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Apolonia Dangzalan: Filipina Businesswoman, Watsonville, California

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Introduction

Apolonia Dangzalan, a Filipino resident of Watsonville, California, was interviewed on April 27, 1977 by Meri Knaster, an editor at the Regional History Project, as part of a series of oral histories documenting local agricultural and ethnic history. Dangzalan was born in February 1896 in San Nicolas, Ilocos Sur, northwest of Manila, on the largest of the Philippine islands. Her family owned some land on which rice and corn was cultivated by sharecroppers. Her uncle was the president of San Nicholas. Dangzalan attended school for five years but was unable to continue due to illness. Her father died when she was five years old and her mother died when she was seventeen. In 1923, at age 27, she married. A year later she and her husband immigrated to Oahu, Hawaii. Her husband worked in the sugar cane fields and Dangzalan began a small business in her house sewing clothes for the Filipino community. This was the first of many small businesses she would run throughout her long life. In 1925 she and her husband moved to San Francisco, and then to Stockton, California, where her husband worked as a laborer in the asparagus fields.

Dissatisfied with her marriage, in 1926 Dangzalan divorced her husband and moved to Marysville, California, where she bought and managed a pool hall and restaurant frequented by Filipinos, Mexicans and Anglo Americans. Although she enjoyed this work, business was not too good. She heard that Watsonville and Salinas were much better places to be in business because they attracted a large Filipino community that came to work in the fruit orchards. So after five months in Marysville, Dangzalan joined her nephew, Frank Barba, in Watsonville, California. Frank Barba is the subject of an oral

history also published by the Regional History Project.¹ Dangzalan opened a boarding house for Filipino agricultural workers on Bridge Street in Watsonville, California, where she became known as “Mama” Dangzalan. After a few years, her nephew, Frank Barba, took over the Watsonville boarding house and Dangzalan opened another boarding house on Salinas Road in 1930. Most of the workers she housed were working for the Gary Company, and Dangzalan also served as a labor contractor, hiring men to work in the company’s fields. Dangzalan was one of very few women engaged in labor contracting but she seems to have approached this non-traditional work with confidence and a certain amount of toughness. When Knaster asked her if it bothered the farmers to deal with a woman, Dangzalan laughed and said, “Even now the people are scared of me.”

As a result of the Spanish-American War (1898), the Philippine Islands became U.S. territory and Filipinos were considered “wards” or “nationals,” legally entitled to enter the continental U.S. Unlike the Chinese, the Japanese, and later, the Mexicans, the Filipinos’ legal status precluded deportation. However, as Carey McWilliams pointed out: “Their status was ambiguous . . . They were not eligible for citizenship . . . [but] when they traveled abroad, they used United States passports.”

Filipinos began to be recruited by sugar growers in Hawaii in significant numbers when the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 and later, the Immigration Act of 1924, depleted the Japanese agricultural labor force. By 1932 Filipinos comprised 70 percent of the total work force of sugar-farm workers in the Hawaiian Islands but labor conflicts in the sugar

1. *Frank Barba: Filipino Labor Contractor*, Interviewed by Meri Knaster, edited by Irene Reti (Regional History Project, University Library, UC Santa Cruz: 2004).

fields led many to move to the West Coast of the United States. They were mostly young, single men with limited education and skills. Many intended to save a little money and return home to their families. Dangzalan's experience as a female labor contractor and businesswoman is quite unusual.

The system of labor contracting for agricultural field workers arose from the particular characteristics of California agriculture. California's extraordinarily diverse and specialized crop production requires peaks of intensive field labor for each specific crop. Also, since production is an almost year-round enterprise extending from the southern interior valleys up to the northern counties, a calendrical cycle has evolved, requiring field labor during specified times with different crops. Lettuce production, for example, continues about nine months per year, being produced in the Imperial Valley during the winter and coming into production in Monterey County in the spring. Workers migrate northwards as the crops reach maturity.

The labor contracting system also arose from the growers' need for an intermediary who would find and hire labor as it was required. Since the latter third of the 19th century various ethnic groups have filled this need. The earliest groups were the Chinese, Japanese, and Hindustani; later Mexicans, Filipinos, and dust-bowl refugees comprised the bulk of the migratory labor force. Because of the language and cultural barriers between the ethnic field workers and the growers, the labor contractor's function as an intermediary became essential. The labor contractor usually was, and continues to be, of the same ethnic background as his or her workers. Serving as a recruiter, interpreter, transporter, supervisor, bookkeeper, cashier, and providing room and board, he or she

acted as an organizing and mediating influence in bringing workers and jobs together in what was a mostly uncoordinated labor market. The system of labor contracting has developed and predominated in areas where there has been a heavy dependence upon a foreign, non-English speaking, unskilled labor force.

