

SHADES OF L.A. INTERVIEW PROJECT

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

INTERVIEW WITH HELEN BROWN ON 7/2/93 IN HERMOSA BEACH, CA

INTERVIEWER: AMY KITCHENER

TAPE 1, SIDE A

000 Introduction

006 Born in Manila, Philippines in May 1915

010 Background on parents, mother from northern
Philippines, father from U.S. of Dutch and English
parentage

016 Circumstances for parents marriage, father to
Philippines in 1901, after college graduation
historical background on American colonization of
Philippines -- emphasis on education and English
proficiency -- previously 89 languages in islands and
need for common language

043 Father was English teacher

052 Few Americans in Philippines during this time --
background history on colonization of Philippines
Philippine revolution against Spanish after 350 yrs. of
colonization -- established own republic 1898 --
synopsis of historical events -- the Battle of Manila
Bay -- Treaty of Paris 1898 -- Spanish sell Philippines
to U.S.-- American Filipino War -- Philippines loses

127 Strategy of U.S. to pacify Filipino people through
universal education -- influx of American teachers
that was circumstance for Helen's father's immigration

144 Meeting of her parents -- mother was high school
student in her father's class in the north -- married
in 1910

154 politics of intermarriage -- Helen's maternal
grandfather was revolutionary who fought against the
Americans but her father was persistent and continued
courting her mother mother was third daughter and
was not supposed to be married first according to
tradition

- 176 Parents married and had seven children -- father successful and transferred to Manila -- Helen was first child born there -- third of seven children -- father became one of the directors of the Bureau of Education
- 187 1933 immigration to the United States after her father retired -- college education for children was motivating factor -- high value on education for Filipinos motivation for other Filipinos to immigrate to the U.S.
- 206 Early Filipinos had different experience as agricultural laborers -- U.S. recruited them to come -- first to Hawaii on sugar plantations and later to the West coast -- followed the Chinese and Japanese Filipinos classified as nationals -- 1920s
- 227 Many of Helen's cousins and mother's friends came during 1920s
- 234 Motivations for Filipino immigration to the U.S.
- 249 Glorification of things American during U.S. colonization of Philippines -- examples: products, citrus, apples -- American produce given as Christmas gifts -- "worshiping oranges and apples" -- the native tropical fruits were not valued -- this mind set is still pervasive in Philippines (shoes, sheets)
- 284 Helen from "comfortable" upbringing -- had Western values, except for Filipino value on family and education
- 307 Experience upon arriving in the U.S. -- age 16 -- was adaptable to Western values, but she stood out was perceived as different -- she anticipated life to be similar to her life in Philippines, but it was not
- 330 Caucasian peers' reactions to her -- prejudice and ignorance about the Philippines --
- 349 Helen protected herself by fabricating identities -- ie. Czechoslovakian or Hawaiiin
- 360 Oldest sister remained in Philippines and married another "mestizo" and remained through difficult time of WWII -- older brother was already in college in Ohio
- 382 Helen's first visit to U.S. in 1927 -- accompanied father and older sister on trip to scout out the possibilities in California for family's immigration

400 Bad time in U.S. -- the Great Depression -- Watsonville riot -- widespread prejudice against Filipinos -- came on Empress ocean liner and landed in Vancouver -- bought car and started driving down the coast -- father liked Washington and the University of Washington and decided to buy a house there -- when owner discovered his wife was Filipina and he was from Philippines they were not allowed to purchase house -- father decided to return immediately to Philippines

431 Father was retired and worked for Goodyear tires in Manila and then fully retired and brought family to California in 1933

438 Family was able to buy house in Arcadia, CA and children could attend school

449 Settled on one acre ranch near present day Rosemead -- Helen attended Pasadena City College which was nearest junior college and then enrolled in UCLA after two years

460 Experiences at UCLA -- she commuted during the first year then moved on campus in a dormitory -- Helen was lonely and felt the social differences among her peers -- the girls were interested in boys -- Helen turned to her studies which she loved

495 Favorite subjects -- education, history did not like math -- had music tutor because she needed to pass exam for education major -- father wanted Helen to be a teacher

524 Remembers mentors in education field and the new theories of the time -- Helen's application of ideas in teaching unit on transportation -- the new theories expounded the value of experiential learning, but were perceived as being socialistic in the school system

567 Earned her B.A. in 1937 -- continued education at UCLA for M.A. completed in 1939 -- college was pleasing experience for Helen -- received honors -- was "reader" for professors for grading exams -- Helen was tough grader

