

Guest: Irene Maun
Interviewer: Brian Campbell

Location: Des Moines & Dubuque, IA
Date: February 11, 2021

BC: So, this is part of a whole series of stories I've been collecting from different people from all different parts of the world who've all wound up in Iowa and the Midwest. I don't think everyone appreciates just how many different kinds of people there are all around us. Thank you for being willing to share your story. I know you've done that a lot in a lot of different places. I've gotten to read a little bit about you, but I'm excited to talk to you more. One thing I was going to ask just to begin – How do you describe the place that you're from, and what do you call it? I know that sometimes people talk about Micronesia or Marshall Islands – how do you describe the name of the place you're from?

IM: I would say I'm glad I'm from Marshall Islands, but to me, it's like people need it more to be healthier than before. I would say it's not a safe place, which we are very, very sick people.

BC: Take us back then, how did it become that way? What do people need to understand about the history of the place that makes it unsafe?

IM: It started in 1954 when our government, the US government, started nuclear tests on the islands. I really hate when they talk about the island, but I would say not the islands are contaminated, but the people are. It's getting worse. It's getting worse because we are the highest percent of cancer and diabetes. Our seniors, when I was growing up, they never experience any kinds of disease or chronic cancer. Today, young generations, like teenagers, are passing away from cancer. Today, there's no adult living with us, only when they reach the age of 50, they die from cancer. I just came back from Hawaii, and I was so sorry about one of my sisters-in-law. She passed. She's only 52 years old. From cancer. The other one, she's only 34 years old. She passed away from the cancer too. It's why I go back and forth. In July I had to go back to Hawaii just for the funeral. I heard all about the young generation passed away from the cancer. That's why I want to go back and learn more today that I know we're very sick people. Now I'm in a different state and every week, I heard from people back home that this person passed away because of the cancer. He's only 18 years old. That's my experience.

BC: You say the nuclear testing contaminated the place, but also the people. That's continued to last for multiple generations now.

IM: Yup.

BC: There was a whole series of tests over more than a decade, is that right?

IM: Yes. That's what the poem meant.

BC: Tell me about the poem.

IM: The poem – it's about the people when they dumped their nuclear waste. Now it's leaking. Now we cannot eat the fish because they're contaminated too. When I was young, 12 or 8 years old, I've known there's two or three fish that you cannot eat because once you eat, they're all

contaminated, people can die from it. Today, we have lots of fish that it's scary. You cannot eat those fish. Once you eat a fish, you're not going to survive. If you survive, you're going to be paralyzed. Both sides. Couldn't talk. It's so sad. Pregnant women deliver their baby, their baby is not surviving because they live so differently. No nose, or their eyes are not open. They're just born, and that's it. Not going to survive. Within a minute or – they just deliver a baby that already died in their womb. A lot of pregnant women. It is so different. Now all kids are learning how they did the nuclear tests, and they aren't even scared. They're like how could they do such a thing like this? We're human beings. It's a big world. Why couldn't they just drop it somewhere in their own place? But why did they bring it over and test on our islands? They think it's unfair.

BC: What do you tell kids when they ask a question like that?

IM: My grandkids, they ask me, "Grandma, we heard a lot about the testing." They're the ones who ask why. Why did they have to bring it all the way to Marshall Island? Why did they choose Marshall Island? It's a continent. We're living on a continent. Why they didn't do it somewhere else? Why did they bring it all the way to Marshall Island? I told them that I don't have any clue. Maybe our government operated and said to bring it over or something. No one talk about it. We just grew up with it. It's in our heart. It's like they buried something terrible in our heart. I, myself, I couldn't get it away from my heart. In school today, they're learning a lot about that. That's the very scary – it's scary. It affects all the generations. It's not going to go away. It's going to continue.

BC: How have the people there responded over the years? Even from the time you were young, this was an issue, and it continues through many generations. What have the people of Marshall Islands done to try to respond?

IM: I think they're mad. They always think that they don't care about us. I remember my mom passed away from cancer, and also my grandmother. She always said we're not going to survive from this cancer, from the nuclear testing. In March, March 3rd I think, they call it the nuclear survivor. The old generation, when they started the testing, kids were playing in the falls with powders. They thought it snowed, so they played around it. They were playing and splashing. The way we play in the snow.

BC: This is the debris from the explosions, from the tests exploding. It was raining down from the sky.

IM: Yep. My mom was there, but my grandmother said to not go outside. So they were staying inside, but other kids, they were playing. Thinking, "Oh, we have flour from heaven!" We today say snow, but they've never seen snow before. It's not even cold. But we describe it as snow because it was white as snow. All the fallout. They were like, "We have flour falling from heaven!" So they were playing, throwing it at each other. All of a sudden, not within 24 hours, their hair, their skin was torn off. Skin was peeling, and their hair was falling off. Their fingers and toes were falling off too. It was the scariest moment when they began to get sick. We used to have our healthy diet, but after the nuclear bomb, they started to import all the sugary stuff. Bread, canned meat, which they really don't know that canned meat contains a lot of sodium. They thought it's healthy, so that's our main dish. They told them not to eat from the fish. No one

go out fishing. Now they started starving. They were very, very starving. My grandmother mentioned something about how they took them to [small island name]. Took them, most of the people who evacuated from the island. They leave them right there without any food or anything. Of course, because they're trying to examine what is wrong after the nuclear bomb. They were in[side] a fence, and no one could get close to them.

BC: It was like a quarantine.

IM: Yeah. It's like a quarantine place, and all the army were lining up and trying to figure out what they were going to do. They were in[side] the fence and starving to death. My grandmother was saying they were trying to figure it out what they were going to do with us. No food or no water. Later, after two days, they started to feed them.

BC: You're describing one island being evacuated from Bikini.

IM: Only one island.

BC: But you're saying also this explosion, this flour from the heavens, was not just one island where this was falling.

IM: Yes. Not just one island.

BC: Many places. And it covered the soil, the water, the people, and is still in that environment and in those people.

IM: Mmhm.

BC: One thing I was thinking about – a lot of that canned meat is probably produced here in the Midwest in these large meatpacking plants and factories. Now that's the core of the diet for a long time has been this processed food that's imported from places like the Midwest. Meats and bread. What kind of diet do you remember for yourself as a child growing up?

IM: Fish. We raised our own pigs. The chickens. We raised our own pigs and chickens, and then after that, we do also have fruits that you've never seen. Banana. They grow their own. They were happy having those foods. Taro, yam, but no rice. They also contain starch food, but they think it's a lot better because it's their own. There's no chemical added or anything. That's our main diet, healthy food that we call it. They said before the nuclear testing, in the garden, they're growing very healthy. If the breadfruit is growing inside it is yellowish meat inside. You boil it or steam it or do it our own cooking, like getting those barbecue. We do barbecue, but we don't do it in the Western way. We do it our own way. You collect all the wood. You start the fire, and when it becomes a charcoal, you put the breadfruit on it and then roll it. Cook it and turn it until it is cooked. Then you eat. Just like that.

BC: What's the flavor?

