also curious to know where I stood on issues.

LM: When and how did you pop the question?

AB: Oh, it took a while. I didn't pop the question of marriage until, maybe, four or five years after we first met. I did it in a very indirect way, more or less like Rick Blaine in *Casablanca*. I sort of said to her, "Why don't we get married one of these days?"

LM: And?

AB: And, she could only respond with, "Are you serious?" I said, "Well, both of us are of legal age; we can go get married." [laughter]

LM: And then, you did! How old were you when you two got married?

AB: I was twenty-five going on twenty-six.

LM: And Elsa?

AB: Elsa was twenty-three going on twenty-four.

LM: What year was that when you got married and where?

AB: We got married on July 5, 1975, at the home of Mayor Max Patalinjug of Lapu-Lapu City and that's in Cebu. That's on Mactan Island.

LM: It was not a traditional Catholic Church wedding?

AB: It was a civil wedding. It was performed on the porch of the Mayor's home in Lapu-Lapu.

LM: What did your mother think of the civil wedding?

AB: Oh, well, what did the parents think? [laughter] They insisted on a church ceremony. So we had our church wedding nine months later. We granted them "their wish."

LM: But of course!

Addi, you were a human rights activist in the Philippines. How did this start and why?

AB: It started actually during seminary years. Even when I was in high school, I had the opportunity of seeing firsthand the plight of the poor. I went to a seminary that was under the direction of the congregation of the mission, the religious order founded by Saint Vincent de Paul. They were into charity work, so, as a seminarian, I spent a lot of time visiting prisons, slums, orphanages, leprosariums, and interacting with the poorest of society.

LM: What part did Ferdinand Marcos' regime play in your life?

AB: Oh, oh, a large part.

LM: Tell me about it.

AB: I have to say if martial law had not intervened, I would have become a lawyer. I would have been able to run for office in the Philippines. I wouldn't have made it to the United States. I wouldn't have wanted to come to the U.S. if things had been left alone as they were. With the declaration of martial law, I lost a part of my life as a result, because of the trauma of being a political prisoner, being on the government watch list. It was not easy to bear.

LM: Why were you on the government watch list?

AB: In college, I was seriously active in the student movement. I was president of the student council and editor-in-chief of the college paper. At the time, we could see signs on the horizon that Marcos had other plans for the Philippines that he was planning to take over. We could see the gradual militarization of Philippine society. And, of course, I wrote political articles. I was leading protests, organizing student groups, supporting workers who were on strike.

LM: All of these incendiary articles you wrote, all of those protests you led, all of the activities you engaged in, happened while you were a student at the University of the Philippines?

AB: No. While I was a student in Cagayan de Oro City at Cagayan de Oro College.

LM: Tell me, Addi, what was it like for you and your friends in the Philippines during the years of martial law?

AB: Consider yourself lucky, because you didn't live in the Philippines during the darkest days of martial law. There was a midnight-to-four o'clock curfew. You could get arrested for a good reason, for a bad reason, or for no reason. Some activists would just suddenly disappear. There were, also, extrajudicial killings. Of course, the presence of the military could be felt everywhere you looked.

LM: When you say, "You could get arrested," who would be arresting you?

AB: It could either be the police or the Philippine Constabulary, which was the national police at the time, or army intelligence.

LM: All of these things happened during the leadership of Ferdinand Marcos.

AB: Oh, yes.

LM: You spent some time as a political detainee. What was that like? Where were you placed? How were you treated? Talk to me about your being a political detainee.

AB: I was held at a military camp in Mindanao and, for now, I won't name the place or its exact location. I was kept there. Actually, the treatment we received at the detention camp depended on which military operative was assigned to "handle" us for the day or for the week. Some tried to "good cop, bad cop" us in hopes of extracting information, or for the simple pleasure of inflicting pain. It has been almost 40 years since that experience, and sad to say, it's still hard to talk about it. In fact, I've needed professional help to get me to process certain things about that part of my past.

There were some officers, especially those who were graduates of the Philippine Military Academy, who did their best to treat us well. However, there were also others, mostly enlisted personnel, non-commissioned officer types, who saw this as an opportunity to show their power or to get back at us for being critical of the government.

