

Judy Patacsil Oral History Transcript

Narrator: Judy Patacsil

Interviewer: Marne Amoguis

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Length of interview: 00:38:11

MA: [00:00](#) Okay. So we're gonna go ahead and start this oral history. This oral history interview is in participation with the recent oral history class of San Diego and the UC San Diego campus. , taught by professors, Simeon man. , today I'll be interviewing Professor -- professor? -- Professor Judy Patacsil. So, she's the national president of FANHs and we're gonna learn a little more about her today. So Judy, when did your family move to the US and what generation do you identify as?

JP: [00:37](#) Well, my father first came in 1928. I had two documents one says '27, one says '28, but I think '28 is what about when he came? So he came when the United States was colonizing the Philippines. The Philippines was the territory, so he was able to come; he was considered a national and he came here for the purpose of getting a bachelors, getting a degree actually. So in the Philippines he did get his undergrad, which is kind of -- for the school system, there's a little bit different [system]. But he wasn't an official pensionado, but he was like a pen boy that he had lots of promise. And the townpeople, the townmates gave money to families to send them money to the Philippines to go, to, to go to college and actually, and then the great depression hit and so he, he was having some levels of difficulty with school, with the racism and he actually was like a manong; he worked in the fields, even though he, he did have education there. He -- I remember him telling these stories of how he would travel across the country on the trains, he would say like a hobo. And so after the Great Depression hit, it was really hard, I think, for especially the Filipinos to find work. They were migrant workers at that time. World War II hit and my dad went, he joined the US army and went back to the Philippines. So he actually served under MacArthur. He was a messenger for MacArthur and was, you know, not his only messenger, but he said that he was a special messenger. And I said, how come you never told us this? This was like when he was already close to, I think his late eighties or early nineties. And he said, well, you never asked me. But I thought, wow, he really represented so

much history. He was a pen boy. He was a manong, he was -- he worked in the Alaskan Canaries, so he was an Alaskanero or he was a World War II veteran and again served. We have a picture of him where he's in Papa New Guinea. So when MacArthur left the Philippines and retreated and went to Australia and the Pacific Islands and Papa New Guinea, there's a picture of him in Papa New Guinea -- my father, not with MacArthur specifically, but in -- in Papa New Guinea. So, after World War II -- this is a long answer to your question [laughs] -- we're in world, during World War II, he was looking for his sister and he, his sister married into kind of an affluent family. My dad's background was farming. He's from Launion, and, so he was looking for his sister and when he went to the town to where his sister married into this family, he saw my mom on the porch and his sister married my mom's brother [laughs]. So that's how they met. And it was supposedly like love at first sight or -- but my dad was a lot older. He was like over almost over 15, I think, almost 16, almost 17 years older than my mom. So, he was of that generation. If he didn't get a Filip- -- because of the anti miscegenation laws -- if he didn't get married or find a bride from the Philippines, he may have died, like, the Manong generation without, without family. so my, my mom and dad got married in 1946 and then they decided after the war he had US citizenship. So he had like a civil service job over there in the Philippines, but they wanted to try life here. And so my oldest sister -- they had a son who didn't survive, I think their first born son -- and then my oldest sister, my next oldest brother and my next brother, he was only less than a year., they all immigrated, came back -- because my dad had access to that. He was a US citizen, so they came back to the -- from the Philippines, to the United States in 1950. So I consider myself second generation because my mom and dad were the first generation to come.

