

# UC Santa Cruz

## Oral History Collaborations

### Title

Mariano "Mario" Tolodro Sulay interviewed by Dr. Kathleen "Kat" Cruz Gutierrez

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## Mariano “Mario” Telodro Sulay interviewed by Dr. Kathleen “Kat” Cruz Gutierrez

**Speakers:** Mariano “Mario” Telodro Sulay and Dr. Kathleen “Kat” Cruz Gutierrez

**Date:** June 17, 2020

**Scope and Contents:** In this interview, originally recorded via Zoom, Mariano Sulay speaks with Dr. Kathleen "Kat" Cruz Gutierrez, a member of the Watsonville is in the Heart project team. Sulay recounts his experience growing up in the Pajaro Valley after the 1960s. Sulay recounts memories of his father at the end of his career as an agricultural worker. In addition, he shares memories of his mother's engagement in social clubs such as the Filipino Community and the decline of her involvement later in life. He also discusses his experience growing up as a mixed-race Filipino and learning about the Watsonville Riots later in his life.

**Mariano Sulay 00:01**

My full name is Mariano Telodro Sulay.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 00:05**

Nice and can you repeat your middle name for me?

**Mariano Sulay 00:08**

Telodro.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 00:09**

Telodro, where does Telodro come from?

**Mariano Sulay 00:11**

I don't know, I really don't know. [laughs]

**Kathleen Gutierrez 00:15**

Oh wow!

**Mariano Sulay 00:16**

Back there a lot of times, I've had to double check my birth certificate just to make sure I spell it right. In documents that we've had to use or whatnot.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 00:25**

And is—

**Mariano Sulay** 00:26

I don't use it much.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 00:27

And is Telodro spelled T-O-L-O-D-R O?

**Mariano Sulay** 00:33

T-E-L-O-D-R-O.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 00:34

Telodro, nice! Uhm, and—

**Mariano Sulay** 00:37

I don't know the origin of that name at all.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 00:41

[laughs] And Mario, can you please share your birthday?

**Mariano Sulay** 00:45

December 3, 1961.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 00:47

December 3, 1961. Great. So can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Were you born in Watsonville?

**Mariano Sulay** 00:54

I was. I was born in Watsonville. I was the last of a family of six. I have two older sisters. I had—I have two older sisters. I had three older brothers, one has since passed away. And the interesting aspect was is that between myself and my oldest sister there's a twenty year difference, my older sister Juanita. Between myself and my next youngest sibling, my brother Bert, there's ten years. So there was a ten year gap between the initial five siblings and then me. So I was kind of the baby and almost had two mothers: my own mother and then my sister Juanita.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 01:45

I see, I see. So you found that your sister Juanita also partially raised you?

**Mariano Sulay** 01:51

Oh, yeah, yeah, she was like a second mother.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 01:54

Uhm, could you share the names then of your older siblings?

**Mariano Sulay** 01:59

I have Juanita and Manzanita are my sisters. Sonny—his actual name is Mamerto—similar to my dad's name but I think it was spelt a little differently. And then Cristino and Alberto are my brothers.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 02:18

And then finally Mariano.

**Mariano Sulay** 02:20

Yes.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 02:21

Nice. And so you were born in Watsonville?

**Mariano Sulay** 02:26

Born in Watsonville. Lived just about my entire life here in Watsonville.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 02:30

Okay, until what age did you live in Watsonville?

**Mariano Sulay** 02:36

Let's see, three years ago—so about until fifty-six.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 02:39

Oh my gosh.

**Mariano Sulay** 02:40

Fifty-six years old. So I'd say this is our third year here in Oregon so.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 02:45

And so you've been living in Watsonville the entire time?

**Mariano Sulay** 02:48

Just about. There's we—when I first got married, Becky and I we lived in Aptos for a while. But other than that Watsonville was home.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 03:03

Amazing, amazing. I'd love to ask you some questions about your parents and so what were the names of your parents?

**Mariano Sulay** 03:12

My Mom is Virginia Viner Sulay and then my Dad was Mamerto Sulay.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 03:19

Do you know how they met?

**Mariano Sulay** 03:23

I don't know how they met. I do not know that story.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 03:30

Oh, that's fascinating. I mean I love it too because you and Juanita sort of have different takes on that, their meeting. I know that maybe Juanita has shared a little bit about when they met. I think she even shared yesterday during the panel how he was told to get married already because he was getting in trouble. Yeah.

**Mariano Sulay** 03:50

I'd say that was educational for me as well.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 03:53

Oh, how exciting—well, that's good. Good. I'm glad. Can you tell me a little bit though about where your parents are from?

**Mariano Sulay** 04:01

Well, I know my Mom was born—I believe she was born here in Oregon, actually. And my Dad immigrated from the Philippines where that, you know—he came from the Philippines and he came to California via Hawai'i where he spent first couple of years outside of the Philippines. And I know my Mom, her parents came from back east in the main area and traveled the United States. How they came to meeting I'm not sure how they actually met. But—I don't know how they—and I don't know how they came to Watsonville.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 04:55

Yeah, I'm glad that part of this, you know, I'm sure Juanita would be happy to share her oral history interview with you too. If you ever want to get—

**Mariano Sulay** 05:03

I know she's done a lot of work in genealogy, putting those binders together of our family history.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 05:10

Which has been incredible, we've scanned seven of them. [laughs]

**Mariano Sulay** 05:15

Wow.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 05:17

And I don't think that's everything so it's been really great. Well, maybe you could walk me through then growing up in Watsonville. What was that like for you as a child?

**Mariano Sulay** 05:28

I thought it was, to me, it was very—I had a very good childhood growing up in Watsonville. Watsonville was a small town at the time, I think it was around 20,000 people. I went to school at T.S MacQuiddy Elementary School on Martinelli [street]. Then Rolling Hills Junior High and then Watsonville High School, graduated there in 1980.

**Mariano Sulay** 05:59

But, you know, I remember as a kid with the neighborhood kids we would just ride our bikes everywhere. I would ride my bike to little league practice. I'd ride my bike to anywhere we had to go, or walk. It was just a small town and there wasn't a whole lot of things that really prohibited us from doing a lot of things. It wasn't the crime and stuff that, you know, is kind of—like any other city that grows, that starts growing— you start getting a little bit more crime. You start knowing your neighbors less and whatnot. But I thought it was a great, great childhood. It wasn't—like I said before, being so far from my main brothers and sisters, I was brought up almost like an only child.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 06:53

Hmm. Can you talk a little bit about that growing up almost like an only child? Is it because of the age difference?

**Mariano Sulay** 07:00

Um-hm.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 07:02

I see.

**Mariano Sulay** 07:04

I have vague memories of my two brothers who—they're ten and eleven years older—ten and twelve years older than I am. As you know, they were teenagers, obviously, when I was being brought up and they did like to tease me quite a bit. And then my older brother, Sonny, when he was home from the Navy or whatnot, he would always kind of be my protector from them, because they're there. They would tease me just a little bit. You know, it wasn't long before they were—they themselves were old enough and had moved out of the house where there was just myself and my Mom and Dad at the house.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 07:51

Got it. What was it like having pretty much the house to yourself and your mom and dad? Or were your mom and dad around pretty often by the time you were growing up?

**Mariano Sulay** 08:00

Yeah, I mean, my Dad he was working the fields a lot and still following the lettuce crops. So there would be times where he's away in Arizona or other parts of the state where the harvesting lettuce was occurring. So there are times where he was gone. But other than that—and I was, and I was kind of like a tagalong with my Mom all the time. She was very active in the Filipino community and I remember as a kid, I'd be going with her to the Woman's Club meetings all the time. I don't know how much of the pest I was or if I just found a quiet place and slept or what have you. But I do remember spending a lot of time with her and going visiting other community members.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 08:54

What was it like at the Women's Club meetings? What were the activities that you can remember happening?

**Mariano Sulay** 09:00

I just remember a group of ladies always getting together. I think my Mom at one point was secretary where she was taking notes and they're just doing a lot of talking and that's—that's about all I know.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 09:15

[laughs]

**Mariano Sulay 09:16**

These are vague recollections.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 09:18**

Oh sure, sure. Were there special events that they would also get up to?