In 1920 5,603 Filipinos lived in the United States, 2,700 of whom were in California. When California growers began to fear that Mexican immigration would be restricted by a quota under the Immigration Act of 1924, the influx of Filipinos became important in terms of agricultural labor. In 1923 alone, 2,426 Filipinos entered the state of California. By 1930 their numbers had grown to 30,500, replacing the Chinese, Japanese, and Hindustani as the predominant Asian group comprising the state's agricultural labor force.

Welcomed at first as model workers, Filipinos, by the late 1920s and early 1930s, had become the object of racism, replicating the experience of the Chinese and Japanese before them. Filipino workers had been working in local lettuce fields since the 1920s, but like the Chinese and Japanese before them, the more recent wave of immigrants were tolerated rather than welcomed. Watsonville itself was the locus of anti-Filipino race rioting in the 1930s. Local newspapers recorded the racial violence that erupted in 1930. According to the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, "Accumulating tensions erupted in January 1930 when whites went on a five-day rampage. At the height of the riot a mob estimated at 400 strong attempted to burn down a Filipino club at Palm Beach. The following night, a 22-year-old Filipino was killed when shots were fired into a bunkhouse. More than a dozen Filipinos were dragged from homes and clubbed the same night. The Watsonville

riots sparked additional disturbances throughout the state and an international response. A National Humiliation Day was held in Manila to protest the violence. In Washington, D. C., a Filipino official told the House of Representatives that the clash demonstrated the need for Philippine independence from the United States."¹ Dangzalan recalls an incident of racial violence of this nature.

With the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934, which granted independence to the Philippines after a ten-year period of commonwealth status, legal exclusion of the Filipinos commenced. A yearly quota of fifty was established and those citizens of the Philippine Islands who were not citizens of the United States were henceforth considered aliens.

Dangzalan engaged in diverse business activities besides labor contracting. She also opened a liquor store, dancing club, and pool hall on Main Street in Watsonville in 1936. During World War II she owned a house of prostitution on Union Street in Watsonville. She hired an American woman to manage it for her.

In 1950 Dangzalan stopped working as a labor contractor and went into business for herself as a farmer, primarily growing strawberries. After four years of this she was tired. In 1952 Dangzalan was operated on for kidney cancer. She withdrew from all of her businesses except for the International Groceries and Liquors store on lower Main Street, which she was still running at the time of this oral history interview in 1977. At age 81 Dangzalan was still working in the liquor store until 2:30 in the morning. In her field

1. "Santa Cruz County: A Century: The 1930s, Depression Marked by Conflict," <http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/extra/century/31/>

notes, interviewer Meri Knaster described Dangzalan as “a very spry and active eighty-one year old. Dangzalan continued to operate the liquor store until 1982. She died in 1992, at the age of 96.

Due to funding and staffing limitations, Apolonia Dangzalan’s oral history was tucked away for 27 years in a safe at the Regional History Project. We are pleased to finally publish this first-hand account by an independent and enterprising immigrant Filipina businesswoman in Watsonville, California. This oral history provides rare and invaluable primary documentation of the history of Filipino immigration in California from a female perspective.

Copies of the manuscript are on deposit in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; and in Special Collections at McHenry Library at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The Project is supported administratively by Christine Bunting, head of Special Collections and Archives, and Acting University Librarian, Robert White.

—Irene Reti
Regional History Project
McHenry Library
University of California, Santa Cruz
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Early Life

Dangzalan: I had three half-sisters and one half-brother, and my mother and father.

Knaster: Was anybody farming your father's land?

Dangzalan: No. We just watched the people get the harvest.

Knaster: What did they grow on the land?

Dangzalan: Rice, corn.

Knaster: How much land did you have?

Dangzalan: Oh, I don't know. I can't tell you. It was so many places.

Knaster: Did you go to school in San Nicolas?

Dangzalan: Yes, I go into the school but I stopped early because I was sick. Every time the sun hit my head I was sick again. So my mother said, "You know how to write and you understand a little bit. That's good enough. I don't like you to die. You girls don't need the big education."

Knaster: For how many years did you go to school?

Dangzalan: Five years.

Knaster: Did people generally think it was not important for girls to go to school?

Dangzalan: I don't know. The teacher, she got mad, policeman came to my house. She gives hell to me, give hell to my mother. But I don't like to get sick. Better stay at home.

Knaster: Your uncle was president of San Nicolas?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: That's in the northern part of the Philippines?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Was it a very hot climate?

Dangzalan: Yes, it's a very good climate.

Knaster: You said you could grow rice. What other kind of food was there to eat?

Dangzalan: I got more vegetable food down there than here. I got more quality kind. Mixed vegetables, chicken, fish, meat.

Knaster: Did you have animals where you lived?

Dangzalan: Yes. Pigs and chickens. My mother liked to raise [animals]. She don't like to buy it outside because she don't know if it's clean or not.

Knaster: Did your mother teach you how to cook?