- MA: [05:16](#) So were you born here -
- JP: [05:18](#) I was born here.
- MA: [05:19](#) - in the States? Where did you grow up and where do you live now?
- JP: [05:23](#) I grew up in southeast San Diego. So my parents, that's where people of color were allowed to buy property pretty much in terms of red lining. So south of the, south of the eight southeast San Diego. So it was the "hood". So that's where I grew up. There was on the block though, there were a number of Filipino families cause that's where many of the early pioneers were able to get property was in southeast. So I grew up between Ocean View [Boulevard] and Imperial Avenue on 37th Street

and we probably had about, maybe eight families on that 37th street from between those -- Ocean View and Imperial, somewhere close to that. So there was a small community, of Filipino Americans in Southeast because that's where they were first came. And my parents, my dad first came over by himself to get things set up and then my mom and, and my siblings came. So there's a picture of them in "Filipinos in San Diego" [the book she authored] of the, the arrival. So my mom was a war bride. Yeah, so in the "Filipinos in San Diego" book, there's a picture of the arrival of war brides and that's my mom and the kids [laughs]. I wasn't born yet [laughs].

MA: [06:48](#) In terms of San Diego back then, and then San Diego now -- because I know you're still in San Diego -- how has it changed, in your own perspective? What do you see that are different? What do you see that are the same, the same?

JP: [07:05](#) Well, the Filipino community definitely is larger. where I live now is up, up here, closer to the college. After I got the job here, I don't like traffic and commute. So I moved here to Mira Mesa, and then I moved to Scripps Ranch and I still have my home in Scripps Ranch, but I was recently married and we, and my husband has a home in Tierrasanta, so we have two homes and I have to sell my house. So I live up here now. So up here when I moved here, it was called Manila Mesa. So there was lot of Filipinos. And back when I was growing up, there were not as many Filipinos. I mean the community was small and there was some level of, of somewhat cohesiveness and that they, they gathered for the Filipino events. And there were the Filipino organizations, like my mom was very involved in Filipino Women's Club. And my dad, because of Ilocanos, they were both in the Ilocano Friendship Club. And they were the veterans, and other veterans organization. And there was a hall in Southeast San Diego called the FAVA Hall, Filipino American Veterans Association. And that's where the Filipino community pretty much would have their events growing up. Both my sisters' wedding receptions were there. And that hall is still there. And so it serves Filipino veterans. Some of the founders are, are -- like Sal Flor. His father is one of the founders. So some of the people who are founders, their sons and daughters are a little bit older than me, but, some of them I know. So there's some level of connectedness, still of that second generation with some of us. But I think back then, they're, --the community wasn't as large. There wasn't a lot of centralized communities like here in Mira Mesa, Penasquitos, , Paradise Hills, National City and South Bay, Chula Vista; there's many more Filipinos. So our numbers have grown. I think part of what's different too is that, when, when I was growing up, there

weren't, I didn't feel like there were a lot of role models. I think now there are more real role models. And I think that, that, that helps. So I, I see more success in education, especially higher education. Even though we all went to college, I'm the youngest of five and I'm the only one who, who, who, who finished, or got to the higher level of degree that, that I was able to do. So I finished the bachelor's degree, I got the masters and got the doctorate.

MA: [10:01](#) So you did mention how education and whatnot, it has changed throughout the years. So in terms of education, when you were younger, how represented did you feel in the curriculum presented to you?

JP: [10:13](#) Zero [laughs]. Not really, even at all. I remember when I first got involved with FANHS, people were talking about that Filipinos were relegated to the Filipino "insurrection", but I don't even remember that in terms of when I was growing up. I went to a small Catholic school in the neighborhood, in southeast San Diego. And so I don't remember. I remember, you know -- I, I did have a good history teacher and political, uh, government and political science, so to speak, but I don't remember a lot of that. Uh, so in terms of representation and in terms of now it's better, but it's still lacking. One of the things I was really determined was when I came here to this college and we had such a large Filipino student population(it was the largest student group of color on campus) was to make sure we had curriculum that, that reflected. So we got activated the Filipino studies class, that got activated Tagalog classes. And last year, I think it was it, finally we got, we have a Filipino studies certificate of performance. So that's, that's a legacy, so to speak, that I'm proud of that we, we were able to make some of that happen. But it wasn't until I got to college, my professor was Professor Tuyay and he taught like, a Philippine, Philippine history and US, Filipino American. It was more of a history class that I took. And that's where, it wasn't again till, till college at Southwestern where I, where my eyes were more opened and knowing what our contributions were, became more solidified and I became more exposed to.