IM: It's like tasty and it can be sweet. If it's too ripe, then sweet. You eat it with coconut, coconut flake, or fish. That's our very popular dish. Breadfruit with coconut and fish as the meat. You'd drink it with coconut milk. Today, our coconut milk is like that. Or it can be like there's coconut in

a tree, but there's nothing in it. It's all dry. We know that it's from the nuclear tests. It's not like before. Everything gets changed after the nuclear tests.

BC: It sounds like quite the contrast. The foods and the environment is unsafe but it also sounds like a beautiful place with these fruit trees and the bounty of the ocean. I think most people, when they imagine a Pacific island, they think of paradise. A dream place they can live and be happy, especially on a day like today when it's so cold – you can imagine a beach and warm water.

IM: It's beautiful. That's why you saw that young lady doing her poem.

BC: Can you pronounce her name?

IM: Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner. She's our late president's daughter. She's very young. She came to New York and that's where she gets her college degree. She's a poet. She is a very smart young lady.

BC: When I asked you before how people responded, that's a powerful response, like you said. It's anger and rage, but also the part at the end of the poem she says, "My belly is a crater empty of stories and answers, only questions hard as concrete." That's what I was thinking when you talk about your own grandchildren asking questions. There's no answer to the question of why. She ends it with that question, the same as your own grandchildren. "Who anointed them with the power to burn?"

IM: I cried when I first saw that poem. I cried. It's true.

BC: Me too. The video is so powerful of her standing on top of the concrete. Can you describe what that is?

IM: That's their nuclear waste. That's the nuclear waste. They bury it. Today, that small island is no longer a dry island. It's covered with water. It's leaking. It's very scary. They don't eat much fish now. When I was still there, people from outer islands, when I'm saying about outer islands, it's outer islands from our capital where I grew up. They had emergency flights or in a ship because it's going to take you forever to come to the capital, to hospital so that they can treat you with the poison. Once you eat fish today, you're not going to survive. But a long time ago, they could bring you to Marshall Island because on other islands, there's no electricity or doctor, only a medic. But they don't have doctors in the islands. They have to come to the capital so they can be treated. But if they're too late, then they're not going to survive. They're not going to make it. By eating just the fish.

BC: You said that island is now underwater. Is that climate change and sea level rise?

IM: Also climate change. Now the islands are covered with water. When it's high tide, it's covered. Low tide, you can still see the concrete.

BC: How has that changed on all the different islands? Are there king tides and the sea is coming more and more and impacting life in Marshall Islands?

IM: They're very scared. They're always looking to the government, asking where will we go? What can we do? Because the islands are sinking. It's not just because of the tidal wave coming in. You can see the water rise up, and it's very scary. It happened two years ago. They have video of it, and it happened in Bikini islands, Kili island. They were saying that they were very scared because the water would just rise up. There's no wave on the ocean side, but the water would just rise up. Salty water. And kills –

BC: Not just the beach, but even inland.

IM: Yeah. It was up to four feet high. The scariest thing is the plants. All the coconut, the breadfruit, bananas, everything died because of the salt water. I heard more. It's not just Kili Island. A year later, they were talking about Namorik. When you're talking about Namorik, it's an outer island from Majuro. The same thing [that] happened to Kili is happening to them too. The smallest islands, they're all gone because of the rise and climate change.

BC: You're saying the people are asking the government where can we go and what can we do?

IM: When are you going to move all the people? Evacuate them. Are we going to move from the islands, or are we going to die here?

BC: People have accepted that they will need to leave?

IM: They're looking at getting help from the United States. With the pandemic, I heard from them that they're dying to come here and negotiate for more. Our government is dying to do something for the people, but they can't be alone. Like they said, "Oh, you can come to the United States. You can work here." That's all we know from what we learned when we were young. The US Government promised that they were going to take care of us. Can we do the nuclear bomb test and then after that, if you were saying yes, you can come to the United States and work there and everything. It was difficult for them because they wouldn't have access to Medicaid before, and after all – since 1986, the Republic of the Marshall Island were enjoying the special relationship with the United States.

BC: So it's this compact of free association.

IM: And allows the residents – you can live there and work, study in the US without visas.

BC: It's a way for people to come live in the mainland United States or even in Hawaii, and have some access to programs like Medicaid. You heard about this as a child. Many people knew this was an opportunity if people wanted to leave the islands. I'm guessing, especially if people thought it wasn't safe, and their health was suffering that maybe a lot of people thought leaving was probably a good chance to start a new life in a new place.

IM: And they were excited. Very excited. But I think our interpreter at that time was not educated about nuclear tests and how it's going to affect the whole generation. That's what I've been told when I was in school and when I was young. They were talking about it every day, about our interpreter interpret but was not understood. I don't know who interpret for them, but it was not clear.

BC: What do you think they were trying to say?

IM: It's not enough information about the tests. It's not enough.

BC: So they didn't understand just how big of an impact the nuclear fallout would have.

IM: Mhmm. I don't think they asked what's in our future, what's going to be. The US government was trying to test something that they wanted. And they didn't do it here in the United States, but they wanted to take it somewhere else. I don't think this will bury anything, but this is affect [sic] our generation. From generation to generation, it will not go away. Because today, I learned from them, and I myself, there's nothing important other than our health. Money cannot pay for that nuclear test. There's nothing that's going to take us back to the normal as before. And our young kids, there is a song that they – it's a rhyme, something like that – it's meant like this: The American, they're greedy, they treat us like those people from Israel. We were treated like the people from Israel. All the kids, they play with it. They create it. It's not even a five minute song. It's something they would say everyday. Because they're powerful, but they want to do something they – it's a safety, or they do it just because they want to do it. Now, we've been treated like those people from Israel. They go to Egypt, and they were treated like a slave. It's more than a slave. It's a small song, and all the kids - I myself, I didn't create that song. Because they're learning more about it, today they're learning more about it, so they can create something they would describe from what they think of the Western people.

BC: So like being enslaved in your own land? Being enslaved in the islands, but by this nuclear testing. By the United States. Do you remember when you were a child, what was your image of the United States? It sounds like you're saying these kids today have this very critical attitude, but what did you imagine when you thought about the United States?

IM: Mine is totally different because we don't talk about it much when I was that young age. When I was six years old, almost seven, I moved to Pohnpei because my father is not from Marshall Island. My father is Pohnpeian. I moved to Pohnpei, and that's where I grew up most of my life. When I was in school back in Marshall Island, I wasn't thought much about the nuclear test. I grew up in Pohnpei, and we talk about it in school, but not much, because it's Marshall Island, so we don't talk much. We study a lot about America and everything, but not talk much about the Marshall Island and how they do the tests on the islands. Today, when I go back to Marshall Island, I'm adult now and I know enough to understand. I learned a lot from the government. When they talk about it, I listen to when they're having meetings. That's where I learned a lot about it. Today's young generation, they're good about it. They go out there and present about the nuclear tests. I saw it in videos. I saw that a lot. When it's their school education week, they call it school education, that's all the students talking about nothing but the nuclear tests. They're on it. They learn a lot about it. I wish I could be like them, to learn a lot about it. All her age and younger. They're very good. I learn just a point that they're testing our islands and we're now affected. Not just the islands but the human beings. I get it.