LM: Can you be more specific? Was there physical abuse? Was there verbal abuse? What exactly did they do?

AB: We experienced both verbal and physical abuse. There were long hours of tactical interrogation. There were also long hours of being kept under the sun, being forced to work without a hat or without anything to cover your head in the heat of the day. There were also times when they resorted to sleep deprivation, tried to keep us awake, forced us to be awake.

LM: Were there any casualties? Did some political detainees get sick or die during the detention?

AB: Actually, I remember one of my companions who had a nervous breakdown as a result of his detention.

LM: How many other political detainees were with you? What did these people do to be put in this kind of detention?

AB: At the time that I was detained, there must have been, at least, fifteen to twenty of us being kept in the army barracks. All of us were, of course, alleged to have violated the anti-subversion law by, in the language of the military, being either wittingly or unwittingly involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the government, which was, of course, ridiculous.

LM: Were political detainees ever given amnesty?

AB: We were granted conditional amnesty, which, literally, meant that we were given temporary liberty while we were transferred to house arrest and while our cases were being reviewed by a military commission.

LM: In your particular case, how did you get out? Why were you freed?

AB: I was actually under a house arrest order for—oh, my god—four years, but my status was now in limbo. Then, of course, in 1977, I tried to test the waters by applying to travel abroad. At that time, I was in Manila applying for a passport and the army intelligence caught up with me, so I was brought back for more questioning to Camp Crame, the general headquarters of the Philippine Constabulary.

LM: So you were trying to escape!

AB: Escape in the open. This is the strange part. Something strange happened. First, the army intelligence caught up with me and turned me over to the Philippine Constabulary, which is how the Philippine National Police of today used to be known, the P.C.

LM: What kind of treatment did you receive from the Philippine Constabulary?

AB: Now, the Philippine Constabulary didn't know what to do with me. After so many rounds of questioning, they decided to take me to army headquarters, actually to the office of the defense secretary, who was Juan Ponce Enrile, at the time. Of course, the army officers who were there didn't know what to do with me, either. I told them, "I have this offer to study community development in Chicago, and I was wondering if you could help me." By some stroke of luck, one officer proved to be very helpful. All he said to me was, "What clearances do you need? I'll sign them."

I was given a passport. Of course, as soon as I was in possession of a passport, I got out of the Philippines with Elsa. I wasn't going to wait.

LM: So you and Elsa both left the Philippines and migrated to the United States.

AB: Yes, we went to Chicago as part of an Exchange Visitor Program, a two-year program.

LM: That happened fast!

AB: It did. Our departure happened as soon as I was in possession of a passport.

LM: Now, what happened when you arrived in Chicago? Was there housing for you? Was there employment, as well?

AB: We were housed at the headquarters of the Institute of Cultural Affairs in uptown Chicago. There was housing for us because we were part of a training program. We had the benefits of medical care, as well as a small stipend, and then, the opportunity to be trained and interact with participants from other parts of the U.S. as well as international participants.

LM: What kind of program was it? What were you trained to do?

AB: Community development and community organizing. We studied different models, strategies for community development and, also, researched the successful projects. They became subjects of our study.

LM: So, now you're in America after having been a political prisoner in the Philippines. You were actually a prisoner. A political detainee is a political prisoner.

AB: Yes, that is correct. I was a political prisoner.

LM: What did you think of life in America as opposed to life in the Philippines as a political prisoner?

AB: For one thing, though, it was a big shock to have that feeling that, finally, you can speak out. You can tell your story. But, at the same time, I also realized that the average American wasn't really aware of what was going on in the Philippines. The Philippines was very low on the radar here in terms of news and all that. You know we heard news bits about this thing happening in the Philippines, but without the in-depth analysis—at least at that point.

LM: Do you remember who the president of the United States was at the time?

AB: It was Jimmy Carter.

LM: What kind of relationship did President Carter and the United States have with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos?

AB: The U.S. strongly supported Ferdinand Marcos, and provided millions of dollars in aid even after his declaration of martial law. During President Carter's administration, the relation with the United States soured somewhat. Jimmy Carter was a critic of Marcos' human rights policy. He was a critic of the human rights violations that were taking place in the Philippines.