**Mariano Sulay 09:24**

Oh yeah. I mean, I remember going to the Filipino dances all the time at the Vet's Hall because my Mom being an active part of the community at the time, you know, she was helping organizing the dances and stuff like that. I remember, even at home, if they had a special theme for the dance have to make leis or something. Stuff like that. So—

**Kathleen Gutierrez 09:50**

Would you help in those activities?

**Mariano Sulay 09:53**

I'm sorry, what?

**Kathleen Gutierrez 09:53**

Would you help in those activities too?

**Mariano Sulay 09:56**

Sure, I mean they were kind of fun activities.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 09:59**

Yeah. Good, nice. And so I know that your mother is—was—Caucasian. And so what did you observe? I mean, were there other Caucasian mothers who were part of the Filipino Women's Association? Were there other ethnic groups represented?

**Mariano Sulay 10:15**

No. Not that I recall. I recall pretty much that Mom was kind of the stand-out there. Everybody else was Filipino.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 10:32**

Why do you think she was so invested in the Filipino Women's organization?

**Mariano Sulay 10:36**

I think because, you know, obviously she was married to a Filipino man and her kids were Filipino. And I think she saw the value in ensuring that her kids had exposure to the Filipino



community. And I do remember a vibrant Filipino community when I was a kid. I remember these dances all the time, like I said, and going to the big picnics up Bolado Park in Hollister. And even at the Monterey County Fairgrounds. And as a kid I really enjoyed it. I had fun. I'd meet the other families who had also young kids like the Ragsacs and the Nabors and stuff. And we kind of create care there at the Vet's Hall sometimes. Just being kids, running around.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 11:33

Yeah. I'd love to hear more about these dances. As you probably observed during yesterday's panel, people were curious about the music and the songs of that generation, specifically of your parents. Do you remember any of the music or any if there was any live music?

**Mariano Sulay** 11:49

Oh, yeah, they had an orchestra playing music. But I don't—it wasn't Filipino origin or anything. I think it was more like ballroom kind of dancing music that they would play. It was an all Filipino band, I remember. I remember I used to, as it'd get late, I'd fall asleep behind the drummer. I don't know why I remember that. But there's benches back there and I'd find a place back there to sleep. Until all of a sudden my Mom's waking me up, it's time to go home.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 12:21

Oh, how busy would these dances be? I mean how many people are we maybe talking about here?

**Mariano Sulay** 12:27

I remember being quite quite crowded. The Vet's Hall there in Watsonville it's kind of a two storey building and many of the dances are on the top, on the top floor. And then it had stairs coming down to the bottom and then there was a bar area where a lot of the older gentlemen would go and, you know, have a beverage before they come up and participate in the dance. But I remember them being pretty crowded.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 13:00

Oh neat. So there—so you're saying there are two floors to the venue?

**Mariano Sulay** 13:05

Yeah, yeah. The bottom floor was the main, I guess you call it, a auditorium with a big stage and stuff. And the top floor is a little smaller venue more of a dance area, or just an open area, I guess. That's where they would set up the band and then have the dances. My Mom most of the time would be at the door collecting the entry fees or what have you or donations—I don't know what they were—for the community.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 13:44

Nice! And then so you're also saying that there were a lot of picnics also up in Hollister, What were those like?

**Mariano Sulay** 13:53

For us kids, I mean, it was a blast because we always got to go swimming. They had big swimming pool there. So, you know, we had a large group with in the picnic area with food and everything and some of the food was the best foods that I remember. And then always had swimming and big play area there and it's just great to be a kid and running around an area like that and having fun.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 14:19

How many families do you suspect were there? Or estimate were there, rather?

**Mariano Sulay** 14:27

Geez, I don't know that could give you one I just—you know, again, as a kid we're off you find the quickest playmate and you're off playing and doing stuff.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 14:41

Do you remember what the adults were up to though, while you were playing?

**Mariano Sulay** 14:46

Nope.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 14:46

[laughs]

**Mariano Sulay** 14:47

No. Other than me bugging my Mom if we could go swimming yet. That's about it.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 14:55

Yeah. Yeah. I'd love, though, if you could tell me a little bit about the food at the picnic since you said it was so good: what kinds of foods would they serve?

**Mariano Sulay** 15:06

You know, there were things like—now you're going to really see the child in me because a lot of it is all about the pastry. The biko, the bibingkas, the lumpias. There's always rice and other other type dishes to put on the rice. But I couldn't tell you what all those dishes were and even

to this day I don't know the names of dishes. [laughs] But I do remember barbecue—barbecue chicken, you know, the barbecues and the barbecued meats.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 15:51**

Yeah. And so I remember also from my interview with Paul DeOcampo him mentioning that there were races that he was able to attend when he was growing up, as well. I don't know if he ever attended a cockfight, I'm trying to recall. Did you ever go to the races or go to—oh he went to wrestling, that's what he went to in San Francisco. But are there other activities like that for you for as a pastime?

**Mariano Sulay 16:18**

Oh, yeah. But well, my Dad raised fighting cocks in our backyard. We had fighting cocks. We had some coops that he had built back there. And I remember that every once in while his friends would bring some of their roosters over and they'd do like just sparring. You know, getting them ready. That really let them engage, but just teasing them, letting them get within close proximity of each other and stuff like that. I have a vague recollection as a small kid being at a ranch where a cock fight was occurring. Because I remember some, some dead—some dead roosters. I don't know that I had an understanding of it, but I have that vague recollection.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 17:13**

Got it. Wow.

**Mariano Sulay 17:15**

I know my brothers and sisters talk about picnics. What they call—what they called picnics or "Sunday picnics," where they—they were actually cockfights that they went to. But I don't have any clear recollection of that.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 17:29**

Um-hm. Um-hm. I'd love to maybe take a step back then and maybe go to the neighborhood where you grew up. Uhm, do you remember the address where you grew up?

**Mariano Sulay 17:38**

28 Broadis Street. It's still, my brother still or—my brother still lives there.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 17:45**

Okay, which brother?

**Mariano Sulay 17:46**

Still in the family.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 17:49**

And which brother has the house now?

**Mariano Sulay 17:51**

Cristino.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 17:52**

Oh, Cristino. Who were your neighbors growing up?

**Mariano Sulay 17:57**

We had the Bertonis, the Lopezes. The Curtises were the people I really know about because they all had kids my age, or about my age. We played together as a group. And then there was the Curt—the Stanleys. I think they had kids that were more my brother's age because they knew them more than I did. The Rackleys . . . yeah, it was a small little street but it was, it was a good neighborhood. We, you know, we'd play ball in the street because it wasn't a very heavily traveled street. It like was just one block long. So—

**Kathleen Gutierrez 18:44**

Was it—Oh, excuse me, sorry. Was it mostly a residential area? Were there nearby—

**Mariano Sulay 18:49**

Um-hm!

**Kathleen Gutierrez 18:50**

—parks? Okay.

**Mariano Sulay 18:51**

No, there was a what we call "Boy Scout Park"—its called Alvarado Park—which is a couple of blocks away that we we'd go to in play as well. But, you know, most of the time we just played on our street or in each other's backyards. They all had yards that were large. They're done a lot—done a lot. So you had a large yard to be in back, or to be in as well.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 19:17**

And was the community that you specifically grew up in or around Broadis Street, predominantly Filipino?

**Mariano Sulay 19:23**

No. No, I—other than going to Filipino functions I really didn't see a lot of Filipinos out and about. Other than, you know, we'd spent a lot of time going to the Philippine Gardens. Rosing Tabasa had a restaurant when it was on Second Street before it burned down. And I remember as a kid, because there's a barber shop right next to it. And I'd go in, get a haircut and then we'd go to the Philippine Gardens and have dinner, or whatever meal happened to be at that time. You know, I was some of the—I still remember the pork adobo there. Because it's different than the pork adobo like even my wife makes now. She—although she's white—she does cook Filipino recipes. It was more of a red sauce pork adobo than uhm, I guess you'd call a "natural sauce." A vinegar sauce. But it was really good. I remember the pancit from there, it was so good.

**Mariano Sulay** 19:40

Growing up and having that and other—going to specific Filipino areas. Like my neighborhood, there's no other Filipinos in my neighborhood. When I went to elementary school at MacQuiddy, I don't have, I don't remember any other Filipinos there. So yeah, like I say, other than going to specific Filipino functions or visiting with my Mom other Filipino families, having interaction, just open interaction within the community.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 21:11

I see. I see. And I remember you mentioning right before we started that, by the time you were growing up, the community started kind of thinning out; the Filipino community in particular. And maybe the racial or ethnic composition of the city was also changing with that. Would you say that that's—that was the case?