602 Helen felt she was more immature than her peers because of her traditional upbringing in the Philippines -- in graduate school there was more emphasis on studies

643 Worked as teacher -- Helen met future husband Bill Brown just after graduate school --

670 First teaching job -- first as substitute -- lived at 105th St./Hoover in L.A. -- married in 1941 -- was "white" neighborhood at time -- where she raised her kids -- taught at 96th Street School -- mixture of white, black and hispanic -- taught lower grades for eight years

727 enjoyed teaching, but not school culture --

733 END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

TAPE 1, SIDE B

000 Helen enjoyed teaching, but not school culture -- confined by school curriculum and classroom -- lack of freedom -- applied to be child welfare and attendance worker in the school district -- receiving referrals from teachers and working with families -- took job

←2 Elementary education was dominated by women -- worked in system for 34 yrs. and saw many changes -- men began teaching early grades -- women began to get positions in management

046 Life experience was growth process -- new interests and became "social worker" .. good e:-:perience to understand social change -- lifelong passion

069 Met husband in early 1940s -- recalls recent Catholic wedding where priest addressed audience to recall how they first met spouses -- Helen laughs and says she was ready to kick Bill out of the house when she first met him -- Helen lived with girlfriend near UCLA -- roommate gave a holiday party that Helen did not attend because she was tired from teaching and needed to sleep -- party revelers set off fire crackers in the fireplace -- She was awakened and asked the guests to stop -- Bill was there and asked her roommate about Helen -- later he called her so they could meet

122 Helen had a previous long engagement with a boy from the Philippines

Started to date Bill Brown -- he captivated her interest -- after 6 months they married -- could not get marriage license in Los Angeles because Helen was Filipina -- went to Boulder City CO to marry

154 Bill was student of History and Politics -- came from family of Irish entrepreneurs -- Bill specialized in building room additions -- taught children his skills - Bill loved travel, people, learning

182 Family traveled -- Helen went on sabbatical for a year to travel around the U.S. with her family and brought her four boys (youngest was 2 yrs. old) -- spent 14 months in a trailer -- every four years they took trips -- went on three other major trips Bill had talent for real estate -- bought property in Hemet

220 Explanation of Helen's rekindled identification as a Filipina -- 1960's Civil Rights -- Black power -- Black Panthers -- Chicano movement in L.A. City schools -- Sal Castro, et. al

257 Filipino influx of immigration after WWII -- women started coming -- Helen saw more Filipino families and kids from the schools -- Roy Morales worked in social agency at the time and Helen met him when she was invited to be on the board of the Neighborhood Youth Association -- worked together and became great friends -- people of color started working together -- having similar experiences

310 Position paper under office of human of relations -- issues in Asian Pacific community -- Helen was part of group with others -- late 1960's -- known as Asians Coming Together (ACT I) -- ACT 2 and 3 followed -- students got involved -- Yellow Brotherhood -- political action and rallies -- University study centers for Asians, Blacks, American Indians, Chicanos

360 Helen was no longer shy and spoke out on many issues

379 60's movement was precedent for today's coalition groups around multiculturalism -- retaining differences and looking at similarities

397 Development of PARRAL (Filipino American Reading Room and Library) -- Filipino awareness of others defining them -- Filipino vs. Filipino --- "little brown brothers" Filipino Spanish surnames

455 Filipinos in U.S. focused on regionalism in past -- now building a common identity here in the U.S. -- not assimilation, but acculturation -- looking at how the Filipino culture contributes to American culture -- empowerment from politics and representation in school system

514 END OF INTERVIEW

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY
PART II -- HELEN BROWN
INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON 7/9/93

INTERVIEWER: AMY KITCHENER

TAPE 2, SIDE A

- 000 Introduction
- 007 Childhood remembrances of Philippines -- values -- language (Spanish and Ilocano) -- languages defined the culture for Helen
- 039 Respect for elders -- anecdote from childhood about manners and greeting elders -- mealtimes
- 054 Absorbing mother's culture of northern Philippines children helping with chores -- relating with grandparents -- food -- privileged upbringing
- 070 Mother's difficulty upon coming to the U.S. -- unaccustomed to running a household -- Helen's love of gardening
- 091 Adjustments to new situation in the U.S. -- learning to make friends -- Helen felt immature compared to her new peers -- anecdote of seeing teens necking in a rumble seat -- blossomed later in career and marriage
- 135 First impressions of Los Angeles -- movies, houses, paved streets, traffic -- all day school (contrast to Philippines) -- Philippines siesta in afternoon -- L.A. **very** busy in comparison
- 163 Leisure activities in L.A. -- home life -- care of pets -- raising chickens and goats -- contrast with Philippines -- family always around -- unified by similar interests and social class
- 195 Home life in Manila -- socializing with barrio children -- not allowed outside fence of front yard -- Helen started rebelling -- snuck out to play with other kids -- giving firewood to their families -- farmlands and caribous -- playing with frogs and tadpoles in mud -- visiting homes of farmer's kids -- description of traditional housing -- gift of handmade jewelry box