Dangzalan: No. She hired some lady for cooking and working in the house. And this one only for cooking and soon I go to the kitchen, the maid, she don't let me. "Get out of here." She get mad. My mother died when I was sixteen or seventeen years old. I don't know how to cook so I go in the kitchen and cry. My nephew's mother was very close to my house. She heard me crying. "Don't cook. The kids will bring your food." Then Frank Barba's mother, my old half-sister, brought me food.

Knaster: Did your brothers go to school?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Did they graduate?

Dangzalan: No, they did not graduate because they go into the service.

Knaster: Do you speak Spanish?

Dangzalan: No. Only a little bit for the Mexicans here now.

Knaster: Did you get married in the Philippines?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: How old were you?

Dangzalan: I think about twenty-seven. I got married in 1923.

Knaster: Where did you meet your husband?

Dangzalan: In my town.

Knaster: Was he a friend from when you were children?

Dangzalan: Yes. But here sometimes the woman tell the man, I love you. In the Philippines—no.

Knaster: How does it go in the Philippines?

Dangzalan: Well, you bring friend, going to the dance or picnic or something, and you meet the people. Soon she meet you, and try to ask you for conversation . . . that's all.

Knaster: Does the boy go to your father to ask permission to marry you?

Dangzalan: My father died when I was four or five years old. And my mother died when I was seventeen years old. Just me and Barba, we stayed in the house, and my maid.

Knaster: What made your father die?

Dangzalan: Oh, natural death.

Knaster: And your mother?

Dangzalan: The same.

Knaster: Were they very old?

Dangzalan: My father was not very old, because he died when I was only four or five years old. My mother was over eighty years old.

Knaster: So when you got married, did you leave the Philippines?

Hawaii

Dangzalan: I stayed there about a year. And then we go to Hawaii.

Knaster: Why did you go to Hawaii?

Dangzalan: Oh, I don't know. My husband decided when to leave.

Knaster: Did he work in Hawaii?

Dangzalan: Yes. The sugar cane. But I don't really remember very much. We don't stay there very long.

Knaster: What year did you go to Hawaii?

Dangzalan: Oh, I don't remember. 1924?

Knaster: Did you have to sign a contract to go to Hawaii?

Dangzalan: Me, no. My husband had to sign.

Knaster: For how many years did you have to . . .

Dangzalan: I don't know. Three years, I guess the contract. But my husband, he not complete it.

Knaster: Where did you live in Hawaii?

Dangzalan: In Oahu.

Knaster: Did you live on a sugar plantation?

Dangzalan: Yes. All the houses down there were plantation houses.

Knaster: Did all the workers live together?

Dangzalan: No. Just me and my husband with our own house.

Knaster: Were there many houses for workers?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: Did the company gave you a house to live in, or did you have to pay for the house?

Dangzalan: I think we paid.

Knaster: What kind of work did your husband do?

Dangzalan: I don't know, only sugar cane, that's all.

Knaster: Did you work, too?

Dangzalan: No, I stay in the house sewing things to sell. Shirts, pants.

Knaster: Did you sell to the workers?

Dangzalan: No. Some woman came to my house to ask me to teach sewing, and she take some of the stuff I selling and go selling around.

Knaster: Did you make clothes for women, or only shirts for men?

Dangzalan: I made for men and women.

Knaster: Were there many other Filipino women there?

Dangzalan: Yeah, plenty.

Knaster: The reason I asked you is because I read someplace that at that time in Hawaii there were eight Filipino men for every Filipino woman.

Dangzalan: No, there were *plenty* women! Plenty families.

Knaster: Children?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: When did you leave Hawaii, and why did you leave?

Dangzalan: Well, my nephew, Frank Barba, he don't come with me [to the Philippines] because I tell him better to graduate first before he come. So he stayed there one year. After graduation he wrote me, "Now Mama, I finish now my high school. I'm going to go to a lady and I like it now to come with you." I send him money for the ticket and everything he need. He stayed five or six months in Hawaii and then he tell me again, "I don't like it. I like to continue my study, go to the United States of America to continue my class." So I take him to the United States to continue to study.

Knaster: Was that all right with your husband, he wanted to go too?

Dangzalan: Well, yeah.

Knaster: So it was more your decision to go to the United States.

Dangzalan: Yes, because Barba was like a son to me. I am the one to give him education and everything. He stayed next to my house. But soon he's married.

Knaster: When your husband said, "Let's go to Hawaii," did you want to go?

Dangzalan: Well, even though I don't like it, I need to follow him.

Knaster: Was that the custom?

Dangzalan: Yes, that's the custom there.

Knaster: Women had to do what the man said?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Did you like that?

Dangzalan: Well, I can't help it then.

Knaster: But when you left for Hawaii, you and your husband went together at the same time?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: You went by ship?

Dangzalan: Yes. Because no plane yet in that time.

Knaster: How was long was the trip?

Dangzalan: About a month.

Knaster: Did you like the ship?

Dangzalan: Well, even I don't like what can I do then? I can jump. [laughter]

Knaster: Was it comfortable?

Dangzalan: Yes, it's comfortable.

Knaster: Were there many Filipinos on the ship?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Were they all going to work in Hawaii?