**Mariano Sulay** 21:30

Well, you know, it could. It could also be my perception. Because maybe as my parents got older, my Mom specifically; because even when as a kid, growing up, I don't remember my Dad being so active in the Filipino community as my Mom was. I know he belonged to the lodge and stuff like that. But I think, by the time I came around, I think he was phasing out of that or whatever, for whatever reason. But my Mom was still active. And but maybe as she got older, she became less active too. And then as I stopped becoming that kid that went around with her all the time—

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 22:16

Right,

**Mariano Sulay** 22:17

—so I stopped getting exposed to it, too.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 22:20**

I mean, yeah, I would understand that too. Which makes plenty of sense. And, you know, I'm curious, because I know that for Juanita, she felt like she grew up around quite a number of the uncles or other manong like your dad. Was that the case for you as well?

**Mariano Sulay 22:38**

No. No. I mean, they were the main, like Uncle Johnny and Aunt Vera. I think they were the closest to my parents, friend wise and stuff. And I think, uhm, really maintain contact there. Other than that, once we stopped going to the dances and stuff; and I don't know how old I was then. I would have to guess probably junior high school, high school age. Really even lost touch with a lot of them. And I do remember, like, brief touching some of them, like the Ragsacs and stuff, in high school once we got to Watsonville High School. But other than that . . . yeah, just kind of, kind of drift, drifted—drifted away, I guess.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 23:38**

Yeah and I think by the time that you were coming of age that the generation of manongs would have been much older, I feel like. Yeah, the one that Juanita was maybe seeing when she was coming of age and growing up, too.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 23:51**

I'd love to ask a few more questions actually maybe more about your dad in that respect. What did he do specifically?

**Mariano Sulay 23:58**

What do you mean? What—

**Kathleen Gutierrez 23:59**

For work.

**Mariano Sulay 24:00**

—as far—Oh, he was field laborer. Worked his whole life in the fields. And I do remember as a kid getting to—I had on occasion get up with him in the morning and go to the fields with him in the morning. And remember me going with him to make—getting the [unknown] to take to the fields. Doing my part to—I'm sure I was more in the way than anything else. But trying to carry a stack of boxes down the rows for the—so that they could be packed. Being by the box truck; the truck that had a big stapler on it and all the cardboard where they pulled up the boxes, actually staple up the boxes, and they throw them up the truck. And then the stackers, or the box stackers, would get a—form a stack of boxes to carry down the rows so that they could be packed. And I remember trying to carry three at a time whereas everybody else is carrying like

ten. Or there's a big ol' stack and I was trying to show that I was strong and maybe carry two or three at a time. But I do remember that.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 25:18**

Oh, wow. Do you remember the name of the farms that he worked on?

**Mariano Sulay 25:24**

I know he worked for a Dobler Brothers. I couldn't tell you. It's the only ones that kind of sticks to mind because I went to school with a son, Michael Dobler. I went to school with him. And maybe that's why I remember that name.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 25:44**

Right. And did he travel for work, your father? Was he also kind of migrating through California during the seasons?

**Mariano Sulay 25:51**

Yeah, there were times when he would be away for a few months.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 25:55**

Did you ever join him?

**Mariano Sulay 25:56**

No. I do remember my Mom taking us down. We'd visit like down to Yuma, Arizona. Or to Brentwood, that place sticks out in mind. And, you know, we'd spent a week there or something then come back home.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 26:17**

What would you do when you visited him?

**Mariano Sulay 26:20**

Don't remember. [laughs] I was just small and, yeah, I couldn't tell you.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 26:28**

So you were very young.

**Mariano Sulay 26:30**

Yeah.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 26:31**

You know, I'd love to ask—I don't think I asked this of Juanita—but do you remember what your dad wore when he was working?

**Mariano Sulay 26:38**

That. Or tan shirt, tan pants, boots. And I remember those orange rubber gloves. They're thick, really thick rubber orange gloves that my Mom would always go by for him. He'd wear those when handling the lettuce. And his lettuce knife, of course; he always had that. I remember watching as a kid during the lunch break. And they use—they didn't have any silverware out there—they'd just use their lettuce knife to eat off of. And those sharp. Those are strap knives. But that sticks out for, for whatever reason, just watching my Dad eat off his knife.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 27:28**

Yeah. So you said that you'd pick up donut sometimes or when you were headed out into the fields, what would he have for lunch? Or for his break?

**Mariano Sulay 27:38**

He will always have a rice pack with whatever my Mom had made. Usually from the night before and, leftovers. Yeah.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 27:50**

Cute. And how frequently would he take you to the fields with him?

**Mariano Sulay 27:55**

I'm sure it wasn't all that much. Like I say, I probably got in the way more than I did helping anything. But it was, you know, I had fun when I was there.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 28:11**

Do you remember, at all, you know—and this is what I'm curious about because I know Paul had actually sort of a memory of this. Because in the '60s, you would have been young when a lot of the labor organizing was happening in the California fields, especially with the growth of the United Farm Workers. Do you have any recollection of that union organizing?

**Mariano Sulay 28:34**

Yeah. My recollection is I don't think my—I don't think my my dad was a fan of Cesar Chavez. [pause] He was not a fan of that. Or I guess he didn't take that side, I don't know.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 28:50**

Oh, how did you know that he wasn't a fan?



**Mariano Sulay 28:53**

Just the way that my Mom had talked about him mostly. I remember, there was a period when they were boycotting grapes that we never—we bought grapes. [laughs] So that was my impression: that he was not a fan of the labor organization.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 29:17**

Why do you think that was?

**Mariano Sulay 29:19**

I don't know. I don't know. It's kind of interesting.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 29:25**

Yeah, I mean, I think there, at least in the history, there were a lot of different perspectives on the growth of the labor organizing. And then there were also Filipino organizers who joined in quite prominently. And then many others, you're right, that didn't really decide to join alongside.

**Mariano Sulay 29:43**

Yeah.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 29:45**

Yeah and I think Paul's father was someone who also tried to sort of abstain from the union work.

**Mariano Sulay 29:52**

Yeah.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 29:53**

How interesting. Did these conversations come up at all, like, when you were at home? Or just sort in passing? I mean, obviously, sometimes your family bought grapes during the calls for the strikes, or the boycott.

**Mariano Sulay 30:07**

No. I want to say it was: my news comes on the TV and maybe I asked the question which prompted an answer that—oh, okay. Not a fan of Cesar Chavez.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 30:24**

Got it.

**Mariano Sulay 30:27**

I don't know if it was the person or just the organization effort that was not a fan of.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 30:33**

Right. Right. I, you know, I'm feeling inclined to then maybe ask a little bit about, you know—because I would say that the the union organizing in the Central Valley and Central Coast were huge especially in the agricultural fields. And obviously, so much of the work that we're doing is to try to broaden Watsonville history. Because what we mostly know of that time, or that location, in Filipino history is the Watsonville riots. And so, was that something that you did—was discussed in the home when you were growing up?

**Mariano Sulay 31:06**

I mean, the ones from the '30s?

**Kathleen Gutierrez 31:07**

Um-hm.

**Mariano Sulay 31:11**

It was never discussed. When I was growing up I knew nothing about it. Until my sister. And I don't know what prompted her to show me these articles that—she had these archived newspaper clippings that she has documenting the Watsonville riots and I couldn't believe that that actually happened in Watsonville. That was—that was a surprise to me. I had no, no clue that it had occurred.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 31:41**

Right, and what exactly was so surprising?

**Mariano Sulay 31:45**

That there was that, that prejudice against—against the Filipinos. I never experienced it myself as a, as a kid—as a child being brought up in Watsonville. But there is one interesting story that—yeah maybe this is what prompted Juanita to give me this back history on—it is when my wife and I, we bought our first property condo in Watsonville. At Bailey Properties in the real estate office. We went back in the office to sign papers, you know, like you normally do when you're purchasing a house, and they had this really large wall. Kind of plot map of the city of Watsonville. It had all the different plots, all the streets and everything else. And they had a beef in the '40s or '50s, I guess it was. And I look at 28 Broadis Street. There it was and they had my Mom's initials on it: "V-A-Sulay," for the owner. I thought that was strange. I go—I go, "Why's Mom's money, why do they have mom's name on it?" I think I asked Juan—I mentioned it to Juanita and she goes, "Oh, yeah, because Dad is a Filipino." He couldn't own property. So

they had to put the—when they bought the house, they had to put it in her name. So, and I didn't realize that.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 33:19**

Hmm. Yeah, yeah. You know, and Juanita too shared some information on how, yeah, there were parts of towns where you just, you knew like this was sort of the Filipino quarter and where Filipinos hung out and you didn't really quite go to other parts of town. And sounds like maybe that experience was different for you? By the time you were growing up.