- 267 Grandparents (maternal) -- grandmother from storekeeper's family in northern Philippines grandfather from prominent family -- story of grandparents courtship -- grandfather was studying to be friar and met grandmother at family's store -- she was 13 and he fell in love with her -- he left the church and married her -- grandmother had ten children -- elder children lived with maiden aunts because grandmother was too young to take care of all of them
- 329 Helen's mother lived with spinster aunt who was devout catholic -- mother religious -- religion among Helen's siblings -- father was Presbyterian -- siblings had double exposure and choice to attend church -- Helen went to father's church -- she liked the singing of hymns and church library with Bobs Twins, and excursions -- four siblings became staunch Catholics two were protestant -- Helen is eclectic and identifies as a "non practicing Catholic"
- 406 Great Depression did not affect family -- although it did deeply affect her husband Bill's family -- Great Depression did affect first wave Filipino laborers and it led to discrimination since jobs were so scarce -- compared to today's recession
- 463 Ties maintained with Philippines after immigration to California -- letters -- school reunions -- Helen returned to her mother's home and family every 2 years after she was married -- she took her sons and husband there too and toured the country -- sailing on brother-in-law's boats -- today's unrest makes such a trip prohibitive -- rediscovery of her heritage
- 558 Cultural dances and songs depicting diversity of cultures in Philippines -- gestures in dance -- anecdote about "training" vs. "educating" tec:l.chers 1954 Shrine Auditorium Filipino dance performance was inspiration for Helen -- beginning of rekindled pride in filipino roots for Helen
- 665 Traditional expectations of Filipino women -- egalitarian values -- "women control purse strings, but men are bosses" -- Spanish colonization put women down -- Americans restored some privileges (continued on side B)
- 731 END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

TAPE 2, SIDE B

- 001 Roles of women in Philippines (continued) -- women gained suffrage -- established own university which was seed of cultural revival of dance -- first such university in Asia -- Helen received "Woman Warrior" award from Asian Pacific Women's Network -- 1st woman president in Asia today
- 032 World War II experience -- married August 1941 during this time taught school during war -- drills at school for air raids -- war impacted family in 1943 -- Bill had disability and did not go to war but taught industrial arts for school district -- Bill taught welding and riveting -- Helen pregnant with first son, Billy -- forced pregnancy leave from teaching for 6 months
- 060 Helen did not enjoy staying at home and wanted to participate -- Husband worked midnight shift with Bethlehem Steel at the harbor -- Helen's childhood friend, Lilly, lived with them too -- Bill got job as tester for welders -- many women were welders -- Bill encouraged Helen to join his class -- women welders included black and latino women -- Helen enjoyed welding -- process of welding was an art
- 120 Worked for Cal Ship -- Helen passed test and went to work in ship yard -- assigned to welding bulk heads of Liberty ships (Victory ships) -- description of work in ship yards -- rapport with women -- Helen worked on swing shift -- husband worked on night shift and friend, Lily worked on day shift -- rotated child care for son -- no child care for women workers -- Helen spear-headed program for child care cooperative -- beginning of women's empowerment -- first time for women of color to advance -- seeds planted
- 215 Helen did not return to teaching after her leave was up -- kept her job as a welder
- 248 PARRAL -- Helen started Pilipino American Reading Room and Library with her collection of books, clippings, etc. -- Helen is life long collector -- Royal Morales suggested First Filipino Christian Church as location for Helen's collection -- converted store room to library -- opened in 1985 -- Jackie Goldberg gave key note address at opening reception -- formed non-profit organization with leadership of community called PAMANA FOUNDATION, Inc. to support library -- Pamana means "heritage" in Tagalog

350 Present plans and goals -- expand to larger space for library and museum to promote the Filipino American culture -- people are unaware of contributions -- L.A. encompasses great diversity and provides a good place to learn about other cultures, including filipinos

404 newspaper articles -- relationship between ethnic groups -- part of Helen's collection includes cross-cultural themes

462 END OF INTERVIEW