MA: [12:30](#) So what experience, err sorry, what influenced you to actually go into teaching? Because I know you're teaching here at the Miramar College and you're depart-, are you a department head in the Filipino Studies [program]?

JP: [12:44](#) We don't have a full department, but I'm the only full time faculty, yes. Tenured faculty in the area and in the, we don't have like a set of full department, but yes. But we that's in that

it's, there's only two faculty. We're not, we're not big enough for a department to be chair and all of that. But, it was, I think growing up and not, not being represented and not having, not having role models. I ended up doing my dissertation on the influence of role models on ethnic identity. And I at that, when I started here, I didn't have my doctorate yet. I just had my master's. But when we -- Professor Tuyay taught the first class, I think in our district, but it had not been activated for a while. And so when I came here, it was like, "okay, let's, let's get that going." Then with that, I think within then, within five years or I think less, can't remember, I mean '92 we started the class in '98 so a little bit more, got the class activated and then a couple of few years later we got the Tagalog activated. I don't teach Tagalog cause I can't speak it. My parents spoke Ilocano growing up and they, they were in insistent in, they had that influence of, you know, educators kind of insisted that, that we just learn English. And so they followed that recommendation, or highly suggested [laugh] direction. But, when I was younger, my family told me that I would pretend like I was a teacher in the patio and teaching class. So I always wanted to be in education. I knew that from a young age. Initially I thought I wanted to be in high school. And then when I, and I knew I wanted to major in high s- in high school in psychology, but I, as I started taking more classes and learning more about ethnic studies -- I actually was able to take an ethnic studies class in high school, which was back then, you know, almost kind of very avant garde, so to speak. And it was, and, and the, the teacher, she was Latina. And so she had -- we had different books by different authors, African American, Maya Angelou, "Farewell to Manzanar". So Asia, I think we had, those are the two that I remember the most and we had two other ones. But that influenced me. I had a Latina counselor that came, I think at my senior year. I tell this story and I even, I wrote about it in my dissertation that I was -- in high school I had the grades to go to college, but my parents didn't know how to go from, from high school to college. And my dad wasn't able to finish here. So they just kept, you know, making sure to get good grades, go to college, but the whole process. So I just figured I'd go to the community college and the high school counselor said, you know, why aren't you applying? And I said, well, I'm gonna go, I'm gonna go to south western. She said, you know you had the grades. But I had a white male counselor before her who never, never led me in that direction. It was just, I just knew I was gonna go and I had to pretty much figure out how. So, so some of the second generation that were older than me, they would come to the high schools and they were, they were working to try and influence a stronger sense of brown identity. So I got exposed to some, some of those people that were like role models, who

influenced me to, to kind of keep me on track. So my -- I went to southwestern and I was able to transfer to San Diego State actually before I became a junior because I had the grades. And I just did the ACT, I think at that time, and so I went earlier but then I thought, you know, actually liked Southwestern. So I came back and I went between both campuses for awhile and I got a job at Southwestern. So I thought, you know what, I'll just stay at Southwestern and finish out and then go back to State. And so I did that. And there were always, I guess people who were -- it was at the right place at the right time, but many Filipino Americans who are influential in education who, there were a couple of Filipinas, Pinays who were in the Masters program that I went into who encouraged me to apply, who helped me with that process. So right out of Undergrad I, I got into a Master's program at 22, graduated at 23 in terms cause it was a one year masters program. And so I was at, there were people who, who influenced me [cries]. Sorry. That, that, that helped. I think. [cries] I didn't think I was gonna get emotional. Oh, sorry. I think just that I was thinking about, because my brothers and sisters, I mean they all had the ability, but, I think they didn't have some of, [beat] people to help along the way. [beat]

MA: [18:06](#) So you did mention that you were interested in psychology from a young age. Can you tell us about the professions that you're in now and your place here at Miramar College and helping with their health services?