Dangzalan: Yes, some going to Hawaii, some direct to the United States.

Knaster: When you left Hawaii, did you go to San Francisco by ship also?

Dangzalan: Yes. Because no plane yet in that time.

Knaster: How was that trip? Was that any better than the first trip?

Dangzalan: Oh, the same. We got the same Presidential Line.

Knaster: Where did you stay in San Francisco?

Dangzalan: One of the hotels.

Knaster: Was it a Filipino hotel?

Dangzalan: No, I think no Filipino hotel down there. American hotel.

Knaster: What year was that?

Dangzalan: 1925.

Knaster: So you didn't stay very long in Hawaii.

Dangzalan: No, not very long. My husband's only purpose was to go down there free. The expenses from the Philippines to Hawaii were free. From Hawaii to San Francisco you had to pay.

Coming to California

Knaster: Did you know people in San Francisco?

Dangzalan: Yes, I got my relatives down there to meet me, and Frank came first.

Knaster: How long had they been in San Francisco?

Dangzalan: I don't know. I forgot to ask them.

Knaster: What kind of work were they doing in San Francisco?

Dangzalan: Oh, some working in the post office. I don't remember all because it's long time now . . . 1925 to 1975.

Knaster: When you were in the Philippines do you remember people talking about the United States?

Dangzalan: Yes. Oh, they said it's a nice place.

Knaster: Did what they said make you want to go? Did you have the feeling, well, maybe I should go too because it's nice.

Dangzalan: No. I like to stay in the Philippines. But soon I am married, and my husband he like to do it. I need to follow him.

Knaster: When you came to San Francisco, did your husband look for work?

Dangzalan: Yes, he look for some work in the factory, but I don't know what.

Knaster: And did you stay in the hotel?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Did you continue with the sewing?

Dangzalan: No, just stayed there because we were not there very long, about a month.

Knaster: And then where did you go?

Dangzalan: We go to Stockton to find my husband a job. He don't tell me anything, just say going to another town to see if he got more good job. And my nephew went down there to get a job too, in Stockton.

Knaster: How did you go there?

Dangzalan: We go in the car. I got some relatives to come down there.

Knaster: When you got to Stockton did your husband find work?

Dangzalan: Yes. He's working in the fields.

Knaster: Did he work with asparagus?

Dangzalan: Yes, asparagus, fruit . . . too many kinds.

Knaster: And what were you doing in Stockton?

Dangzalan: Nothing, just I stay in the house.

Knaster: Did you have your own place?

Dangzalan: Yes, because my nephew worked in the hotel. So the boss, she give us one room to stay. And we stay free. We don't pay nothing.

Knaster: Who was the manager of that hotel?

Dangzalan: American lady. I forget the name now.

Knaster: Was she a nice person?

Dangzalan: Yes, she was nice.

Knaster: When your husband worked in asparagus did he work with a group in the fields?

Dangzalan: Yes. I think so because you can't cut asparagus if you're not a group.

Knaster: So did he work with a labor contractor?

Dangzalan: This I don't know because I don't try to ask him.

Knaster: How long did you live in Stockton?

Dangzalan: Oh, not very long, maybe a month or two. Then I moved to Marysville. In Marysville I met an old Filipino man and he asked me if I'd like to buy a pool hall and restaurant. So I buy the business.

Knaster: Did you have to cook in the restaurant?

Dangzalan: Right.

Knaster: So you learned how to cook after all!

Dangzalan: Right.

Knaster: Was it Filipino food?

Dangzalan: Filipino food and American food.

Knaster: And you also had the pool hall next to it.

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Were most of your customers Filipinos?

Dangzalan: Filipinos, American and Mexican. Mix up.

Knaster: Where is Marysville?

Dangzalan: Near Yuba City.

Knaster: How long did you stay there?

Dangzalan: Four or five months only.

Knaster: And did you sell the business to somebody else?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Was it a good business or you didn't like it?

Dangzalan: Yes, it's a good business but I don't like it very much there, not too much people to come around to the business. I heard Watsonville and Salinas is good, because you got a lot of people in there, and good business. Many people told me. The people come down here to work the fruit, because they had a lot of fruit here—apples, pears, peaches, grapes. "Why don't you come to Watsonville, Mama, or Salinas, because there is good business down there." So I made my mind up to come here.

Knaster: Was it okay with your husband to move from place to place?

Dangzalan: No. I separate already.

Knaster: You separated from your husband?

Dangzalan: Yes. I divorce.

Knaster: You got divorced here in the United States?

Dangzalan: Yes. In Stockton in 1926. It's not very long before I mad, and we divorce. Then I left him.

Knaster: And then you didn't see your husband any more?

Dangzalan: No more.

Knaster: You never saw him again?

Dangzalan: After the divorce I don't see him no more. I tell him don't bother me. I don't like to see him any more.

Knaster: Did people get divorced in the Philippines, too?