LM: True. President Carter targeted the Philippines in his human rights campaign.

Something significant happened in your life in 1979. You left America and went to Peru. Why Peru and what did you do in Peru?

AB: First of all, we planned to be in the Exchange Visitor Program for only two years. The program was designed for two years and, after that, we were required to leave the country. At that time, there was an opportunity that opened up. One of our colleagues from Latin America, who also happened to be the superior for Maryknoll Missions there, asked me if I would be interested in being part of a pilot project in Peru. Of course, Peru, at the time, was a country that transitioned from military to civilian rule after nine years of rule by a military junta. The military finally decided to step down and pave the way for new elections. For me, I saw at that time, the opportunity to learn from what the Peruvians were doing, because I had always planned on going back to the Philippines.

LM: Of course. You were going to stay in America only for a couple of years...

AB: Yes.

LM: And go back to the Philippines, hoping that when you returned to the Philippines martial law was over.

AB: Yes.

LM: But that did not happen.

AB: No. So we spent some time in Peru.

LM: Talk about your life in Peru.

AB: It was actually a great experience. We lived in a small village about ninety miles southeast of Lima, the capital of Peru. It was a farming village. It provided me an opportunity to be reconnected with my Hispanic past. I was finally among people who spoke no other language than Spanish and who accepted me as one of their own. We worked together. I was able to share some of the things I knew with them, and I was also, at the same time, advocating for them.

LM: When you were a young boy learning Spanish from your dad, little did you know that your knowledge of Spanish was going to be useful in Peru.

AB: Actually, when I was in high school, I had heavy exposure to Spanish and for a major part of the time, in seminary, too, because my professors were all Spaniards. When I was a sophomore in high school, I read the book *Kon-Tiki: [Expedition: By Raft Across the South Seas]*, which was Thor Heyerdahl's diaries, of his trans-Pacific crossings from Peru. From that time, I dreamed of Peru. How I wished I could go to that part of the world! I didn't realize fifteen years later that I'd be there! [laughter]

LM: *Kon-Tiki*, though, was written in English.

AB: Yes.

LM: Is there a Spanish translation?

AB: I think there is, but I never read the Spanish translation, only the English.

LM: Were your children born in Peru?

AB: All my children were born in the U.S. When Elsa and I returned to the United States, Jaffer, our oldest child, was almost two years old

LM: Was Jaffer born in Chicago?

AB: Yes. Jaffer Raschid was born in Chicago in 1978. Elbert Alexis (Alex) was born in 1980 in Minneapolis. Himaya Tagumpay (Maya) was also born in Minneapolis in 1984.

LM: From Peru, you went back to the U.S. and settled in Chicago?

AB: No, we settled in Minneapolis.

LM: When did you come to Minneapolis, and what was the reason you chose this place?

AB: We arrived here towards the end of 1979. We already had friends whom we had met before who were from Minnesota. Of course, we thought it would be good to be in a place where we knew a few people. Some of the people we knew had also been to the Philippines and knew about the Philippines.

LM: Was there a job waiting for you here or did you have to look for one?

AB: Actually, there was a job waiting for me. I was working, again, with the Institute of Cultural Affairs Office in Minneapolis and, at the time, we were doing consultations with the local governments. We were doing town planning meetings, mostly in Marshall County in the northwest part of the state. Elsa and I actually were doing the same thing for the Institute.

LM: Currently, you work as a contract compliance specialist for the Department of Transportation. What does your work focus on?

AB: It's equal employment opportunity in highway heavy construction. We make sure that projects that are administered and funded by the Minnesota Department of Transportation are open to qualified applicants regardless of race, national origin, or religion and that there's no discrimination on the job.

LM: That seems so relevant with who you are and what you always want to do. Addi, you are a very community-oriented person. Would you say you are an activist and have always been involved in community activism?

AB: Well, I believe so. It looks like it's where my destiny is: to be that of a community activist.

LM: You left community activism in the Philippines, got yourself in trouble for it...

[chuckles]

LM: And you came to America and are still a community activist in a very positive way.

AB: Oh, yes. The passion and the interest just don't seem to go away.