BC: You said, what's the name of the place you moved to?

IM: Kosrae. I grew up in a place that we have rivers, mountains, deer on our islands, but not Majuro. Majuro is a small, flat island. It's kinda scary because if you go there, you can see tidal waves. It's a very, very small island.

BC: That's the one in Marshall Islands where you lived, but Kosrae is much larger.

IM: Larger, mhmm.

BC: And you say your father is from a region of Kosrae.

IM: My father's grandfather was the king. He was the king of Kosrae, and his name was John Sigrah. I grew up in a well known family in the Kosrae Islands. My great-grandfather was the king of the islands.

BC: You told me before that your grandfather was the last king, right?

IM: He was the last king.

BC: Why was he the final king? Tell me the story.

IM: You see how I mention it? When they want something, they will change anything, and because of those old generations, they don't know anything about education. They don't know anything about sort of stuff like that. He came on a ship, which it was like 18-something. I forgot the year. But he came along and he married to a pure Kosraeian woman because he was really smart. So he didn't go back on the ship. He left the ship because he saw this beautiful woman. He decided to stay and get married. But the ship and the crew left without him. That was a very, I would say, dramatic story, but it's also a very smart move that he made. So he was starting with a King first. He made so many differences, and he taught them a lot. The first thing he taught them was English and mathematics. Three things: English, mathematics, and writing. So that was the first thing he did. They started, and they thought, "Oh, he's a very smart guy. He's very smart." A few decades later, the king changes his mind. He called a big meeting, and everyone gathered together, and he said, "Why don't we – I think we need to change things around." He makes the changes to everything. When he started a – when his wife got pregnant, he thought, "I work a lot for the king," so something came up in his mind that he would change his king's mind. The king was so pleased with him. He was happy, whatever he did for them. Because he helped them build a house, and he taught them how to cook. There's a lot of food, but they don't know what to do with it, so today the people from the Kosraeian Island are the very best. They cook like a western menu. They're very good at it because he taught them. In American ways, they adopt the American culture. He changed everything.

BC: So he came on the ship from America?

IM: Yeah.

BC: And taught them all these things, and they were impressed, and they decided that he could be their leader? Is that right?

IM: Mhmm. Well, the king decided to do it. Because he cooked for him, he did a lot, and he taught him a lot. He was like satisfied with whatever he did. And he called before he would get sick and get home. It was like he should call a meeting. SO he called. Everybody was agreed. "Why don't we choose him as our king?" From then, he was the king. He didn'te ven pass it on. His heirs – no one takes the place. Only when he died, then it will go back to whoever is gonna take the crown. It's not gonna pass it on on his own because that was the deal. He said, "You know what, know that people learned a lot about God, you know what? There's only one king. Our Father in Heaven." And they were like, "Ohhh," because he taught them a lot.

BC: He taught them about Christianity?

IM: Christianity.

BC: And then also taught them to end the royal lineage and have no more human kings on the island?

IM: Yes. Today there's no human king on the island.

BC: And it seems like Chrisitainity has been very important to the culture of all the islands.

IM: True. Correct.

BC: How is Christianity part of that culture even in your lifetime? How would you describe that?

IM: I would say that... no place to go, nothing to do, but Christianity. Once you're in the church, you're safe. You're safe. That's what they taught us. And it's part of our life. It's part of our life. And we pass it on. Pass it on.

BC: Couple generations later, your father lived in Kosraeian and then moved to the Marshall Islands?

IM: He was a captain of ships for the government. We used to work all together. Before, there was only one government that runs for all the islands. But after that, it's changed. Everything changed. Each Marshall Island separated from these islands, so we're no longer including the federated states. It used to be all in one government for all the islands. They're still doing it. Pohnpei, Kosrae, and they call the other island Truk. There's only three of them. They're still holding each other.

BC: But at that time, there were lots of connections, so your father kept his ship.

IM: Yeah. So that's when he came to Marshall Island and married my mom. They got together.

BC: Another romantic story.

IM: [Laughs.] Yes.

BC: So you lived part of your life in Marshall Island and part in Kosrae?

IM: I was sixteen years old when I came back from Pohnpei. Pohnpei is another island of the Federated States of Micronesia. I grew up there. I have my uncles and aunties there too. When I first moved from the Marshall Island when I was six years old, I went to not Kosrae, but my father took me to Pohnpei, and that's where I grew up. I learned their culture and everything else. When I was 17 I went to Marshall Islands, and that's where I got married from. Small world.

BC: Yeah. What was it that brought you to the United States?

IM: Oh, that's my favorite part. I got married. I'm a mother of four. I have two sons and two daughters, and seven grandkids. Seven grandkids going on eight. They're expecting another grandbaby in May. When I first got here, I, myself, and my husband – he was a very sick man. It's a common way. Diabetes on the island. Noncompliance with this medication because we never learned other health. It's a good thing to go see a doctor within in a year. There's a routine. But we never paid attention to go get health checked or something. He was getting worse, like very sick. The last thing I remember, we had to go to the emergency because he was very, very sick. Because of the diabetes noncompliance with the medication or not seeing a doctor. We had to go to the emergency, and then we found out that he was a very sick man. The kidney failed. They checked his eyes. It also affects his vision because of not treating with any medication. It started to leak. Today he's not very well. It's not going to go back to normal like it was before because it's already damaged from the diabetes. Back home then, we don't have any ointments to treat his eyes. Also his kidneys. They always send our sick people to Hawaii or the Philippines to do more dialysis. They couldn't send him. Our government – when you're sick, they send you to specialities like either you go to Phillipine, or you go to Hawaii. And they told us, "You're going to have to pay your own ticket to go to Phillipine," because it's a lot cheaper. You know how they use the US money. You've got like \$10. \$10 means like \$300 or something like that. I don't know how it works, but I know. They recommend him to go to Phillipine, but you're going to have to pay your own ticket. I said, "Why he have to pay his own ticket?" And they said diabetes is not an emergency. Well what is an emergency for you guys? And they said dialysis. You wait until the person is needing dialysis that you send them away? But no preventative – how do you say it?

BC: Preventative.