JP: [18:28](#) So I started at Miramar over 25 years now [laugh]. And before coming here I worked at San Diego State in counseling and psychological services. So, after I got my masters in counseling, I went, I, I decided I did not want to do high school counseling [laugh] because, because I, I thought I was gonna be different. I was gonna be the high school counselor that was gonna do what didn't happen with me until my senior, senior year. But then I realized really they didn't -- but I also wanted to do more personal counseling and more psychological counseling. I realized high school counselors didn't do that as I was, as I got into my master's program and as I got into into the field in terms of psychology. So I, I worked at counseling, I got my license, three years after I got my master's degree. So I was licensed at a very young age, at age 26. And then I was able to get the job at San Diego State, what was it almost two years later or something? I think. I was, I was pretty young and got a job in counseling and psychological services doing this kind of work. So that was really my dream job. I want it to be in education. I wanted to do more psychological counseling. And so I had got a part time job, it was, but it was a part time

contract and then budget cuts hit and I, I got laid off and so they are permanently off basically. And then that next year I applied here and again, there were people who knew that this campus needed, in terms of representation, but also because I had the qualifications and the background, encouraged me to apply. And so I applied. I got the first, I got the second interview with the president and I got the job. But it was ironic because it was doing more academic counseling and I thought, "Oh, this is part of why I didn't do the other thing". But I actually enjoyed it because I see psychology and in counseling and therapy as a tool of empowerment as education is a tool of empowerment. So I was in some ways, again, got another dream. I was doing counseling, helping, empowering students. And then, what was great about working in this setting is that we have professor status. So I went through the ranks of assistant associate and tenured after assistant, then that full professor and they want, and I had the license already. So when I got the position they knew that was my background. And when the college decided to build a mental health program, I got the the call to do that. So I built the mental health program here. Over 10 years later now, we have two full time. I have an adjunct and we're about to hire one more full time faculty member in the department.

- MA: [22:02](#) So I noticed you speak really highly of role models and their importance to people in the developing ages. In your experience, is there a connection between the presence of role models and one's mental health?
- JP: [22:17](#) Yes, I think so because -- I think most definitely. So I was watching the news this past week. They were talking about that West Point is gonna graduate the highest number of, the diverse, most diverse class, the highest number of, of women. I think specifically African American women and, and so all the major networks did a piece on, on, on, this statistic. And, and one of the things that, you know, each of them were saying is "if you, if you can see it, you can be it." So when you have role models who show, you can get there, you can do it, you can be there. Then those role models, help an individual to aspire to, to feel better about themselves. I think in terms of mental health, part of having a good mental health is having a sense of self esteem, sense of self identity, a strong sense of, of self and wellness. So I think role models can help contribute to that.
- MA: [23:26](#) As an educator and a psychotherapist here at a college with a much more diverse population and something that is really reflective of the San Diego community, do you see yourself as a role model for a lot of the youth that you're, that you're involved with and that you, that you speak to on a daily basis?

JP:

[23:48](#)