Dangzalan: Yes. Some no. The people like to get the divorce come here in the United States, because there you not let to divorce. I don't know why.

Coming to Watsonville

Knaster: When did you come to Watsonville?

Dangzalan: 1926.

Knaster: And where did you live?

Dangzalan: I leased four houses on Bridge Street in Watsonville. This is the place I keep the boys working in the fields. Frank [Barba] take all the places of work to the boys. I keep the boys too, the board.

Knaster: How many boys did you have in a house?

Dangzalan: Oh, sometime I got forty boys, fifty boys altogether. Not a very big house.

Knaster: Did you give them beds to sleep on?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: And sheets?

Dangzalan: No, they had to buy that themselves.

Knaster: Did you give them food?

Dangzalan: Yes, because I running boarding house.

Knaster: How much?

Dangzalan: He would pay the board.

Knaster: He would pay by the week or month.

Dangzalan: By the weeks, on pay day. Every two weeks we pay them, we subtract the board.

Knaster: How much did you subtract for board?

Dangzalan: I forget now how much the board in that time was because everything was very cheap in that time. And working in the fields, only thirty cents an hour. So very cheap stuff to buy, and maybe fifty cents a day to board at that time.

Knaster: Who did the cooking?

Dangzalan: I hire two boys to cook. I watch them cooking.

Knaster: You didn't have to work in the house.

Dangzalan: Just I watch the cook and order them what she need.

Knaster: Who cleaned the house, the kitchen and the rooms?

Dangzalan: They cleaned it themselves, the boys.

Knaster: In the Philippines, did you study English?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: So when you came to the United States you were able to speak English?

Dangzalan: Yes, I knew how to speak it. I knew how to talk when I came because I am in fourth grade in the Philippines. The fourth grade there look like eighth grade here. It's very hard to go to school there.

Knaster: What else did you learn besides English? Did you study history?

Dangzalan: It's nothing. Just for business.

Knaster: They didn't show you anything else in school?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: When you came to Watsonville and you started the business with the boarding houses . . .

Dangzalan: Me and Frank did it.

Knaster: . . . were there other Filipino women in the community?

Dangzalan: No, in 1927, not yet Filipino women in that time.

Knaster: Were you the only one?

Dangzalan: No, but I don't going around to see them, just meet them at the social, that's all.

Knaster: Social. What is the social?

Dangzalan: Well, we got the Filipino club in here in Watsonville.

Knaster: For men and women?

Dangzalan: Another club the men, another club the women.

Knaster: This was when you first came here?

Dangzalan: No after that.

Knaster: When did the club start?

Dangzalan: 1942.

Knaster: Oh, so when you first came, in 1927, were there some women here?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Did you have friends?

Dangzalan: I got some in Salinas and in Watsonville, but I don't get them right away because I don't have too much time to go and look around. I take care of the kitchen, watch the cook.

Knaster: Did you live in the boarding house?

Dangzalan: Yes. I lived in the kitchen. My cook, Frank, and me stayed in the house, because I got three bedrooms, and kitchen and dining room, for eating the boys.

Knaster: Was it considered unusual that a woman was in business at the time?

Dangzalan: I don't remember.

Knaster: Well, when you were dealing with people were they surprised? Did they not want to deal with a woman in business?

Dangzalan: Well, some of the American people got surprised. Usually first time see the woman working like this. Especially when I am in camp, separate from Frank. Frank is in another place working under the company. Frank lived in Aromas, the place he is now staying. There is the place he stay running the boarding house, too. I am to the Salinas Road to run my business, a boarding house.

Knaster: You had a boarding house on Salinas Road?

Labor Contracting

Dangzalan: Yes, [for] eleven years. Take care of the crew . . . I make it a big house to keep the boys. When the boys go to work in the morning at five o'clock and go into the fields, I go with them. Work down there and take care of them in the field.

Knaster: Did you work in the fields or did you supervise?

Dangzalan: Yes, supervise the boys.

Knaster: Were you a labor contractor?

Dangzalan: No. Just only soon [they] need some people to work, just call me and I supply them.

Knaster: Who used to call you?

Dangzalan: The farmer.

Knaster: How many farmers used to call you?

Dangzalan: Oh, I got plenty. I don't know, maybe twenty or twenty-five people I supply.

Knaster: All year?

Dangzalan: Yes, all around the year.

Knaster: What crops?

Dangzalan: I got the lettuce. I got bean. I got carrot. I got celery. Sometimes cucumber, garlic in San Juan Bautista.

Knaster: What was the company?

Dangzalan: Gary Company.

Knaster: Where are they?

Dangzalan: I don't know where he is now. But before he got the office in Salinas he hired some people to work in Watsonville. He used to call me. I got manager in the field. I got the foreman. The foreman give me all the order. He comes to the camp, to talk to me in person or call me on the phone—"Bring twenty boys. Bring thirty boys down there. Bring forty boys down there." I am the one to take care of that crew, divide it, which places to go to in the fields, where boys to work.