IM: Yeah. They say cancer and dialysis the most. I was like, "Okay." I don't have that much. I don't have any money. How can I pay for a ticket? They said, "You're going to pay for your own ticket, but we're going to cover your cares." As that's unfair. I cannot afford a ticket. A month later, or two months later, we decided to go to mainland United States instead of going to Phillipine. I realized if I go to the Phillipine, I'm going to be needed forever because they cannot afford. You take care of your need, your fair ticket, but take care of your health stuff. It's unfair. I don't want to go starve or anything. I'm not going to Phillipine. I work hard. I come up with a fair ticket so I can buy a ticket to go to Hawaii. That's the first thing I decide to do. So we did. I made it. Left my kids home without any trust. But I have no chance. I have to go with my husband. There's an auntie - my aunt - I asked her to come and take care of them. My aunt is not working. She has no income. But one thing I remember I told her: God will protect whatever we need. I

trust him. I trust him with our ticket, so He provided. I also trust with taking care of my kids. They were very young when I left them. We go to Hawaii. We made it. It's a one way ticket. We were coming to United States instead of staying in Hawaii because I know we couldn't afford anything. I knew about the history. Without insurance, you could not be treated. But at least we go to Hawaii and get some advice. And yes, my husband was trying to get in, but it takes long time for him to establish. I moved on. He stayed in Hawaii, but I came to the United States. There's a meeting that I had to go with, and he stayed there because he was a very sick man. He stayed there. Our family was supposed to try to help him up, but it's time consuming. It takes forever to take him to establish. I was still in California, and there was a sister of his. She came to my hotel, and she said, "Irene, I heard about [husband's name]." And I said, "My husband." And I said, "Yeah. We're looking for a place that we can be establish." She was like, "Okay, where is he at now?" And I said, "In Hawaii." And she said, "You're coming with me." I said, "I've been praying for this. Thank you." And I said, "We'll be taken care of?" And she said, "Yeah. We'll take you to Iowa." So, I ended up in Iowa. [Laughs.] Miracle, huh? So, my husband later that week, I told him he better come because I went to California for a meeting, a church conference, so he came. Because we're staying with his sister. She'll take us to Oklahoma, and then we'll go to Iowa. So he did. He came to California, and we drove all the way to Oklahoma. It took us forever. When we got out from the car, my legs were like swollen so bad. I ate too many canned meat. It contains a lot of sodium in my health, my body. They were like surprised. My shoes was not fit. It took us like two nights and we were driving all the way from California. It was not fun. Of course, we stopped at the gas station and we slept a little bit, like a nap. And then refuel and go.

BC: You just stopped to buy more canned meats along the way.

IM: Yeah. We ate canned meat all the way. Of course we ate chicken, some sandwiches, but when I was in Marshall Island, we ate so much canned meat. We thought it was healthy.

BC: Do you have a favorite canned meat?

IM: Spam is the saltiest. There's a lot of sodium in Spam. I love Spam. That was my favorite canned meat.

BC: How do you prepare it usually? Straight from the can?

IM: I just open it up. I love it when it's fried with grease. We didn't even know it was too much greasy. Today when I learn it, I just open it up and put it on a pan, no grease. There's a lot of grease in that. Wow. We've been treating like – I don't know. It's so complicated to explain it. Now we're not doing the same thing. We learned from a long time ago, our generation. We try to feed our children healthy food here in the United States, but I don't know about the Marshall Island. The main dish is rice and chicken. Lucky - you eat chicken. You get the frozen chicken. We do not eat chicken every week or every day because it's so expensive. We bring lots of the times, 5 or 10 people, can fit with a can of tuna or Spam or corned beef hash. Those canned meats, only one can can feed 10 people because everything back home is expensive and we don't want to go eat the fish because we're afraid. You never know which fish is contaminated.

BC: You had this journey. First, these flights. You came to this church conference, and then you drove. It must have been the longest drive you ever imagined.

IM: It was. I was so tired. Never sit for that long time because our island is so small. You walk every day. You don't have to go with a car or anything. You walk every day. It would not take you forever to walk.

BC: You must have seen so many parts of the United States while you're driving.

IM: Yeah. It was cross country. I went from California to Arizona. It was so hot. We can feel the winds coming. It's not fresh at all. It was so hot. It was like I was living in a desert. I had to go in the car. It was hard.

BC: And you came to Oklahoma where there were many people from the islands.

IM: I waited. We had to wait there so my sister-in-law and the family could drive us here to Iowa. Because we have a niece. He was here before. He was a bastard also. They said Iowa is the best place to go. Iowa is the best. True. So we left our children. Two years later I got a job. I had to earn money so I could save money for their tickets. One came in first. My older son, so he could come and go to school. My two daughters were younger than my oldest son. They came within two years later. I had to go get a job so I can have them here.

BC: What was that like being so far from your young children?

IM: I cried. It's hard. It's not easy. I cried every night. Every night. That's the worst time ever of my life. When it's come to bed, you never know. If you leave your children behind, you don't know what they're eating. Are they starving or are they healthy? I couldn't sleep. And I work hard. Because coming here to Iowa, we're talking about for a round trip ticket, \$2000. I had to pay them for \$1000 each ticket for her and my two daughters so they can come in. I spent almost \$3000 for the round trip ticket.

BC: What kind of work were you able to find for someone who is –

IM: Lots of barriers. Come to United States is also exciting but also a challenge. Very, very challenging. When I first got my job, I don't want to go out for any other job because I said well, I didn't finish education. I didn't graduate from high school. It's required, a high school diploma. And I know. I said I'm not going to make it. Well, I'm going to try to see if I can qualify for being a nurse aid. So I did. I went to find a job. The first job I apply was Mount Carmel. It's a nun place for all the sisters. I heard they hire non-CNA or non-certified nurse. I went to start there. I filled out my application myself, and it was so hard. I couldn't fill it out. I don't know what they're asking. It's language barrier. I don't think my application I made pleased the hiring people because it was off. I don't know what they're asking, but I just write whatever I can. Language barrier.

BC: Did you speak some English already?

IM: I speak some English. Little, not some.

BC: Just a little.

IM: When I was in school, I always fool myself. I was not a smart kid. I always fool around. When I got the application, I was mad at myself. I was mad at myself because I was like, "What did I just say?" I was fooling myself. I was not getting a good grade. I was the naughtiest. I grew up with this [unclear]. I never listened. I was mad at myself. No one's to blame but myself. But my other classmates, they were on it. They speak English very well. But I wasn't thinking of my future. It was not there. I don't want to do it again. I'm the best supporter with my kids. I go to school because I didn't finish school. And I realized not being with your parents – you need your parents around. I was without my parents since I was growing up. My parents were divorced. My mom was with another guy, and my dad was – I don't know what he was doing. I grew up with my auntie. My aunt and my uncle. I'm telling my kids, living with other parents or anyone else is not as your mom and dad. I know, because I grew up with it. That's my future. It was worse. A lot. A lot to learn. So, I got this job. Anyway. It took me forever. I applied and they were ignoring my application. They don't like – "Oh, she's not a high school graduator. Why would we need her?" They'd been ignoring my application for six, almost seven months. But you know what I did? I kept calling and bothering. I called and I called because my mind is now set on my kids. Who's going to be – my husband is a very sick man. I understand English a little bit, but him? No. He's one of the kids that never go to school ever. Never. So that's the problem. Our age, we never think of our age or our future. But today? All the kids – you see my coworker. That's why I asked you if you can give me another chance so he can help me out with the technology. [Laughs.]

BC: So you were very motivated to work and learn English and have opportunities so you could bring your own children here to be with you.