**Mariano Sulay 33:40**

And again, the only Filipino part of town that I was aware of was Rosing Tabasa's restaurant, you know? I didn't know of any other Filipino businesses or anything like that. Just the restaurant and the barbershop. As a Filipino we're in barber shops.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 34:06**

Yeah. And so, when you were growing up, you felt like you could go around Watsonville safely?

**Mariano Sulay 34:13**

Yeah. And no, as I say, we used to ride our bikes all the time. Or we'd walk from our house to Cabrillo lane, the bowling alley, which was quite a distance away for kids, but it was alright. We never had any issues walking around town.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 34:32**

And you know, I'd love to kind of expand more on that, too. I mean, you grew up mixed-race Filipino. Mother's Caucasian, father's Ilokano, correct? What was that like for you growing up as a mixed race child?

**Mariano Sulay 34:47**

Didn't know anything. I didn't know that that set me apart from anybody else, I guess. You know, I had no—I think one thing that set me apart that I remember having some conscious knowledge of was that my parents seemed older than everybody else. My parents seem to be the age of my contemporaries' grandparents. So that, I think maybe that was, that was the only conscious thing that I go—that made me somewhat different than everybody else.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 35:23**

I see. How old were your parents by the time they had you?

**Mariano Sulay 35:28**

Let's see, my Mom was born in 1922. I was born in '61. So forty, forty-one years old. My Dad was born in 1907. So that made him, what? Do that. Do the math on that one.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 35:46**

It made him older. It made him older.

**Mariano Sulay 35:48**

Made him in what, late fifties? Sixties? Maybe sixty by then—late fifties. He was born in [19]07. Sixty-one . . . fifty-six?

**Kathleen Gutierrez 36:05**

About yeah, fifty-four, fifty-five, yeah! Older parents, my parents were similar. My mom was forty-four, my dad was fifty-five when they had me. And so, you felt like that was kind of what differentiated you from the kids that you were growing up around? Because you had older parents?

**Mariano Sulay 36:22**

Yes.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 36:23**

I see.

**Mariano Sulay 36:24**

Parents that, like I say, that are the same age—or close to age—as my contemporaries' grandparents.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 36:32**

I see. Did children make commentary about that?

**Mariano Sulay 36:36**

No, no. No, that wasn't, you know, like I say, I wasn't ostracized or anything like that, or I never felt ostracized. Growing up, you know, we went to Filipino functions. We had—I had fun playing with kids that were there. When I was in the neighborhood we used to have fun with kids in our neighborhood. There's never seem to be any, any racial bias, or anything that I was aware of.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 36:41**

I see, I see it. That's, I mean—and what a gift of an experience to have that sense of belonging around you, right?

**Mariano Sulay 37:21**

Um-hm.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 37:23**

Can I ask then if there were any experiences in your coming of age, or after in Watsonville where [sighs] maybe there were—there was tension? If it—if it was racial or otherwise that kind of came up in your experience?

**Mariano Sulay 37:45**

No, I mean, I think being brought up like the same. My Father was a field laborer all his life and my Mom had odd jobs here and there, you know. She worked in as a, as a—as a maid cleaning beach houses at Pajaro Dunes or at the Resetar Hotel. She worked at a maid—as a maid there. So there wasn't a lot of money that we had. It was basically from check to check and I—so, you know. And there were lean times on that. And that would be about the only thing that, that I thought was—would cause some sort of tension.

**Mariano Sulay 38:44**

And then my Mom and my Father, they didn't have a traditional—by the time I came around they were not, uhm—[pauses] living as a couple anymore, I guess, so to speak. And there was always, you know, there's always tension between them. And my Dad was a person that had a very hard temper. And, I mean, there were times I remember being afraid that I'd hear my Dad's truck coming. You know, whether he's coming home from work or from fishing or something. Maybe I'm still in bed, "Oh, I gotta get up before Dad catches me in bed," or something like that. So there was that there. They didn't have a great relationship. So.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 39:41**

Yeah.

**Mariano Sulay 39:41**

Yeah.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 39:42**

Did, uhm, you said that they were pretty much living separately by that time, but they were under the same roof? Oh—[silence, first part of Mariano's response not recorded]

**Mariano Sulay 40:11**

—that plan so we ended up moving back to Watsonville. And after that I do recall that my Dad's temper seem to subside, a little bit at least. He became a more—he became more mellow.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 40:38

I see. And, you know, I had to turn off my camera because I think the internet connection was getting a little bit spotty. And so I only caught you when you came back to Watsonville. Mario, would you mind [laughs] restating what you just shared? Gosh.

**Mariano Sulay** 40:53

Yeah. I think I, this was my—I was in junior high. Seventh grade, I think. And when I remember my Mom, she had the car all packed. Put me in the car and said, "We're leaving." So we did. And I think it was only for about three months because things didn't work out as she had hoped they would work out. And we ended up coming back to Watsonville. But it took a while once we did come back to Watsonville that we actually moved back in with my Dad. We lived elsewhere for—[pause in capturing Mariano's audio]

**Mariano Sulay** 41:46

—are short moving back into the house.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 41:48

I see. And where did she take you for that three months? That three months stretch of time?

**Mariano Sulay** 41:54

Pacifica, just outside of San Francisco

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 41:56

I see. Did—were you living with her friends?

**Mariano Sulay** 41:59

Yes.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 42:00

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, thank you for sharing that, you know, and the struggles at home which are real and experienced and very lived, as well. And so did they—you said that your father's tempers sort of subsided a little after that point, and they continue to live under the same roof through your, through your childhood and adolescence—[Kathleen's audio cuts off; silence]

**Mariano Sulay** 42:36

Are you still there?

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 42:37

Oh, here we are. Oh, no! I don't know where it cut off. But what I had kind of clarified was that, like you had said, his anger subsided a bit by the time that she came back and they continue to live together under the same roof.

**Mariano Sulay** 42:55

Yes. Yeah they did. And she would still get up at the crack of dawn. Make sure there was coffee or breakfast before either went to work. At that time maybe he wasn't working. No, he was. I think he was. He was—he was still working a little bit in the fields. Or if he went fishing because if he wasn't working, he would go fishing.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 43:25

So fishing was his pastime in addition to cockfighting.

**Mariano Sulay** 43:29

Yeah, cockfighting was basically out of the picture by then.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 43:32

I see.

**Mariano Sulay** 43:34

Roosters are no longer in the backyard and the coops had been turned into a green house where he's growing vegetables and whatnot.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 43:43

I see. I'd love it if you could tell me a little bit more, too, of just about both your parents personalities and what you felt like they were like as people. Like who was your dad? How would you describe him?

**Mariano Sulay** 43:54

I'd describe him as kind of [pause] I'd describe him as, number one, hard working. Is he—that's all he would do. I think he had a very strong work ethic as far as I knew him. I knew he had a temper and could be very mean when he was angered. And that he was, I would say, he was a much better Grandfather than he ever was a Father. Because once we had—once Becky and I had kids, he was much more openly affectionate towards them as kids as I felt he was towards me. I didn't experience what my brothers and sisters experienced. I've only heard stories there but I thought he was a much better Grandfather when he was a Father. I thought he was a very hard working individual and I thought he was—I think he did the best he could for the education that he had.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 45:11**

And how educated was your father?

**Mariano Sulay 45:15**

Think up to grade school, so. But, and he could craft things out of anything. I think that was one thing he's, like I said, he built chicken coops. He built their fence. If you needed a scabbard for his knife, you'd find extra materials and make them. I think it was very resort resourceful in that area.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 45:45**

I see. I love how you describe that. So he could, you know, be resourceful with his hands and so he could make a scabbard. Was there other stuff that he made that you were witness to?