Yeah, I think so. And it's something, I guess something that I'm also proud [tears] of because it's something I think I've worked hard. I've, I've known the influence of how that's helped me. So I've been really committed to, to do, to give back in that same way. I wrote a chapter and in Philippine-American psychology, which is my own personal narrative and, and that's how I am and how I end that chapter. I just, I talked about sometimes I asked why do I stay? Cause I've had a lot of racism here, a lot of microaggressions and discrimination. I mean I actually, I sued the college because their lack of, their lack of hiring Filipino faculty. And part of it was in terms of for me, that I had, I had taught psychology here as well. And so they were gonna open a new psych position -- and actually two new psych positions. And so I went to the department, I had been teaching psychology and said, would you support my transfer? And they, the majority of I talked to him once I hit the number of five, there were seven. I thought, okay, I've got the majority support. And I, I, so I, I talked with the, the department, the Dean and I talked with the, I've filled out a letter asking for a transfer and the chair had said in a department meeting, cause he knew that I was trying to get -- garner -- the support. And he said in a department meeting, "there's a certain short individual whose ancestors are out there in the Pacific, who's trying to get a transfer and we're not gonna allow it to happen. The dean and I aren't gonna allow it to happen." And someone who was in the department came back and told me that. And so I, first they told me, no, they're not gonna let me transfer just to go ahead and apply. So I thought, okay, they already told me no, why should I even apply? But I thought, okay, no, I'm gonna go. I do, I want it to, I wanted to move into just teaching and not doing both teaching and this and I, I, so I told the Dean, because I was supposed to go to a conference in Hawaii in March. I said, so when are the interview's gonna be, cause I have this conference and I got funding and I want to make sure I'll be able to be here if I get an interview. So he'd tell me when the interviews are gonna be. So I thought, okay, so I went ahead and applied and then they had the interviews when I was gonna be gone. And so when I asked for them to change the interview date, they, they decline. They did. Denied me even the opportunity to interview. So prior to that I had a number of other, but that was the last straw. I had a number of other things that have happened. So, I filed a complaint with the Department of Fair Employment and Housing Discrimination complaining and I, I went to all the way up to before trial and it was a long process. It was a long, painful process. But what they did during that time frame was they hired at least I think five or six Filipino faculty. So for me it was a win. Even though -- it was ironic was they hired two white faculty for that position that I didn't even get a chance to

interview for, two white women who did not have a doctorate degree, who, one of them didn't even make tenure. So they let her go. Whereas I had been teaching here and I had been working here all this time. So it was, it was a painful process. And, and I'm just now, I'm not even fully recovered because it just kind of ended some of that process a year or two ago? '16, '17... it's been a couple of years now. So it's been hard because, they know I speak, I speak up and they know I complain and they know [chuckles]. And so they haven't made it real easy for me. So when I wrote that chapter, it was other, just, it wasn't even to this level of discrimination, but I say in there that I feel like even if it's in some small way, I can make a difference. At least, at least I've done that. So that's that. So I, even though I didn't, I didn't go to trial because I just decided I was putting too much money into the case with the depositions and all that. But what I did get was I got that certificate, I got a, a Filipino studies abroad class approved and they had faculty, we hired, I think about six faculty during that time frame. So it was like, okay. It was never about the money. It was about, it was about the discrimination for me.

MA: [28:51](#) All of these experiences that you've had here, how did all of this influence you into joining the Filipino American national historical society or, FANHS.

JP: [29:07](#) All of it I think contributed. We started -- I'm one of the founding members of the San Diego chapter, so we started the chapter in 1995 so it will be our 20th year anniversary next year, 2020, 25. I'm not fast with math. So I was one of the founding members in 1995, but prior to that I had gone to my first FANHS conference in 1994. And I had the founding president was, Dr. Fred Cordova. I was able to have him come speak at a counselor's conference as the keynote. I belong to this organization that was about social justice and a representation of different, four different main ethnic groups, Asian, African, Latino, and Native American. And so we, I was able to get Fred Cordova for the Asian. And so when I, when I heard him and the work heard about the work that they were doing, it was like, wow, this is somebody who was second generation like me, but he's older, so he wasn't an immigrant. And, and he was about some of the things that I experienced growing up in terms of influencing youth and young adults. And so, that, that, that conference in 1994, it was in San Francisco, it was like, "wow, this is, this felt like home." It felt like a place that I could connect to people who looked like me, who, who valued the same things I valued and were about, about telling our Filipino American history and our Filipino American narratives and stories. So the next year we started our chapter here in San

Diego. And in the 2000s, I got elected to the board, to be one of the board of trustees. I was actually on the founding, I think, treasurer. And then in 2000, I became the president of San Diego Chapter. And then I became, I got on the board, I think it was 2004, and then I got elected to the executive board in 2012 as Vice President. And then 2016, I became president.

MA:

[31:26](#)

As President, what does your position entail?