IM: Yeah. My husband was not getting healthier. He was declining every day. His heart is broken that he left our children. He's more sicker than I am. I was the one to be bold. I think I was the one who was encouraging him and said, "We'll get it. We will work together with this." We started to come to Crescent. It's a long story. There was a lady working. She was a care manager here. She was the one – she kind of feels sorry for us. I didn't tell her anything, but she could tell that we're in a needy – we need everything. We need clothing. We need access to foods, pantry or something. She really know what we're going to need. So, she's the one who helped me out with the application. She wrote a recommendation note. There's a lot of things that I came here and waited for my job so I can get a job. She was the one who wrote a letter and said, "If you hire Irene, I don't know her much but I know she's a very good mom and she takes care of her husband." She kind of talked them into it. Start with my husband. "If you hire her, you're going to be very excited. She's a hard worker." She did the same thing to her husband. She's a good mom. She will take care of same thing. She will take care of your sisters. So with that fat letter, I got the job! They said, "Irene, are you ready for an interview?" I said, "Yes, I am! I've been dying to get a job." They said, "Well, come today at this time." I was excited. People said their very exciting time is their marriage. When they're getting married. To me, it was not. To get a job in the United States was the happiest moment, especially when I'm in a bad situation and very need it. I was so excited that I cried. I know if I got this interview – I got that faith in my heart. Interview, then I will get a job. I did. When I first started a job, I thought

it was the happiest moment in my life, but I cried. It turned the other way. I cried. I couldn't communicate with the sisters, and they get mad. They get old, and they yell at you. "We don't need this lady!" They tried to communicate, they don't understand. They will kick you out from there. It was so hard. It was not easy. I stood up and I said, "I feel like I'm left out." So I asked them if they can teach me English. So they did. It was like I was going to school every day.

BC: With the sisters?

IM: With the sisters.

BC: They would sometimes be angry with you, and instead you turned it and asked them to help?

IM: I asked them to help. My time will be like free. I don't care. I just need help. So they agree with me. There was two of them. One English writing and the other one was reading mostly. A year later, they were all want me to be their aid. To take care of them. They were excited that they have me because I was – my schedule was flexible. I'm right there. I started with not full time, but part time. I can work first shift, second shift, third shift. I don't care. Once they needed help, I'll be there. I'm all over.

BC: A hard worker. And you wanted to learn.

IM: I wanted to learn. I'm still learning. From experience from my job.

BC: You're still working in healthcare.

IM: I lost my job. I lost my job because only one car cannot take us all to work and school. So many tardies, that they let me go. I worked there for six years.

BC: After your children came, your life became more complicated. It was too hard to be a working mother.

IM: I have no car, and I have to call neighbors, our families, and they pick us up. But you know how it works because under a roof there's like ten people and only one car. That's another barrier.

BC: Language, transportation.

IM: Like challenging. It's also exciting, but a lot of challenges. It was not easy.

BC: Before when you were telling me about Iowa, you said you were so excited and Iowa is the best. Did you know anything about Iowa before you arrived?

IM: No. They told me that they will help us. Crescent was the first place we came to. No copays, they said they help you. No insurance, they will find sources for you.

BC: Tell me. What is Crescent for people who've never heard of this place?

IM: Crescent is a nonprofit. We're using government's help with 340B. The medication with low-income, they help. We have others that help with the Pacific Islander Health Project. So when I started this job, I had to go do more presenting to bring awareness to these people. What are these people, and what are they needing. Also I talk a lot about the nuclear testing. That's when I connect with the resources and communities. They donate – there's also our donors who help. Also the sisters. They work a lot, the sisters.

BC: This was the first place that you came when you arrived as someone new to the United States. You found some help there. And now you helped to create this Pacific Islander program at Crescent.

IM: Yeah. I did it for the first time. The first thing I did was volunteer. Then two years later, I was hired in 2017. That's when I started to get a salary. Now I'm working full time. I used to be alone with a nurse and a social worker. Now that our social worker is no longer working, they hired another social worker and another health worker. I asked them if they can hire another health worker so they can help because I'm here and there. I cannot do it alone. I'm very busy. I go out there with the facilities and then outside the Crescent. I can be interpreting on the phone, too. It's a lot better to our culture if you always depending on someone that knows the resource and everything. If you don't know what you're doing, our community is not built like that. They need someone to go with them. Once they got it, get into it, you can leave them. But for the first thing, it's none. If you're trying to send them over with, "Okay, go do this because you blah blah blah," they cannot without their interpreter. They really need help. Once they get it, they can go by themselves.

BC: Can you think of a story of some of the help you've been able to give for some of the other people coming from the Marshall Islands?

IM: It's a small community. The first thing I did was try to build the trust between the community and Crescent and our staff. The main thing I did was build the trust. Today our projects were known with the community, and they know it's a resource for them without insurance and everything. It's not just that. We've never seen a doctor before like I explain it to you. It's also a barrier. They could not see a dentist for ten, twenty years. When they come to whatever they need when they're on schedule, because I'm focusing on get them resource, medical first, dental, and an eye exam. Once they schedule, that's another main thing. They've got to pull out all the teeth all the way because they're all rotten. Never seen a doctor.

BC: You're with them in their first experience going to the dentist, going to the doctor, getting their first examination done. I imagine many of them have health problems that they need lots of additional specialists and follow ups.

IM: Yeah. A lot of barriers. At first I was trained at Mercy. That's our first office located. Mercy was taken care of and I was getting paid from Mercy Hospital when they first hired me. I was hired. I was doing this thing for volunteer. Trying to connect the community what they're needed through the survey first. The organizers can say we know what to do from then. First thing we were surveying was -- there's a few questions about have you seen a doctor. If your answer is no, why? Can you explain it? Those kinds of questions. From the survey, bring it in, and they

know what to talk about. What the community needed. There's plenty needed. They don't have cars. They don't have access to food vendors. They don't have access to health. They're just there. But they just try to find a job. They don't think it's [healthcare] important for them because they're focusing on paying their bills. Otherwise they're going to live under the sky, not eating their food or clothing. So we started to do that, and then lots of resources up here. We have VNA, we start to connect the community to VNA services. Housing. That's where it started. People end up thinking – ER is our main hospital. Main clinic. They think ER is the best resource to go, but it's not. After you go to ER you're going to get a big bill. With that barrier, we don't know anything about bills. Even headache or running fever, you go to ER. There was concern – “Why are these people coming to ER instead of –” They find out they don't go to any clinic. That's when the project was started. People sitting on a big bill and get bad credit of it. Today our community is focusing to hire a navigator. Dustin just hired, and now that he's helping me with the technology. I do the translating, getting people to – I do a lot of not just the translating. Today we don't have much people going to ER because we have our diabetic class, and we realize that these people aren't diabetics and don't go to the class, they feel left out. So we change it. We change it, and it's called community education class. Within an hour, we teach them health. In another hour, we teach them the social life. What is important for human resource. What do you have to do, you know. We teach them Western culture. We don't receive any calls from ER saying, “This person came here.” They all know. They know where to go now. We help them with medical – ever since Medicaid went up. We enrolled them to the marketing place.