**Mariano Sulay 45:55**

No. Just like, well, crates for his roosters. You know, he built those. Just like say, once the chick—actually once he got rid of his roosters and no longer had the roosters in the chicken coops, he decided, well, he's going to turn one into a smoke house. So he made a little smoke house for his fish, that he would use to smoke his fish. And then he made a greenhouse. So he's always, you know, building things back there and whatnot.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 46:31**

And I like how you kind of were also sharing a little bit about how affectionate he became, you know, with your grandkids, or with his grandkids. I mean, what would he do? What, what kind of—what looked different to you?

**Mariano Sulay 46:45**

Oh, he would just instantly bright up when we walk into the house with the kids and bring the kids onto his lap and hug and kiss them. Like say, something that we didn't experience as a kid. We—at least me personally—I feared more making him mad than I did him hugging on me or, or what have you. But there are also times, Juanita reminded me of this. I grew up as active in sports. I was playing baseball. And I remember he would come to my games along with my Mom. It was mostly my Mom that would come she was also part of the organize and work in the hotdog stand or what have you.

**Mariano Sulay 47:37**

But I remember one little league game we had. And I was a I couldn't get through this without just cr—I was crying, telling it to Juanita because I just couldn't stop laughing. But I remember one little league game. My Mom wasn't there. My Dad drove me. It was actually at Pinto Lake Park. And I was in uniform and then the coach says, "Do you have your cup?"—my athletic



cup—"because you're going to catch." And I go, "No, maybe I could send my Dad back to go get for me." I told my Dad, "Can you go get my cup in my room?" And so he got in his truck, he went and he came back. And he's holding this: my blue Cub Scout hat. And I go, "Dad, that's not my cup." He goes, "Oh, I thought you said, 'cap'." [laughs]

**Mariano Sulay 48:41**

And, yeah. That was—he was one for aide and, you know, taking me to baseball and trying to help me out.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 48:50**

So did you get to play?

**Mariano Sulay 48:53**

I assume I did. I just go my—"What's, what am I gonna do with my Cub Scout hat?" "Oh, I thought you said 'cap.'" [laughs]

**Kathleen Gutierrez 49:06**

Thank you for describing your dad a little bit more and giving me a clearer picture, a bigger picture of who he was in his personality as your father. What was your mom like?

**Mariano Sulay 49:17**

My Mom, I think she was the heart of the family. She was the organizer. She was the one that brought the family together all the time. And we do all the cooking when we had get togethers. And she was a—she was, I'd say, very active in the community and community organization, organizing and stuff. As a kid I remember being very active in the Filipino community and helping organize events. And I have—I don't know what they were for. I have vague recollection of her attending meetings with her civic meetings. And she was—she worked very hard to make, to make sure that we had things that we needed. And maybe even some things that we felt we really wanted that to attract—provide to us as well. I remember even in high school, I had a group of friends that would go skiing, go out and organize ski trips. And I'd asked, "Hey, Mom, can I go on this? Can you get that?" She'd come up with the money to allow me to do that. Even like, even our senior trip to Hawai'i. I'm sure she had to make payments to make to pay for that Hawai'i trip so I could go with my senior class to Hawai'i. So, she did a lot of those types of things.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 51:03**

So your high school class went to Hawai'i?

**Mariano Sulay 51:06**

Yeah. They had uhm, there was a local travel agent that contracted with the high school. You made it so that senior class get organized class trips for us.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 51:26**

And had you known—

**Mariano Sulay 51:27**

Great experience.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 51:28**

Yeah! Totally. And had you known by that point that your dad had traveled through Hawai'i to get to the U.S.?

**Mariano Sulay 51:34**

I probably did. I don't know exactly what he did, in Hawai'i. I think he worked construction—did some construction work, but I don't know anything about his Hawai'i experiences.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 51:48**

And you shared too that your mom was very involved in the Filipino community and Filipino Women's community. Did she ever talk to you about you growing up as mixed race or Filipino or about your Filipino identity?

**Mariano Sulay 52:02**

No. Just that, "You're mestizo." "What's that?" "Oh, it just means you're part Filipino." "Okay." I almost even call it—even kind of carrying that almost as a badge of pride. You know, as part Filipino. It was something that my friends weren't, so.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 52:31**

What was the ethnic composition of most of your friends?

**Mariano Sulay 52:35**

White. White and Hispanic. The Lopezes were Hispanic and everybody else in the neighborhood were white, except for me as a mixture. Yeah.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 52:47**

Wow. And so for your mom, you said is the heart of the family. And you were saying that she worked a lot of different jobs. Do you remember her path to California? I mean, your dad came from the Philippines through Hawai'i, eventually settling in Watsonville. What was your mom's path like?

**Mariano Sulay 53:10**

I don't have much on this. I know that my Mother's mother, my Grandmother Evelyn, when she met her husband, James Viner, that that wasn't accepted too well in my Grandmother's family. I don't know why it wasn't. But it wasn't accepted too well. And so I think that's what brought them to the west coast from the east coast. Because I think my Grandfather was—I think he was born in England, and emigrated to Canada when he met my Grandmother. So then, once they met, I think they ended up traveling the United States coming out west. Because I know my Mom was born in Oregon and her other siblings were born in other states throughout the United States. And so I think they actually did some—I don't know if they did any harvest work or not during their travels. I'm not really sure. And then how my mom—how she ended up in Watsonville. I'm not sure. I don't know.

**Mariano Sulay 54:41**

I know my Grandmother wrote a book, a poem book. What was it called—"My Brown Brother"? One of the poems. Kind of dealing with the Filipinos in the fields. So I don't think that my Mom's marriage to my Father was a source of, uhm, I don't think that that it had—I don't think that it was looked down upon, by that way. Because I remember she wrote a book that includes a poem about her brown brothers.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 55:31**

How interesting! And do you have a copy of that?

**Mariano Sulay 55:34**

I think Becky just went to go look for it. We do have one somewhere.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 55:39**

Oh, wow. Did you get a chance to meet your grandparents?

**Mariano Sulay 55:44**

I don't recall meeting my Grandmother at all. I do remember visiting my Grandfather. They were estranged at some point in time. I don't remember meeting my Grandmother. I do remember meeting my Grandfather. I remember also attending his funeral as a—as a young child, so I didn't know him that well.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 56:12**

Did you have any recollection of your grandfather's personality, Grandfather Viner?

**Mariano Sulay 56:18**

Nope. Other than we're—I was a youngster we went to go visit him. It seemed that he lived almost a hermit existence, I would guess? A small house, no TV or nothing like that. I remember we stayed in a separate house that had some function. But I remember his house seemed like—my impression as a kid was seemed like a storeroom. Just seemed like an empty, empty thing. A cabin, I guess. That's all. That's all I remember on that.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 56:59**

Oh, wow. And so—

**Mariano Sulay 57:01**

Very fleeting impressions, I know.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 57:03**

Oh, sure. No, it's, you know, sometimes that's how childhood memory works. Uhm, where was your grandfather living? Was he also in California?

**Mariano Sulay 57:11**

Southern California area. I think it was Ventura. Ventura area at the time when we went to go visit.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 57:18**

I see, I see. And so thank you so much for covering your parents and kind of what they were like and your recollection of them. I'd love to hear about your schooling. I mean, we can go back to that. I know that you went on a senior trip and that you were educated all throughout in Watsonville schools, how would you characterize that experience?

**Mariano Sulay 57:41**

I was—I thought school was fun, for the most part. I was a terrible student. I was, you know, and then we'll get into high school. And I was active in sports. Played the high school baseball throughout my year, played some high school football. But again, I was a very terrible student and I thought it was more of a place to go to socialize. I did terrible at homework. I remember that my junior, senior year—whenever you're supposed to take SATs for college—I didn't even know what they were. I never took them. I didn't know what they were and then after graduating people are, my friends are going off to college and whatnot. And I'm like, "Oh, what am I going to do now?"[laughs] But I again, I thought high school was very—I didn't, I didn't have any big issues or anything. I just wasn't a good student. [pauses] This is—this is the book my Grandmother wrote.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 58:58**

Oh, nice! So that says—

**Mariano Sulay** 59:00

It's a book of poems.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 59:01

So that says, "The Writings of Evelyn Wooster Viner." And if you can—

**Mariano Sulay** 59:07

Marguerite Viner Hogue, that was one of my Mom's sisters.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 59:11

I see. Could you find "The Brown Brothers" poem?