Knaster: What kind of jobs did the boys do?

Dangzalan: Thinning lettuce, farming. I got lots of things to do in the fields. Hand-work farming.

Knaster: Did they also pick the vegetables, do the harvest?

Dangzalan: Oh yes. They did everything.

Knaster: When did you start working with this company?

Dangzalan: 1930.

Knaster: And before that, did you work with other farmers?

Dangzalan: Yes, me and Frank, when I run the boarding house in Watsonville.

Knaster: When did you get the boarding house on Salinas Road?

Dangzalan: 1930.

Knaster: So you had four in Watsonville and one on Salinas Road?

Dangzalan: No. Because Frank took care of the ones in Watsonville and I went to Salinas Road.

Knaster: Were you responsible for bringing the workers to the fields? Did you have a truck to bring them?

Dangzalan: Yes, I got my two trucks. I got three drivers.

Knaster: Were they Filipino drivers?

Dangzalan: Yes, Filipino. All Filipino working for me.

Knaster: Did the truck drivers live in the house?

Dangzalan: Yes, nobody living outside the camp. I make up the big house to keep all of the boys.

Knaster: Were you the only woman labor contractor?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Do you think it bothered the farmers to deal with a woman?

Dangzalan: No, I think I made it clear to him what the boys doing, just conversation to me, that's all. Even now the people are scared of me.

Knaster: They're scared of you?

Dangzalan: Yes. [laughter]

Knaster: Why are they scared of you?

Dangzalan: Well, I don't know. Because I am not to talk, that's why. Even now, in my business, nobody tell me anything.

Knaster: Did you hire children?

Dangzalan: Oh, when we got some woman working for me who was a servicemen's wife, she bring the kids on Saturday and Sunday and put them to work, eight, nine and fifteen years old.

Knaster: Did you pay the children?

Dangzalan: Yes. I pay by the box.

Knaster: How much did you pay for a box?

Dangzalan: Twenty cents in 1952.

Knaster: How much do they pay now?

Dangzalan: I asked a Mexican farming one time and he say, four dollars now. Because by the hour now in the fields it's three dollars an hour.

Knaster: When the Filipino boys were working for you when you were a labor contractor, how much would a farmer pay you for a job?

Dangzalan: Well, depend on how many hours to work. Sometime fifty cents an hour only. And going up, seventy-five cents an hour. Depend how many hours to work the boys.

Knaster: How many hours a day did they generally work?

Dangzalan: Oh, sometime five hours, sometimes ten hours, sometimes twelve hours. Depends on the crop.

Knaster: Did you ever have to work with the vegetables?

Dangzalan: No, I never work.

Knaster: You only supervised.

Dangzalan: Yes. Look at the boys and see what they are doing.

Knaster: When the boys were working did you bring food for them in the fields?

Dangzalan: Yes, food and water.

Knaster: Where did you get the water?

Dangzalan: From my camp. I got a faucet in the field.

Knaster: When they worked during the days, did they get rest time?

Dangzalan: Yes, fifteen minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes in the afternoon.
Half hour a day.

Knaster: Did you ever have any problems with your workers?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: The boys didn't make problems for you?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: They didn't fight with each other?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: Did you ever have to fire any boys?

Dangzalan: No. They always stayed.

Knaster: Did anyone ever leave for any other reason?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: So you always had the same boys?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Do they still live in Watsonville?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Are those boys still living?

Dangzalan: Some still living, some not. I don't know.

Knaster: But don't you still have a boarding house in town?

Dangzalan: No. I have a rooming house, but not a boarding house. I only rent my hotel to the boys, and to any kind of people that like to rent it.

Knaster: Do you own that house?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: How many Filipino men live there?

Dangzalan: Oh, I don't know how many now. I think I got six Filipino now. Most Mexican and American. The Filipino sometime he not stay. If he got no girl in here, going some other place. Going Fresno, going Arizona, Imperial [Valley], until the season he start again here. Most are Mexican now, working in the field.

Knaster: I saw Filipino men sitting in the town square. I was wondering if those were workers that used to be with you.

Dangzalan: No, nobody stay with me.

Knaster: You said that you started to work for that company as a labor contractor in 1930. That was the beginning of the depression. Do you remember the depression?

Dangzalan: Yes, I am here in the camp in that time. The depression time fifteen cents an hour.

Knaster: Before the depression how much was it?

Dangzalan: Twenty-five cents.

Knaster: So it went down ten cents.

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Was the depression a very hard time for you?

Dangzalan: Well, very hard time for the boys. Because the boys work for a dollar and a half a day. And to pay the board, one dollar.

Knaster: Room and board was a dollar?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Did they also pay you to be their labor contractor?

Dangzalan: No, I am the one to be paid. I make the payroll. The check is in my name and I pay the boys.

Knaster: How much did you get for yourself?

Dangzalan: Two hundred dollars a month.

Knaster: Even in the depression?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Two hundred dollars a month was a lot of money during the depression.