LM: The Filipino-American community regards you as one of its strong community leaders. I would like you to describe your various involvements in the Filipino-American community and its events.

AB: I served as president of the Cultural Society of Philippine-Americans for one term. But my main involvement, organizationally that is, is with the Philippine Study Group of Minnesota [PSGM].

LM: What is the Philippine Study Group of Minnesota? What does it do?

AB: The Philippine Study Group of Minnesota is an organization of Filipinos, Filipino-Americans, and Americans who are concerned with human rights, social and economic justice in the Philippines.

LM: Talk about some of the projects and some of the activities undertaken by the Philippine Study Group of Minnesota, or PSGM.

AB: Yes. We have sponsored livelihood projects in the Philippines for poor and marginalized sectors. We have supported children's shelters as well as drug rehabilitation centers. We have also supported organic farming activities and health care facilities in the Philippines.

LM: That's very impressive. While you are actively engaged in socio-civic and charitable undertakings with the PSGM and other non-profit organizations, your wife, Elsa, is likewise involved in other non-profits like FAWN, which is the acronym for Filipino American Women's Network. What do they do?

AB: For nearly 25 years, the Minnesota Chapter of FAWN has been a valuable resource for the issues and concerns of Filipino Americans in the state. By undertaking training and education, leadership development, and building relations among Filipino American women, FAWN addresses barriers caused by racism, classism and sexism

LM: I admire what they do and am proud of what they have accomplished.

I would like you, Addi Batica, to talk about yourself as writer and historian for the Filipino-American community.

AB: Well, I just love to write. When I'm not doing anything, I am writing. I, also, love the study of history, but especially Philippine history, because for me, it's important to know how the country came to be, how the Philippines came to be known as the Philippines, and how we have developed into a nation, into a republic, and what's our role on the global stakes.

LM: Tell me about your writings. Are they mostly historical? Dramatic? Journalistic? Who do you write for?

AB: I've written scripts for some of the plays that we have staged for our own version of the community theater. I have also contributed opinion pieces to the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, for example, as well as other publications. And during the years of the Marcos presidency, when PSGM still had a newsletter, I wrote a lot of articles in our newsletter, mostly focused on human rights issues in the Philippines.

LM: Are you saying that your anti-martial law articles were written during the Marcos regime?

AB: When I was here.

LM: Did that not get you, or your family in the Philippines, in trouble?

AB: Fortunately, not. I think by the time PSGM started publishing those newsletters, the dictatorship was already on a downhill slide.

LM: Where were you when Ferdinand Marcos was removed from power and left the Malacañan Palace, and when the Philippines had the phenomenal People Power Revolution in February 1986?

AB: I was right here in Minnesota. I made a lot of TV appearances. I was interviewed by MPR [Minnesota Public Radio] and the local TV stations. It was a rare opportunity to be on TV.

LM: Indeed. Would you call yourself a politically conscious person?

AB: Yes, I am a very politically conscious person. For me, it's always about issues, exploring them, discussing them, and when you have a better hold on an issue, taking a stand.

LM: You were a politically conscious citizen in the Philippines and you continue to be a politically conscious citizen as you live here in America.

What do you consider to be the most important political event in the Philippines that occurred during your lifetime?

AB: I would say the People Power Revolution in February 1986. I had been praying for that day to come.

LM: For those people, Filipinos and non-Filipinos, who may not be aware, can you elaborate on that? Can you talk a little bit more about the People Power Revolution? What was it like? How did it come about and what did it do for the Philippines?

AB: It started out as a mutiny staged by a segment, mostly younger officers of the Philippine military, who were, later on, joined by the defense minister, as well as the armed forces deputy chief of staff. Then, when Marcos ordered the tanks to attack army headquarters, the cardinal at the time, the Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal [Jaime] Sin called on his flock to rally around the mutineers and protect them from the approaching tanks without resorting to violence. And the crowds just grew and grew and grew until finally, Marcos realized that there was no way he could turn back the tide, that everybody was now in revolt, and at that point, the U.S. also decided to cut ties with him.

LM: That's when he and his family, the Marcos family, fled to Hawaii.

AB: And that revolution led to the presidency of Cory Aquino.

LM: Yes. It signaled the dawning of a new era for Filipinos. It brought back democracy.