**Mariano Sulay** 59:19

Don't think it's in this one.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 59:20

Mario as you go ahead and look for that I'm just gonna take a quick break, okay?

**Mariano Sulay** 59:24

Okay. [pauses] I'm not finding it.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 59:32

What sorts of writings are in there?

**Mariano Sulay** 59:35

Poems . . . poems. Okay, actually, it has a story of her life, my Grandma's story. Apparently I've never read. I don't know a whole lot about it.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 59:56

How did you come across the book?

**Mariano Sulay** 59:58

I don't know how I got it. But it was—it was my Mom's. It was given to her by her sister, Marguerite Hogue. The inscription on it: "To Virginia, my oldest sister. With much love, Marguerite Hogue."

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:00:18

Did you ever spend time with your aunt Marguerite?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:00:21

Yeah, yeah. And the cousins. Again, those cousins were older. They're more my brothers and sisters age. But, no, we spent time with them and visiting them. They lived in Atascadero. So it was a big trip to go visit with them. But yeah, I have fond memories there. Even my cousins—Marguerite's sons and stuff—when they're in the military service and were stationed at Fort Ord. We'd always make sure that we either had them come over to our house because they always loved to come to our house. Aunt Gin— we called her Aunt Ginny. And Uncle Max's house because my Mom would cook them a dish that they called "slop chop." They love coming to have some "slop chop" at Aunt Ginny's house.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:01:13

What's "slop chop?"

**Mariano Sulay** 1:01:17

It was basically a dish my Mom made with hamburger and vegetables and we put it over rice and it was—it had beansprouts, hamburger, other vegetables. Kind of like a chop suey, I guess

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:01:37

I see, yeah. Oh, yeah! I think I remember Juanita sort of talking a little bit about that. [laughs]

**Mariano Sulay** 1:01:42

Yeah. Because here come the cousins and she had to make "slop chop" and get the "bug juice" out, soy sauce. It was what they called "bug juice" on it.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:01:51

Bug juice?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:01:53

Bug juices.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:01:54

Were you, at least on the Viner side of the family, was yours the only mixed race family?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:02:01

Yes.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:02:03

I see. And you were also mentioning too that you didn't grow up around a whole lot of Filipino kids your age, was that also the case in school?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:02:13

Yeah. In grade school and stuff I don't remember any other Filipino kids. In high school, yes. But I guess just because where I went to grade school was MacQuiddy—T.S. MacQuiddy. And that was mostly all white, the Burlington-Martinelli area, mostly all white. I may even say upper class. White upper class area. So I didn't see. I don't have any recollection of any other Filipinos there.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:02:55

Got it. Got it. So you went to Watsonville High. And then what year did you graduate? Was that 1980?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:03:01

1980. Class of '80, yeah.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:03:04

Did you decide to stay in the city proper or town proper?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:03:09

I did. You know I lived—I lived with my Mom and Dad until I got married in 1983. Then got married to Becky and we moved to Aptos. And then, what, '86 we moved back to Watsonville when our first child was born. We move back into Watsonville.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:03:39

And how did you and Becky meet?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:03:40

We went to school together and first met at Rolling Hills in junior high school. And then in high school, obviously, we went to high school together. She was dating, actually, another Filipino during most of high school. And so it wasn't until after we graduated that she had broken up with her—with that boyfriend and then I was lucky enough to catch her.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:04:23

And so were you both working at the time when you got together after high school?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:04:28

Uhm . . . [aside to Becky] you were working? You were at Bank of America, yeah? When we first—No, no at the hospital.

**Rebecca Sulay** 1:04:41

[faintly; away from microphone] Was at the hospital and then I went away.

**Mariano Sulay** 1:04:46

That's right. You went to culinary school for a short time.

**Mariano Sulay** 1:04:50

And I was working—what I'd do when I got out of high school? I worked for a janitorial company. That was—was I saw in high school or was I graduated? [inaudible aside between Mariano and Rebecca] I worked for a janitorial company for a while and then I worked for security guard company for while. Also at Mervyn's [a bar]. I was working two jobs then. I was going to—I was working security, working part time at Mervyn's, and then also going to Cabrillo College full time taking administration of justice classes. I think it was about that time that I decided to start asking myself, "What am I going to—what am I going to do with my life?" You know, because up until then it was just, "you go to school, you play sports" Well, I was going to Cabrillo, but I knew that the end of school was coming so I needed to do something. And that's when I got interested in law enforcement and ended up getting hired in law enforcement in 1985 . . . '84, '85—'85.

**Rebecca Sulay** 1:04:51

[unintelligible]

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:06:23

Did your parents ever provide guidance on what you should do with your life? Or your vocation?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:06:32

Not so much that although they did want me to go to college, which other than a couple of years of Cabrillo, I was not able to fulfill that desire. But other than that no. I think I kind of developed that on my own. Thinking about that, the recollection I have is I remember going to the Filipino dances at the vets hall. And there'd be a police officer there or police officer would stop by. I just kind of remember being able to talk to that person and how that person interacted with us kids, and us ooo-ing and ahh-ing over them and stuff like that. I just thought that was—that made an impression on me as a child.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:07:22



Yeah. And so you were taking classes at Cabrillo. And then did you, kind of, find your way to applying for law enforcement? Or, you know, had you kind of gotten a lead that there was an opening?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:07:35

No, just through the administration of justice program there. Learning about the Reserve Program at the sheriff's office and applying there, getting accepted to that. Where I was able to work as a reserve officer or partner officer with a deputy, go out and patrol and whatnot. And kind of learn what's expected, what the job is. Kind of the basics of police work while you're working with another deputy. So I did that for a year. And then I was able to, at that point, then I'm starting to apply for all other agencies. Actually, I went to the Academy. I went to the police academy. Graduated from that, after Cabrillo, obviously. Then started applying to other agencies and, luckily, I was able to get hired by the sheriff's office in 1985.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:08:37

In 1985 and then a year later, your first child was born?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:08:40

A year later, we had Jacob. We'd been married by three years, almost three years by then. And Jacob was born. Yeah. That was a great experience. Brought a lot of joy to my Mom and—and my Dad, at the time. I'd leave them there to go. Because Becky was working and on my day off, which included a weekday, so Becky would be at work. If I wanted to do something like go to the driving range, go golf or something I'd leave Jacob with my parents and they'd watch over for the day. I thought it was—like I say, I saw a side of my Dad that we'd never experienced, so.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:09:34

And how is your mother as a grandparent?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:09:38

Very doting. Very doting. She, she'd come to our house and give us a lecture on taking care of a baby and all this. You know, sometimes to the chagrin of both my wife and I. "Oh, here comes Mom again." Because where we lived, we lived in a duplex. The actual—the front door was actually away from the street. So somebody would have to come through a side gate to come around to our front door. So we'd always see the top of my Mom's head walking by the kitchen window.[Kat laughs] We would hear the gate, then see the top of my Mom's head come by the window: "There goes Mom!"

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:10:21

Aw, what kind of advice would she give?

**Mariano Sulay 1:10:24**

Oh, things. [laughs] What was it, laundry detergent? [aside with Rebecca] Yeah, make sure, yeah, you're using the right soap on the baby. The right laundry detergent. Don't—what was it—don't traumatize. Don't try to, you know, you move him too—sometimes he'd go like [impersonating accent], "Oh, don't traumatize him." [laughs]

**Mariano Sulay 1:10:48**

Two.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:10:48**

Aw, and so Jacob was your first. And how many kids do you have in total?

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:10:51**

Two!

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:10:51**

Jacob and Alyssa.

**Mariano Sulay 1:10:57**

Okay, and when was Alyssa born?

**Mariano Sulay 1:10:59**

She was born two years later, 1988.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:11:03**

That's my birth year.

**Mariano Sulay 1:11:04**

[laughs] Oh, okay. So you're my daughter's age.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:11:09**

Yeah, I am exactly your daughter's age. And so both Jacob and Alyssa were born in Watsonville?

**Mariano Sulay 1:11:16**

They were. They were—unfortunately, Alyssa never got to meet my Mom. Her Nanny. But she did get to meet the Grandpa, but not my Mom. She had passed just before Alyssa was born.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:11:32**

Right, right. I do recall that. I do recall that. I'm sure though you tell Alyssa stories of your Grandma—or of her grandma.