Dangzalan: Yes. But there is the contract to give to the contractor, you need to pay.

Knaster: Did the company tell you what to do?

Dangzalan: Yes. He tell you send the boys to thin lettuce, or hoe lettuce, or irrigate.

Knaster: Did they have a foreman who came to look and see what they were doing, or only you?

Dangzalan: Yes, he sometimes came around to see what the boys were doing. Sometimes he see the boys stand up, and: "Mama, what are the boys doing standing up?" He send me down to them to talk.

Knaster: Do you remember in 1930 there was a riot in Watsonville?

Dangzalan: Yes. But I was in Arizona at the time.

Knaster: What were you doing in Arizona?

Dangzalan: Well, I bring the crew down there to work because in California, not much going.

Knaster: Who sent you to Arizona in 1929?

Dangzalan: Frank and me take the crew, the truck, everything.

Knaster: Did you know where to go?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Who told you to go?

Dangzalan: Well, that's easy if you get the map. And you see the sign on the street too, it's easy.

Knaster: But you knew where there was a farmer to see.

Dangzalan: Oh yes. It was easy to find. Soon you interested in something, it's easy to find it.

Knaster: Where did you go in Arizona?

Dangzalan: I forgot the place.

Knaster: What kind of work was there?

Dangzalan: Same as here, vegetables. I stay in the house and boys go to work. Frank find some job, give it to the boys. Tell the boys to go to work.

Knaster: Where did you live?

Dangzalan: I rent a house down there.

Knaster: And did you cook for the boys then?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: How long did you stay in Arizona?

Dangzalan: I don't know how long. Maybe a month or so.

Knaster: How many boys did you take with you?

Dangzalan: I don't know, maybe ten boys. I fill up my truck to go down there.

Knaster: And then you came back here and you started to work for the company?

Dangzalan: Yes. I go direct to the house in Watsonville.

Knaster: During the depression did you see people suffering very much?

Dangzalan: My boys even if they have no money, if they had lived in my camp before, I feed them. Soon I got the job, then I collect the money.

Knaster: So you took care of them even when they're not working.

Dangzalan: Yes. Even not working, I board them just the same.

Knaster: Do you remember people talking about the riot? When you came back, did anybody in the Filipino community tell you what happened?

Dangzalan: Yes, I heard that some Filipino got shot.

Knaster: Who got shot?

Dangzalan: Oh, Filipino, I don't know the name now. He lived in another Filipino camp, in Eaton Camp on Aromas Road.

Knaster: Do you know what those riots were all about?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: What did the people tell you when you came back?

Dangzalan: Nothing, just say riot. I don't know what happened. They start the riot. American and Filipino.

Knaster: Was there usually a problem like that in town?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: Did you feel discrimination from the Americans?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: You didn't have any problems with them?

Dangzalan: No. Because as soon as I come back the riots stopped.

Knaster: How long did you work for this company?

Dangzalan: Eleven years.

Knaster: Did you have a good arrangement with them?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Why did you stop working with them?

Dangzalan: Well, the company got tired and sold all the land.

Knaster: How much land did they have?

Dangzalan: About 2000 acres. Not only in this area. I got some on San Juan Road, San Juan Bautista, some in Gonzales, Salinas. I go working all around.

Knaster: So you always had to bring the boys to work every day?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: What did the boys do when they were not working? Did they go to dance halls?

Dangzalan: Yes. Some boys go to the dance; some go to another town for vacation, one or two days. Or play volleyball in the camp, because I put in a volleyball place.

Knaster: What about cock fights? Did they have cock fights?

Dangzalan: They didn't have cock fights yet.

Knaster: So when you said you had the labor camp you also said you had a business you went to at night. Where was the business?

Watsonville Businesswoman

Dangzalan: Main Street.

Knaster: The same liquor store that you have now?

Dangzalan: No. That is the first one I make in the building, Monterey Club. A Mexican runs it now.

Knaster: And you have the liquor store.

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: What was it before, a restaurant?

Dangzalan: Restaurant, gambling. I run gambling too. I make that Monterey Club. I buy the dry cleaning business next door to the Monterey Club. I open a pool hall in 1936.

Knaster: Were there women too?

Dangzalan: No Filipino women. Mexican women. American woman working under my beer parlor. And barber shop, Filipino, too.

Knaster: Was there music in the restaurant?

Dangzalan: Yes. I got some dancing, too. Then after that I buy license for nightclub. I run that, too. Soon after that I put a grocery to the place now I am. After that I reopen for nightclub.

Knaster: What kind of nightclub was it? Did you have musicians?

Dangzalan: Dancing, music, every night.

Knaster: Every night!

Dangzalan: Yes. Nightclub.

Knaster: Did you have girls come in?

Dangzalan: Yes, a lot of girls. A lot of family come in.

Knaster: Who were the girls?

Dangzalan: Oh, I don't know their name. [laughter] They were there to dance or drink.