Addi, what do you consider to be the most important political event in the United States that occurred during your life here in the United States?

AB: I would say the election of Barack Obama to the presidency. I couldn't believe that such a thing would be possible in America. When it happened, it was like I had witnessed a miracle happening. In fact, I was so consumed by this historical event that I promised myself that the only trip I was going to take outside of Minnesota was to Washington, D.C. for the inaugural. And, sure enough, Elsa and I went there, plus our daughter, Maya [Himaya]. We were there!

LM: You were there!

AB: [chuckles]

LM: Tell me about your experience. What was it like?

AB: The event was attended by well over one million people. The entire length of the National Mall was opened, breaking with the tradition of past inaugurations. People came from all corners of the world, stood together on the Capitol Mall that chilly day to share the glory of that one historic moment when Barack Obama became the 44th President of the United States. People waved American flags as he was sworn in. The crowd was euphoric. All I could see were happy faces.

LM: My family and I watched the inauguration via television and witnessed the presence of an estimated 1.8 million people. That was a record-breaking number for any event on the national capitol.

Which political figure in the United States, do you most admire and why?

AB: Without any hesitation at all, I'll have to say Paul Wellstone.

LM: Tell me why.

AB: Not only because I knew him personally. Paul and I worked together, again as activists, before he became senator. We were on the first board of the Minnesota Alliance for Progressive Action.

I admired Wellstone's courage and his undying passion for the underdog. He was a man of high principles. He was, also, very likeable. I could connect with him; most people could connect with him.

LM: Talk about his traits which made him likeable.

AB: Elsa would describe him as being cuddly...
Like an older brother or a close relative.

LM: I would like to know what political or socio-civic movements have affected your political consciousness and how.

AB: The student movement in the Philippines, of course, and the many people's organizations that were advocating for human rights as well as an end to the dictatorship in the Philippines. I, also, have been inspired by the experiences of the Civil Rights Movement here in the U.S., how their efforts succeeded in really leveling the playing field for everybody.

LM: Addi, if you could meet any Filipino political or historic icon, be it past or present, who would it be and why?

AB: Without hesitation, I would have to say Doctor José Rizal, our national hero, simply because he was the greatest Filipino that ever lived. He was multi-talented, and he had the passion for Filipino identity and for nation building. He was the most passionate and articulate of the people in this generation who were advocating for independence or, at

the very least, greater autonomy for the Philippines as a prelude towards independence from Spain. Unfortunately enough, since Spain couldn't grant us independence, then it had to be won through a revolution.

LM: Talk about his many talents.

AB: Rizal was a linguist who spoke twenty-one languages. He was an author of two classics, *Noli me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, which really influenced Filipinos at that time and got them to think long and hard about independence and the need to struggle against fate.

LM: Is there an English translation for *Noli me Tangere* and is there an English translation for *El Filibusterismo*? And what in a nutshell are these literary pieces?

AB: *Noli me Tangere* is Latin for "touch me not" and *El Filibusterismo* translates into "the subversion" or "subversion."

LM: What is the *Noli me Tangere* about?

AB: It actually encapsulates the experiences of the Filipino or, more specifically, the Indio or Hispanized Filipinos, the Hispanized natives, under Spanish rule and how they were abused by the friars, by the religious orders, as well as by the Spanish colonial authorities.

LM: José Rizal is your Filipino political and historic icon.

If you could meet any American political or historical icon, be it past or present, who would it be and why?

AB: It would be Mark Twain, because Mark Twain was as American as apple pie and as American as the Mississippi [River]. He also was a very talented writer and humorist and a world traveler. He was a linguist in his own right. He lectured in Europe and other places around the globe. One of his lectures was in Vienna [Austria] where he delivered a lecture in German. I didn't even know that Twain spoke German. He was a world traveler and a journalist and, above all, deep in his heart, he was sympathetic to the Filipinos' call for independence, so he had a Philippine connection. Even if he was very American, he opposed the U.S. annexation of the Philippines, and called on the U.S. government to leave the Filipinos alone and let them have their independence, because it was their sovereign right.

LM: I remember having read one of Mark Twain's articles reflecting these sentiments. Would you elaborate on this?