**Mariano Sulay 1:11:42**

We do. We think—we think she was conceived at the time that my Mom had passed. [laughs] And, yeah. See, my Mom, she didn't have—she had very poor dental. Her teeth were never that great. And so when she would eat corn on the cob, she would cut it off the cob. You know, to eat the corn on the cob. Well, one time we're feeding the kids were at—[aside with Rebecca]

**Mariano Sulay 1:12:26**

—Eighteen months old, maybe? She'd been eating solid food for a little bit but we're having dinner, which included corn on the cob. And you know, kids love corn on the cob. And my son Jacob gets the corn, and he ate corn on the cob. And Alyssa, she looks at it she says, "Cut it off." Do you want to—we thought my Mom reincarnated.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:12:50**

Yeah. [laughs]

**Mariano Sulay 1:12:52**

"What do you mean 'cut it off?'" Because that's what my Mom would do.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:12:56**

Oh, gosh. Yeah, maybe!

**Mariano Sulay 1:13:00**

That was very, very surprising. Yeah, freaky. That is kind of freaky.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:13:07**

Oh, sure, sure. And so your dad, though, was able to spend some time with Alyssa when she was growing up?

**Mariano Sulay 1:13:14**

Yeah.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:13:14**

Okay. And did your kids spend all of their childhoods in Watsonville, too?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:13:18

Um-hm. Yeah, they were educated at Green Valley Christian School and then at Monte Vista High School.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:13:28

I see, and are they still there?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:13:30

Nope. Nope, Jacob now lives in the Bay Area, back in the city. Living in San Francisco. He graduated at the Academy of Art University there in San Francisco. Graduated there and has remained in San Francisco since basically. And Alyssa graduated San Jose State and then ended up moving with her fiance back to Oklahoma where he's from. So they live in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, just outside of Tulsa.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:14:04

Okay. Oh, wow. So everyone's kind of moved out a little bit. Although I know your brother is still in Watsonville, too. And so, walk me through it: so I know you're now in Bend ,Oregon. And so you spent your career really in Watsonville. And I'm guessing Becky as well?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:14:21

Yeah, like I said, her parents. Her parents are born and raised in Watsonville, as well as her. Then we spent all our adult life, or adult working life, there. She, Becky, graduated Cabrillo College—or retired from Cabrillo College. In, what, seventeen, 2017? So then once I retired in 2015, so once she retired then we put our plan into action. Once we got Alyssa married, we put our plan—we put our house on the market in Watsonville, came up here to Bend looking for a house and were able to make the move.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:15:16

Yeah. Yeah. I'd love to know with all the time that you spent in Watsonville, that's fifty plus years, what kinds of changes did you see over time? I mean—

**Mariano Sulay** 1:15:26

Huge.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:15:26

Yeah, I mean, so what was that like? From the early '60s, when you were born and growing up, to just about the 2000s or twenty—

**Mariano Sulay** 1:15:36

Yeah. I mean, it was like, Becky would say, it's not the same little town that we grew up in. It's not a little town anymore. It's a bigger town along with all the other headaches that come with it. The traffic, I mean, just to get anywhere in Santa Cruz County now you're stuck in traffic all the time. You know, I remember riding the bus to junior high school, at Rolling Hills, and he would pass an area on North Main Street that was just rolling hills. Farmland hill, or ranch hills, and there'd actually be bison, buffalo! There at the place ahead, they're raising buffalo. Well, all that has gone. All that is just built up all commercial area now. And all the open spaces that were in Watsonville, the orchards and stuff like that, they're gone. And it's all—it's just all built up. So and then, obviously, the crime has gotten to a point where it's—it's a lot of crime there.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:15:40**

You know—

**Mariano Sulay 1:16:03**

I just want to—

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:16:50**

—I'd love it if you could—I'm sorry, I cut you off, actually. Did you want to expand a little bit more on the crime?

**Mariano Sulay 1:17:06**

Well, when we were growing up, there wasn't anything—we didn't deal with things like gangs and whatnot, you know. The problems that kids have tried to navigate through their youth. Not only dealing with things that youth normally I have to deal with, but then gangs as well. Some that maybe their neighbors or peers or something that they got to try to navigate and coexist with. So that is something that became prevalent in the Salinas Valley and Watsonville in particular.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:17:48**

I see, I see. And I'd love to also hear—actually, I remember Paul mentioning that too. Even though he grew up in Aromas, how gangs had become so prevalent by the time he was growing up, he just sort of knew to avoid them. But they were certainly in the community and recruiting actively. And so I think for you also to, sort of, see that too and that change?

**Mariano Sulay 1:18:12**

Yeah. I would say is probably about nineteen—because I was a junior high school. Probably about '75, '76 when it started first popping on radar. Back then they were called "cholos." Before that, really didn't know—it wasn't something that we really knew anything about

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:18:38**

And, you know, I'd love to go back too to the changing of the landscape. I know some of us who are on this project are really curious about the environment of Watsonville. And even just like the physical landscape that you were around. Then so, how would you even characterize what the smells were like of the air or what you saw when you were growing up in that environment? And then seeing that change kind of over time, which I think you alluded to. So yeah, what was it like for you as a kid to kind of take in the Watsonville air?

**Mariano Sulay 1:19:08**

Well, you know, I think as a kid, you really don't appreciate a lot of that. The fresh air and stuff until it's no longer there. Not to say that I don't think—I think it's still there. I don't think that much has changed. Although, with the traffic and all I can imagine it's not quite the same as it was. Because it's on the coast, you still have the sea breeze and stuff like that. That's there. The things that's no longer there, like I say, the orchards, the apple orchards. A lot of it is housing areas or businesses or something like that. Or been converted into—what agriculture areas are left have been converted into row crops for berries. Strawberries and stuff, raspberries. So that's changed.

**Mariano Sulay 1:20:16**

Other physical makeup is downtown is much more congested than what it was when we were kids. I remember driving downtown or having parades downtown, which you no longer have. That was another big part of the Filipino community is getting ready for the Fourth of July parade doing a big float and stuff. They don't have those anymore. So that was something else that dropped off. So I, you know, it's kind of those changes that kind of gave us—well, and the fact that even her parents when, once they retired, they moved out of the area. So as people started leaving the area, our anchor to the area started dissipating. Goes, "Okay, they're not here no more. They're not—family's kind of dispersed. Why do we want to stay here? Do we want to stay here?" And I think we came up with the answers. We don't want to try to go someplace else where we don't have to worry about the traffic. Being stuck in an area. We wanted to be in a place that afforded us the ability to enjoy things outdoors, which this fit the bill.

**Kathleen Gutierrez 1:21:44**

I can see too what you're explaining about. Not only were community events changing, like the big ol' parades, the July 4th celebration, but even the urban environment that would lead to such congestion. And so, what do you think has been responsible for some of those changes of the landscape or even of the urban environment in Watsonville?

**Mariano Sulay 1:22:05**

I think it's just, uhm . . . yeah, cost of living. Because that area, especially Santa Cruz, and stuff, cost of living is so high. And Watsonville being in the south portion of Santa Cruz County, I think that area is more affordable. So I think a lot of the, especially from over the hill and stuff, people started making those commutes. Because they're able to afford something in Watsonville versus trying to buy something in Santa Cruz, which may be \$100 or \$200,000 more expensive.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:22:57

Right. Right. Right, right. And what about the building developments? Or at least the conversion, right, of those orchards into residences? Were there—is it just a different level of investment that's going into the town now? Or are there particular property developers also around?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:23:15

Well, I think it became a point where people needed housing, and the existing housing was insufficient. And so that made property development profitable. And maybe more profitable than farming the land. Maybe even easier than farming the land. I don't know what the dynamics were that a farmer would decide to sell his land to a developer. Whether it be destroyed for cash or the fact that they're getting too old to work the land and somebody—something's got to happen with it. I don't know. But the fact is, there was a need for it. And you know, it happened. When you get more people starting to reside in an area, then you need more business to support that. So then more businesses case. And then you also need jobs of manufacturing income.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:24:23

And how about the Filipino community? How did that change substantially as well kind of over time? I know that you said that some of it thinned out, like the activities of the Filipino community. But I'm also guessing that, at some point, more newly arrived Filipino immigrants came into Watsonville. What was that like, or what's that been like?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:24:44

Well, part of that was—I'm sure Juanita too explained that my Father also had a family in the Philippines prior to him immigrating to the United States. I know that my Mom spent a lot of time trying to support and get that side of the family to immigrate to the United States, too. And so they put a big effort and eventually got them here so we had a whole nother family, Sulay family—[accented] Sulay family in Watsonville. So that was something that I experienced as a youngster.