BC: How has the Marshallese community changed in Dubuque since you've arrived?

IM: Before, no one knows. They don't do a lot. Only few, but they don't share. Some people are selfish, “Just me and myself and my family. Why do I have to help the others?” Some people do that. They don't share it. Big difference is when we got this project. I'm here and there. I'm all over trying to get them resources and trying to help them out. We have a worker. They're now working at the school. I have my daughter working with them. She's volunteering for interpreting and also helping families navigate. We also have a lady working through our project. They call us and we look for another lady that she's now working with the resource of navigating family. Those kinds of kids that are kind of slow. My other daughter she's working with monsoon. Have you heard about the monsoon?

BC: I have, but maybe you could describe it?

IM: Yeah. She's working there with them now. She's the first Marshallese working with monsoon. We got another community so now they're two of them. We're getting people resources.

BC: Monsoon especially supports women from immigrant communities, migrant communities who are dealing with domestic violence.

IM: Domestic, yeah. You know it.

BC: Yeah. So, it sounds like you've been able to expand all these different services to all different ways of supporting people. I'm curious – people from the Federated States, Marshall

Islands, Micronesia, they're not exactly immigrants, right? Not refugees, not asylum seekers. How do you describe that? I imagine there's some confusion when people are looking for work, looking for medical care. Are they undocumented? How do you describe your community?

IM: Well, it's very – there's a lot. The Marshallese are not considered immigrants or refugees. Nor are they considered US citizens along with the people from the Federated States of Micronesia. Known as the Free Associate Nation. They pay taxes. They serve in the US Armed Forces and enjoy freedom of movement through the 50 states. They also basically – they will be denied from the US resources like Medicaid. Now that we have that, it came back to us, it's a big celebration. We hope we can do a rally or something, but due to COVID we cannot do anything.

BC: The privilege or access to Medicaid was offered in 1986 and then 1996 it was removed.

IM: 1996 it was removed, yeah.

BC: Until just a month, two months ago. The US government restored that access to Medicaid, correct? And you were part of advocating for that change for a long time.

IM: I was. I was. Most of the time we drive down to Des Moines just to meet the government people. I have supporters. We have supporters from the organization that they support us. That's the main thing I did. We did a lot of presenting so that I can bring awareness to our culture and so people learn a lot about us. They said they never learn about such things as that.

BC: You were lobbying the Congress to make this change. Then it just passed in December. You were saying you hoped you could have a big celebration.

IM: Yeah! Hope so. During the meeting, due to COVID we were on Zoom. The last Zoom I was with the government was last month just before they approved the Medicaid. I was like, "We need to get back. Get that Medicaid back. All the benefits." Because it's all that matters to us. Nothing else. We were prepared before the COVID hit us. We were prepared. These people would be the easiest people to get the coronavirus and spread it out. Because we are a very sick people. We have lots of chronic. That's why the big concern was prepare for the community because they are a very sick people. They are not in full health. We lost already I would say 35% of coronavirus pass away. They're no longer with us. It was the hardest moment for us. I'm here and there, trying to get all the people access to a city of Dubuque so they can isolate themselves. It was more than that, but I would say 35% of deaths of the community, I would say 75% of them with corona and they're survive.

BC: You were saying that in your culture, it's very common for people to live in large households with many people and generations living together.

IM: Yeah.

BC: I imagine lots of people who have the kind of work where they can't just stay home and work on their computers. They're all out in dangerous workplace settings maybe.

IM: Yep. And I said how can they isolate themselves when under a roof there is 20 people? Can they survive from that? Like myself. I was the first one to have corona and announce it. I got it. I went home. My two sons got it. My back and sides was hurt, and I didn't know it was corona. It's different. My right side was hurt. Second time, it's like I couldn't breathe. Second time they did it, I was working when I got the feeling. I went to see my provider, and I said, "What's going on?" BEcause both my sides, I couldn't breathe. They said, "Just go to lab, and see if you have a kidney infection or something." So I got it. I went to lab and they got blood drawn and whatever they needed. I was sent home. When I go to bed that day, I got sweaty. I woke up because I was running a fever. I know I was having that fever. I woke up in the morning and I came to Crescent. I said, "Hey, can you guys run my temp?" because I was running a fever. They run it, and they say, "You are running a fever. So you go home." I said, "No, I have to get the test." And they ask me, "Where else is pain?" I said, "Just my side." They run the test. They sent me over to quarantine for 14 days. I went home without sending my boys or my husband away. I kept myself isolated. One day announced on radio and news all over, they were running fever, other sites. We wouldn't even believe it that I would get the virus. But then my test was run and came back positive. It affected my husband and two sons. Luckily, my other son and my other daughter, they have their own house. We all isolated in a safe place with corona. But my husband was admitted for almost two, three weeks because he had heart problem. I'm looking back. Before the project was started, and I'm looking back, now the people are knowing to go to doctors. They're used to it now. They're like calling me, "Hey, my appointment is today!" They know. And they do care. Before it was so hard that they'd throw their medication away. They never compliance with their medication. Today they're on it. We prepare for them, for the community because we're six years now, our project. Just imagine when we look back and if we would not establish this project, what would have happened to the community? I'm looking at those people who have heart problems. Chronic disease. They were covered. But those that never come to clinic and come establish? They're the ones who have no chance. I've looked at that, and wow. I'm so grateful that we could help before the corona hit. We were preparing for everyone. That was my big picture here. Look back and say wow.

BC: Even though it's been so devastating with COVID, it sounds like it's such a high percentage of people affected and died, you can imagine it could have been much, much worse without a program like this to help people understand the importance of medical care and feel comfortable and trust and have people like you to help them understand how to get the help they need.

IM: Even when I was sick and isolated at home, people called me. I was very sick, but I realized that they really need help. I couldn't hang up from them. My husband was like, "Are you crazy?"

BC: So you're translating and helping them on the phone.

IM: Yeah, I'm translating.

BC: While you're in quarantine yourself.

IM: Yeah. I also called 911 to get them from their home. I called the shelter so they could be isolated themselves too. I was like, is that real me that I'm doing this? And I realized my heart is poured out for them. I do care about them. And I'm so glad I've got this job. I don't know. If

someone else – it's going to be limited. But myself, it's not limited. I have a home cell phone that they know. When they ever need a phone, they say please don't take the phone home. Otherwise you're gonna call everybody.

BC: You'll be working day and night.

IM: I don't care about the time. As long as I'm there, I'm satisfied with it. They don't know that I have my home personal phone. My husband is looking at me and is like, "Is that my phone or your phone?" "Well, it's your phone, but it's very important." He doesn't have any numbers on it, like his friends, only a few. But I have hundreds of tons of numbers there of the community. I save their numbers. They don't allow me to take the work phone home. They know I will call every night and day. Doesn't matter.

BC: You're obviously such an important leader in that community, and I saw a little while back you had a sculpture in Dubuque with your name. Tell me about that.