AB: Yes. Actually, most of his writings only came out recently. Most of his writings on the Philippines were scattered, and they were gathered by his daughter for later publication. When he was still alive, he was the vice president of the Anti-Imperialist League of America, and he gave speeches and lectures all over the U.S. protesting the U.S. annexation of the Philippines. He was an activist and advocate for women's suffrage and for the rights of the disabled. He made friends with Helen Keller and financed part of Helen Keller's studies. He sent an African American to school at Yale [University] and sent another African American to divinity school in Texas because he wanted to be a minister, and Twain financed his education. That's why I like him.

LM: Tell me honestly, do you identify with him?

AB: Uhhh, actually, I would identify with him. He was raised in a small town and loved to write, used humor and satire to communicate his message, loved to travel, and I love to travel, too.

LM: There is that one particular thing as well: the activism.

AB: Yes.

LM: The passion, the activism.

Addi, you've had several accomplishments in your lifetime. What accomplishments are you most proud of?

AB: I can say my involvement in community, community development, more specifically in a third world setting. I can cite my experience in Peru because it was a very successful community development project, and the village where Elsa and I stayed for a year, the village of Azpitia, won the Presidential Award for community development five years after we left. We were no longer in Peru, but we heard the news that when they were finally given the award, it was the president of Peru who handed it to them, the Bronze Shovel.

LM: Have you returned to Peru since then?

AB: We returned in 2004, twenty-five years after we left. It was a very emotional experience, because many of the kids that I trained were now running the programs. They were elementary kids when I left; they were now in charge of the many activities in the village and training other community development workers.

LM: That must have been a very rewarding experience for you.

AB: Oh, yes.

LM: Let's talk about religion. What place does religion have in your life?

AB: I wouldn't say religion per se, even if I'm Roman Catholic. I would say faith and spirituality play a very important part in my life. The best of human qualities and the firm belief of something other than myself sustains me, that no matter what I do and no matter what happens, there's always a Supreme Power, a Higher Power that watches over me.

LM: If you could re-experience one thing in your life, what would that be?

AB: I wouldn't mind re-experiencing my elementary years; the mid 1950s when things were a lot simpler. When we were innocent, without cares or worries. And the Philippines, back in those days, were only second to Japan in terms of national development - when it was the envy of its neighbors in Asia.

LM: That was a time when the Philippines were thought of as the best country in Asia.

AB: Yes, indeed.

LM: When it enjoyed its golden years.

If you could do one thing differently in your life, what would that be?

AB: If I had to do it differently, even as an activist, I think I would have to be more open to dialog as I am now. I'm more conciliatory at this point in my life, but when I was younger, I was very confrontational, competitive, adversarial, but that was, also, the nature of friends. We were fighting against militarization. But, looking back at that experience, I could have been, you know, more open to dialog back in those days.

LM: When people look back at your life, how do you want to be remembered?

AB: I just want to be remembered as one who cared for his family, his community, and for the world.

LM: And what are you most grateful for in your life?

AB: I'll always be grateful for my family. I have a very supportive wife, good kids and grandkids. When all is said and done, everything comes back to family.

LM: Absolutely.

Tell me, Addi, where do you plan on spending the rest of your golden years and why?

AB: I'll have to divide my time between the U.S. and the Philippines or, maybe, divide it three ways: the U.S., the Philippines, and Peru. I'd like to do a lot of significant things while I have the strength. I would like to go back to community organizing.

LM: That's where your passion is.

AB: I love working with people at the very grassroots of society. To me, this work gives fulfillment

LM: I am about to conclude our interview, Addi. Would you like to make a final statement, perhaps, some words of wisdom?

AB: My vision for the future, at least for the Philippine-American community here in Minnesota, would be to foster stronger bonds - unity. That's the only way we can move forward as a Filipino community in this part of the U.S. For the younger generation, I hope they carry the torch after us. I hope that they do what's right, learn to give back to the community, and always, always remember their heritage and be proud of it. Without my heritage, I won't be me.

LM: Thank you very much, Addi. It was such a pleasure doing this interview with you.

AB: Maraming salamat. The pleasure is mine.

Filipino Community Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society