**Mariano Sulay** 1:25:29

And then, like said, I don't know how it happened or why it happened, but my mom became less involved in the Filipino community. Which lessened my exposure to it. And I really did become—I've never really gotten reacquainted with the Filipino community as it existed in my youth as an adult. I know that there's a Filipino community house, or clubhouse—meetinghouse just outside of Watsonville. We started going to that. My wife and I started going during the the chicken barbecues to go get—support the Filipino community. That was a fundraising thing so we'd go to that. And there would be very few people that were from the families that I knew of. Then all the rest, are all do or—I had no idea. If I was being introduced, they'd say, "Oh, that's Max's son." My Dad's picture is on the thing that because he used to be president at one point. And so he's in a past president picture. "Oh, that's Max's son." But as being actively involved in that community I've never had been.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:27:04

And how do your kids identify? Did they—do they identify as Filipino or Filipina?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:27:10

Our kids? Yeah, they're a quarter Filipino now, I think. I don't know, [turns to Rebecca] do they? Okay, so yeah. If you ask, I guess if they're asked. [Rebecca speaks; inaudible] Yeah. They—like my daughter. She cooks biko. She learned a biko recipe, will cook that and lumpias, yeah, for her Oklahoma family. Try to expose them to a little other culture.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:27:49

Sure, sure. Do you talk to them about this history in Watsonville? Or does Juanita talk to them about that history?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:27:57

No, not much. Not unless it comes up. We go to Juanita's house. A lot of times we break out—because they're there, you break out the binders and start talking. It might spark a conversation, but it's nothing that we've really gone deep into.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:28:18

You know, that reminds me, to ask you a little bit of another question related to the Watsonville history that we know probably the most about, which is the Watsonville riots. I mean, was Fermin Toberra's name ever brought up at all when you were growing up?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:28:33

No, no. Not—not as an individual or a person, no. Like I said, I didn't know anything about it until subject came up one time. Juanita provided me with these articles. I was like, "Wow, this really happened at Watsonville?"



**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:28:52

Were you aware of the apology that happened last fall?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:28:57

No.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:28:57

Oh, gosh. The city of Watsonville issued a formal apology for the riots.

**Mariano Sulay** 1:29:04

Wow! That happened last fall?

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:29:06

It happened last fall. We have a recording of it now.

**Mariano Sulay** 1:29:10

Was that when they did the—because I know my sister and Roy and stuff had a display that was that was done at the Watsonville Public Library. Was that around that time?

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:29:20

Months later. So I think that one opened up in early 2020. And then the lockdown happened. But the Watsonville apology happened, I believe around November of last year. And it was on Zoom so I think Roy has shared with me a recording of it. Rob Bonta, who's an assembly member attended as well to give some remarks. And so, you know, the the city itself has also tried to make some amends in relation to that history, too.

**Mariano Sulay** 1:29:49

Wow. Interesting, because, we hear about, obviously, from just last month, the Tulsa Riots that happened in the twen—oh, that was in the '20s, I guess? And then to see something like that happened in, in our little town of Watsonville. Yeah, that was—I would have never known.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:30:12

Yeah, yeah. We're gonna come up pretty soon on the full two hour mark, but I'd love to talk to you a little bit about just even the project itself in capturing this history. What do you feel is perhaps the most important thing that we are able to capture as a research team with relation to the Filipino community in Watsonville? Or even Watsonville history itself?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:30:38

Well, the—I do you think it's important that we kind of know the past to better deal with the future. And to build on the past so that mistakes of the past aren't repeated. And, in the future, that people aren't—become victims of violence just because of the color of their skin or their ethnicity. So, having those things documented, so that people could learn from them, I think is important. Again, someone like me, although I was involved— I spent my whole career in law enforcement, in dealing with, you know, the victimization of people. And trying to make just those incidents. I never knew anything like that happened in Watsonville, where I was born and raised. As I was being brought up, I had no idea that that types of prejudices or anything existed.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:32:10

Yeah, yeah. I'm curious maybe even just to circle back on that.

**Mariano Sulay** 1:32:16

Even the systemic that just like—my Mom is happy to have their house in her name and not my Father's name.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:32:25

Yeah. And then in that sense of systemic injustice and violence, why do you think it wasn't spoken about?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:32:37

Why? Because it's hard to speak about, I think. It especially brings a lot of trauma. Toberra—imagine or relive trauma which is, you know, very hard to speak about to the people who have experienced them. But I think if it's forgotten, then it's something that could happen again.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:33:11

Right, right. Mario, I'm just gonna pause really quickly. I do want to ask one more follow up question. I hear my dad just got home, hold on.

**Mariano Sulay** 1:33:19

[laughs]

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:33:21

So you mentioned too that, yeah, it was traumatizing experience for those who went through it. Do you have a sense then that, likely for your parents ,that was why they also weren't talking about it in the home? Because your dad was around in California at that time, or at the very least, some of your uncle's or the manong that were around him.

**Mariano Sulay** 1:33:46

Yeah. In a way I do because even my Dad never had any interest in teaching us the Filipino language that he spoke. We'd hear it when he's talking on the phone to one of his friends or something. But he never really—he never taught it to us. I don't know why that was but I think it was a shielding mechanism in part. So I think it was a way and I think they wanted us—I don't know—to succeed maybe in in the world in which they lived. So bringing up the past I don't know if that was something that they were interested in.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:34:44

I understand. Yeah, I see that, I see that. Hopefully, through this project at least we're able to get a sense not only of that time which again, is a better investigated time in Watsonville history, but at the very least how differently people engage with that history or were taught that history. Like you, many of our narrators said the same thing; In the home, it wasn't talked about. And it was sometime much later that some of our folks, including your sister, came across this history by surprise, you know?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:35:22

She never knew about it? Did she—

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:35:23

Until—

**Mariano Sulay** 1:35:23

Has she found it?

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:35:25

Until she was in school.

**Mariano Sulay** 1:35:28

Wow.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:35:28

Yeah, so it was much later. And then I think she did then go to her parents to ask them a little bit more. Because she had been taking I think an ethnic studies class or something related to diasporic history and it was a shock to her. And I think your sister had explained too sometimes there was a gendered difference in the kinds of stories people were told. And so sometimes that history wasn't shared. I talked to Modesto and Rita Tuzon as well who had a different experience with hearing about the Watsonville past.

**Mariano Sulay** 1:36:04

Yeah, it's definitely a checkered history. For sure. I do remember my parents talking about . . . there were some—how Watsonville was segregated. I remember my Mom saying, "Chinatown used to be over there" or something. When I was here, I knew nothing about Chinatown. I love Chinatown. [unknown] Chinatown. Well, yeah, it used to be over there. I guess there was some of that, but I never knew that anything like the riots that had occurred. Even in my law enforcement career, I knew we had cannery riots and stuff like that, but no ethnic riots.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:36:53

Um-hm, um-hm. Right, right. As we wrap up finish our time together—it's been almost two hours—I'd love to know, Mario, if you just want to share any last bit of information about your family, your parents, about yourself for the interview?

**Mariano Sulay** 1:37:16

Like I said, I think for all his faults, my Dad kind of did the best he could, given the tools that he he had in life when leaving his home at such a young age. Not having much of an education whatsoever and only having the skills that he could do with his hands. So I know, it wasn't easy for my Mom, or my Dad for that matter, back in those days and raising a large family and what they had. But I think on all, especially my Mom, I think she was the heart of the family. You know, I think they did a really good job with what they were able to do. Although they didn't see me get a college degree, at least by my kids—they passed it on to me to make sure my kids had a college degree.

**Kathleen Gutierrez** 1:38:29

Thank you. Thanks, Mario. I'm going to wrap up the interview here and in the future I hope—if we have any follow up questions for you I'll reach you again and let you know. It would be great to talk once more, but thank you so much for the interview.

**Mariano Sulay** 1:38:45

Sure, good luck with the project and I hope it comes out really well.