IM: Yes. It started, they tried to look for refugees or Marshallese or people from Micronesia. It started from a lantern, because that's where I go and am learning how to type because I don't know how to type or use computer. I took a class so I can learn more English and technology. More about health and the health field. I need more like that. I started since. There's a lady, the leader, manager there. She works there. I forgot her name. She left. She's no longer with us. She was the one who nominate my name. She was the first one to nominate me. "I have a candidate. She's working with Crescent and Mercy. She's a leader. She's a community health worker, and she knows everything. She would be the best nominated." They said, "Okay! We think she would be –" That's when they started the sculpture. I got interviewed. They were nominating no one else buy my name. Mercy nominated myself. The Lantern. Also Crescent. They said, "Well, she would be the best nominate, and we don't want anyone else but her."

BC: Can you describe it? Where's it at? What does it look like?

IM: It's an hour. There's a guy that did it. Let me see, I think I have that. The guy started it. Let me get it.

BC: His name?

IM: His name. Let me find it at my desk. I'm sorry. My desk is so messy.

BC: It's good to move your legs. I don't want you to have swelling.

IM: [Laughs.] Like I said before, too much sodium, too much canned meat when I first got here, but today I'm good.

BC: I'm sure you are. You've taught a lot about how to be healthy.

IM: I don't have that. Maybe I left it.

BC: We can find it later or something. There's this sculpture that you were going to describe it maybe even if you can't remember his name. How would you describe it?

IM: Well, it's something that I like awareness. Lots of people here don't know anything about us. They started to do the culture. Inside the head, it's supposed to be covered. They took picture of myself. This guy stood up – it was up here above my head and he took a picture. I had to stay still, don't move. He took picture all over my head. Way down. It was real picture of me. I was like how did they come up with it? They did it with the wire, and they described my face and everything, and I'm supposed to close my eyes. He said that culture and supposed to be something with my story in it. I would say like a story. The back of the head was going to be a door. There's a door back of my head and you just go in and listen to my story. But then, it's supposed to be 15 or 18 thousand dollars, but they only came up with 10 thousand dollars, so they didn't even cover it all. We didn't make it. It's not that the donor come up with, but only few people know about this Marshallese.

BC: The idea was to help share your story and the story of Marshallese so more people would know.

IM: When we didn't make up that amount, they called people so they could come to the museum so I could do my presenting there. But you're supposed to go in that – there's going to be a door at the back of the head. It was tall. A very big sculpture. It was out there for a year. And they took it.

BC: What has it been like in Dubuque? I know there's a whole history of struggles in Dubuque around diversity, around welcoming people of other races and cultures. Famous history of cross burnings and racism in Dubuque. How has that been for you and Marshallese people?

IM: There's racism, yes of course. Now that we're connecting with all the employees, because they have lots of questions. Why are they getting laid [off]? They're very good workers. I'm connecting with them too, other employees. I bring awareness that under a roof there's only one car. Like I said. Now that they know, they're now hiring more and more Marshallese and Micronesians. Before there was more racism. We know. Now that they're aware, they're very happy with them. Once their group of Marshallese are working, they think – The last report I get is all the Micronesian people are running the place. They're nonstop. They do extra. They don't mind if they do extra. They don't care if they help each other. They're on it. These Micronesian people are totally different.

BC: Hard working. What are some of the main places people work?

IM: Hormel. Another pack meat. The farm where they're making milk, cheese. It's here in Dubuque also. The hotels. Most of the women working as the housekeeping. All the facilities. Nursing. Working in the office like here, only a few of us. Myself, and now Dustin joined. My other daughter, my youngest. And others. Only a few of them. I think 8 work with the school.

BC: Similar to lots of other communities of people who newly migrated to the Midwest. People working in meatpacking, working in hotels. Lots of people, again, who were in very dangerous places during the COVID pandemic. I was going to ask you a little more about as new people arrive or – I was going to ask you about the Midwest and how you describe it. Before your children came when you were telling them about Iowa, what are the things you see as unique

here? How do you describe Iowa to people who are still in the Islands and haven't been to the Midwest before?

IM: They heard about it, and they know. The main thing they're looking at is their health issues. They're wondering if they can come and stay. So, how we do that is once you know that you have your relatives here in Iowa, you can come and stay and live with them. When you get a job, you can be on your own. They're looking at coming to Iowa. We have people moving here every month. Just to get health and a job. Here in Iowa, they know all the employees. They learn a lot about the Marshallese because I'm connecting with them. The Pacific Islanders, we're trying to navigate the community. Now that they [the employees] know everything about us, there's a lot of opening. Before Walmart is packed of Marshallese. Other places. Before it was hard. Now that they know and learn about and are aware of, everywhere you go there's a Marshallese there. Before it was so hard. Now that it's open, the job is open for all the Marshallese, people keep coming here. I have a nephew. He went to Minnesota. He's right there. He said, "I'm having a hard time getting a job. There's no way. The same job I did." I said, "Come back to Dubuque." He thought he was going to go help his uncle. He went so that he could help his uncle. He didn't get a job. The more people know, here in Dubuque, that all the employees here are aware of these Micronesian people, especially Marshallese, all jobs are open. It's like in Arkansas. They know all the people back there. That's why Arkansas is packed with Marshallese. That's the largest Marshallese population there.

BC: There's also a chicken processing there. Lots of people have moved to Arkansas.

IM: They're all over. Kids graduating from college and working in a hospital. They've got good jobs.

BC: I was going to ask, it sounds like there are more and more young people. You said the schools in Dubuque now have a family navigator to help. How do you think that younger generation is maintaining connection to the islands and Marshallese culture? What is that like?

IM: It's also a challenge because most of our generation, I'm afraid, we might lose our culture. Especially our language. Our young kids' generation don't speak Marshallese much. Especially those that are young ages. They don't speak it at all. That's what we're trying to encourage all the parents. Please do not lose our language. Speak Marshallese so when we have more helpers, they can help. Last month we opened the station for another help, but it's got to be a man. I cannot translate for men. It's not comfortable for them. I cannot say something that they would not want me to say when translated. You're recommended to go to the lab. You only can say something about blood. Other than that, no. Yeah. You're not bringing people when you don't feel comfortable about the resource or you're not coming back. We're not trying to chase all men away. I told my boss and others, I said, "If we are hiring another coworker, it's got to be a man." They did it. All the men were excited when they hired the other coworker. They were all excited. Finally.

BC: When you pass along stories, what are the kinds of things you share with your own children and grandchildren, with other young people? What do you share about the Marshall Islands?

IM: I'm also teaching all the children at the church, so I don't speak English. They call me *Bubu*. That's me. *Bubu* means grandma. They go, "Oh, *Bubu!*" Even though I am not their *Bubu*. I'm okay with it. It's pretty normal. I speak Marshallese. I read Marshallese. They say, "Please don't speak Marshallese." I said, "No, it's very important," I always tell them. "In the future, you're going to be like an interpreter. And you're going to help a lot of adult people in my generation." We cannot lose our culture, so I teach them our culture also. That's the only place. We've been looking for some people to gather in the community if we can build up something, a class, so all the children can come and learn. I'm looking forward to do that. I'm trying to do that. I don't know how to get all the pastors. We have 5 pastors here in Dubuque. I'm trying to get, if we can get – they're ready to do that for us. Human Rights started it. They're trying to make sure we don't lose our culture. Because within maybe a few decades from now, we're not going to speak that language anymore.