JP:

[31:26](#)

Much more than I had expected [laugh]. Just now, just in terms of, I think because of timing. When I was on the executive board, I actually coordinated the FANHs San Diego conference in 2014. And I'm biased, but it was one of the best conferences that one, New York was really good, and then Chicago wasn't that good. And it's gonna be in Hawaii next year. But, in terms of responsibilities since I've been president, we, we opened our FANHS national museum in Stockton, we celebrated our 35th anniversary as a chapter. We've, , since I've been on the executive board, we've, we've, uh, inducted, uh, three, three more chapters. So we're up to 37 chapters now. We, I do quarter quarterly meetings with the board of trustees and I also have monthly meetings with the executives. So we have different subcommittees, which include organizational capacity, Filipino American history month. Last year I worked on a film that, about Filipino American history month. It's a very short film that FANHS had, had a major contribution to, so if you get a chance, look it up. And then also in my presidency, one of the, my major goals was to get the congressional gold medal awarded to Filipino World War II veterans. So, so that was something that we helped accomplish. And my father was recipient out, posthumously. He, I was able to receive the congressional gold medal on behalf of my father for his service in World War II. So I flew to DC and was able to take part of that ceremony. And in these last two years, we basically had a ceremony, (?) the Fil-Vet rep, project, and we were able to, to get them Congressional gold medal awarded throughout the nation to different people (World War II veterans or their next of kin) throughout almost 50 ceremonies throughout the United States. So it's kind of been a lot. And now we're focused on succession planning. Our executive director's, 87 now years old. So Fred Cordova was the founding president, but the real brains was a Pinay. She's, they're both brains, but it was Dorothy Cordova, his, his wife, Dr Dorothy. They both received honorary doctorate degrees from Seattle U. it was her brain child. So she's really the one who started it.

MA: [34:38](#) How has your involvement with FANHS actually in a way affected, or maybe even helped you here at your positions here in Miramar College?

JP: [34:50](#) In many ways it's been my source of support when I only kind of sometimes felt like I've been on an island here without level of support. Now that we've got more Filipino faculty, I feel like I have more support. There were other faculty of color, we would support one another. But now that there's, there are more than you can count on one hand [laugh], that, that's helped, but, but FANHS was sort of my, it was my source of empowerment. It was my source of connection, it was my source of connecting to my identity. So I think it was very helpful. We actually, it was because of FANHS, we started a Filipino American students scholarship fund here. And so we just awarded, I just met with the student who we awarded the scholarship to last month. So that those funds still to this day, I'm, they're not large scholarships but, but, every little bit helps. So, we were still giving out the scholarships and I think it was it in... Before Obama left office in 2015, the White House celebrated the first ever Filipino American history month event and he was the first president to recognize it. So when I was Vice President, I went to the first ceremony and then when I became president, I was able to speak at the White House at the Filipino American history month event. So they somehow, it got a whole, I think one of my mentees, she, she put it on her Facebook and then they picked it up here on the campus, so they put it on the campus Facebook. And, and so people were like, "oh, wow. Judy was at the White House." It was the Eisenhower building next to the house, but it was on the White House grounds. So it was, so I, I think it's helped a lot. It's given recognition to Filipino Americans here and there. Our numbers, our contributions, our history.

MA: [37:01](#) How has your community involvement shaped you?

JP: [37:02](#) A hundred fold, a I think? I've been very involved. I think since, gosh, I don't, I don't even. I always remember being involved in some capacity. My Master's program is the masters program that focuses on multicultural competency and social justice. And so that was really a lot of the beginnings. And I got my master's over 30, I don't know how many years ago. So since then I have been involved with the community to some degree. And then when I got involved with FANHS, I became very, very involved in the community and we were able to do a lot of great things. One of the things also since becoming President, we named the Larry Itliong-Philip Vera Cruz bridge off the Filipino-American freeway. So we've been able to do some real good things during

my community involvement. So it has shaped who I am and many ways.