BC: The church must be such an important place for that cultural sharing to happen.

IM: Yeah. Because that's where everybody goes to. They come to church every Sunday. That's where you're getting lots of people, because they come. I'm hoping if all the pastors can share this.

BC: There must be other important celebrations or holidays with the church and community?

IM: Like Christmas. Those occasions. Christmas, first birthday, wedding. Yeah. Christmas the biggest thing. And Easter. But first birthday is the biggest thing in their life.

BC: For each child?

IM: Each child.

BC: What happens on first birthday celebrations in the church?

IM: People can travel. When it comes to first birthday, they all travel. Come to your birthday. It's a big thing. Sometimes wedding. It's not as big as first birthday. They said the kids that survive – you don't know what it's going to be like. So first year is a big celebration for them.

BC: That's beautiful. I was going to ask you also – one of the things I do, especially now, in my own work is focusing on environmental problems, on climate change. This is one of the reasons I was excited to connect with you and Marshallese in Iowa because I don't think so many people know the story of this community that's moved here. Have you also experienced some of the challenges of climate change in Dubuque? I know there's been lots of flooding and things like that. Have you experienced some of that as well?

IM: Here in Dubuque, it's just the water runs down and you're not going to flow away from. It's not as scary as our island. Our islands, if the tidal waves is on, once it comes, just one tidal wave is going to wipe out everyone. It's already happened to our island. And I've seen it. Here in Dubuque, it's totally different because just the rain and water. I've never gotten close to the river. It's also kind of dangerous. It's pretty normal to us. We've seen it. The scariest thing is when the waves wash you away, and all the plants die from the salt water. Here in Dubuque, we feel safe.

We're safe because we know there is nothing that's going to be happen. Unless if we have hurricane. Then it's dangerous too. We're also safe because we're around a lot of resources and we have a lot of help. It's not very scary for us.

BC: Yeah.

IM: Yeah.

BC: I didn't know some places in Iowa had lots of flooding in the streets and different parts of town, and Dubuque is so close to the river there. I didn't know how much.

IM: When I was in Marshall Island and I saw a hurricane was announced, we were very scared. There's no place to go. Our house is not strong as the buildings here. We're living in a big building, and we know they're built up very strong. But our house, we build it. We didn't learn how to build but we built it anyway. Everyone comes and helps. There's no place to go. There's no underground safe place. We, of course, were very scared. When we come here, it's totally different. We know we can be dependable on someone else, the government. We know that we're going to be safe. It's not as scary as at home. Home is more scary.

BC: That must be hard to feel that way about home. Home is usually a place people think of as safe and comfortable. But, yeah. That must be hard.

IM: Here we have basements that we can go down and hide. But home? No, we don't. I remember when we had a hurricane. I was so young. That was the last time that I know about the hurricane. My mom and dad took us to a court. That's the only concrete place. It's a big building. It's a small building as if you come and see it, but to us it's a big building and strong. We have first, second floor. No bathroom. People get sick or sicker because no bathroom. We were there for a long time because of the hurricane. Two days, I remember. We have no place to go. People lined up and no electricity. It's bad for people. If you lay down, you're not going to move the other way. It was a hurricane. It was scary. Wind blowing with rains and waves come out. That was the scariest moment. I experienced it. I never want to come here. There's no place to go. We have no place to go. Those people, they check our house, and if they know it's not safe, whoever goes in first will be the first person to stay in the building. But if you come late to the building, then you're going to have to go back to your house because no one has a place to go. I guess we were the first family. Those families that went in first. That we had to stay in the big building. The concrete building. Every building was built – tin, the roof was dangerous too because it's not a safe roof. They made the room out of tin. So we had to go to court. It's concrete. The roof, and everywhere. We thought it's a safe place. I feel sorry for the rest. They had to go home because they came late. The place was already packed. They're not late, but those people that came by and it was already full. The place was already full.

BC: The storm was already coming. It sounds like now you are helping create a safe place here for people who need a place they can come with a strong community of support and resources. Is there anything else you wanted to share about your story of the story of your community in Dubuque?

IM: I think you will create whatever, and you know better than I am. I'm jumping here and there because I'm very excited.

BC: Me too.

IM: I think our community is now well-known. Our culture, we learn a lot of western culture. They also now learn a lot from us. That's the main thing I always tell them. When we moved here, our story was kind of funny, because when it snowed, everyone wore a muumuu. All the women. Because it's our culture. We don't wear pants. That's the way it is. We can't wear pants right in front of men or our brothers. We're used to it. When we come here, I saw people wearing muumuu, women wearing muumuu. Skirt and muumuu dress, and then flip flops. Now that they're aware, that's the most important thing we share. Now all the women know what to do. They wear warm clothes, coats on, their hats, their gloves. Some of them I think we can't change their attitude, but I always remind them to please wear warm clothes. Something I would say is when they come to their health issue, they're improving. I'm talking about those that they have like diabetes. Now they're compliance with their medication. They're on it. Before when we started the project, mostly I got maybe 5, 10% coming to their appointments. Most missed their appointments. It goes on and on. We started the class, and now people realize it's really important. I don't get much calls from ER. That's a main thing. I'm very excited that people are knowing what to do with their health. I make phone calls and reminding to schedule and make sure their on it, and due to COVID, I miss how I go out there and visit. Home visit is the main things. Three times a week a visit. I know my list. Those that just establish. I know that there is a lot of barrier dealing with their meters and their medication. I visit them. I visit them and make sure, "Oh, how's your machine, and how's your—" From there, now they're going to get used to it and now they know. Those people that just moved here, members of family called. They call me anytime. They say, "Hey, Irene, did you know that blah blah blah came in? They were from Marshall Island. They're here. They're wondering if you can help them." "Oh, of course! Of course!" So, I started when I come to work. I just try to establish them as our new patient. From there, I start from there. Then with the copays, I help them. Our project helps them with the copays. That's another barrier. Their medication, we're using 340B. You provide your check stubs, and they will waive you. You just come in. No bills. Just the copays, and we take care of the copays. We do a lot of passport for now. I'm working on the passport renew. So they can establish. We can enroll them with Medicaid. There's more coming. My schedule to do the passport is open, and I'm looking for 15 passports a month. Each passport cost \$150. We do all the fees. You take care of the picture. Photo. Then we take care of it. Now we just opened our schedule so I just posted on Tristate the Marshallese. Whoever doesn't have any insurance, we're available. Just call us and we'll set it up for you. I think that's all the stories.

BC: That's such a great program. I'm glad to learn more about Crescent and about your work there, and about your story. Thank you for taking the time to share with me. I'll be in touch. I'll be editing a little bit. I'll have to condense it and make it a little smaller.

IM: [Laughs.] You do that.