Knaster: Were these girls like prostitutes?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: They were just . . . girls.

Dangzalan: Just family. To come dancing. American people, Mexican people, Filipino peoples . . . A lot of nationalities, Negro, Mexican . . . I got all of them because the nightclub is open wide. My hotel is where we run prostitution. It was legal. All the houses down there on Union Street, all woman business.

Knaster: Oh, I didn't know that.

Dangzalan: Yes. In war time.

Knaster: World War II?

Dangzalan: Yes. Seven houses on Union Street.

Knaster: Who was running the prostitution houses?

Dangzalan: American lady. I hire American lady to take care of the business.

Knaster: All seven houses were yours?

Dangzalan: No. Only my hotel. One lady had two houses. I think one lady managed four houses. Belong to one man all the property and running the business.

Knaster: How many years was this prostitution?

Dangzalan: It's not very long. But in some dancing hall on Union Street, somebody kill woman, dancing woman.

Knaster: Who killed her? Do they know?

Dangzalan: Filipino do killing.

Knaster: Did you have a lot of trouble with the police?

Dangzalan: Not me. Next morning, my police friend come to tell me, "Mama, the chief told me to come to talk to you about the dancing hall in the hotel. Did you hear about the woman killed in the dancing last night, about one o'clock? We better stop your dancing hall now." So I stop planning the dancing hall I was going to put in the hotel. I hadn't yet started the business. I made it a rooming house.

Knaster: The girls that would be in these houses, were their husbands gone?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: What kind of men went to these houses, American men or Filipino men?

Dangzalan: To go into the house, well any people go in there. But Negroes, they don't go.

Knaster: Why no Negroes?

Dangzalan: I had a rule.

Knaster: The reason why I asked you is because I remember in those years there was a law that said Filipino men could not marry white girls. Do you know anything about that law? It was against the law to get married.

Dangzalan: No. I don't remember that. But almost all Filipino come to the business before the prostitution.

Knaster: I heard that the riot in 1930 in Watsonville started because there was a . . .

Dangzalan: Jealousy. Yes, this I heard too. But I can't say anything. [laughter] I heard that the jealousy was for a woman, an American woman.

Labor Issues

Knaster: When you were a labor contractor, did you have a license?

Dangzalan: No. Because no license yet in that time.

Knaster: Did you keep a record of all the payments?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: Did you have to pay for workman's compensation insurance?

Dangzalan: Yes. I pay that too. There was an accident in 1934. My crew went to Milpitas to cut lettuce. My driver went to drive the truck and there were three boys in the front. A garbage truck loading garbage didn't see the pickup and bump my pickup. The pickup got burned and three boys got burned too.

Knaster: Who took care of the boys?

Dangzalan: They were taken to O'Connor Hospital in San Jose. The compensation insurance took care of them. This was in 1934.

Knaster: 1934. Wasn't that when there was a strike in Salinas? Do you remember that strike?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Did your boys go on strike too?

Dangzalan: Some boys like to strike because they liked higher wages. Filipino, Mexican, American—all the boys went on strike.

Knaster: Do you think it was a good idea to strike?

Dangzalan: Myself, no. But what can you do? I don't like to go into the field at that time. I didn't want to get killed. So I told my boss, "You take my crew, I don't like to come in the field to talk." He said, "Yes, better you don't come."

Knaster: So the boys weren't working during the strike?

Dangzalan: Well, some boys like to go. Soon the order came to work, they went.

Knaster: Did any of the boys get hurt?

Dangzalan: Well, I got the guards but as soon as the strikers go down there and bother, the boys come home.

Knaster: Did anybody come to the labor camp and make them join the union?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: The boys didn't like the Filipino labor union?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: There wasn't a union?

Dangzalan: We didn't have a union yet working in the field.

Knaster: Do you remember a union later?

Dangzalan: Yes, but I am not union. I don't join.

Knaster: Did the boys join the union?

Dangzalan: No. Nobody like to join the union in that time. Not much union yet.

Knaster: Did the boys join later?

Dangzalan: This I can't say. I cannot tell you that because nobody tell me anything.

Knaster: Did you ever have any problems with the company? Did they ever not pay you or complain about the work?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: Who gave the boys tools to work with in the field?

Dangzalan: The company.

Knaster: Did you always have enough workers to do the job?

Dangzalan: Yes. Sometimes we had too many.

Knaster: Did the number of boys who worked change from year to year?

Dangzalan: Yes, sometimes boys go to another job to find a job.

Knaster: Did they make enough money to live, to eat?

Dangzalan: Oh, I guess so.

Knaster: Was there ever a time when they came to you and said, “Mama, this happened to me, can you help me?”

Dangzalan: Yes. “I need money, Mama.” Soon we got payday and I subtract it. I pay the boys every two weeks.

Knaster: Did you have a bookkeeping system?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: You wrote everything down.

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: And you did all of this yourself?

Dangzalan: No, I had a bookkeeper. One of my boys. He did all the bookkeeping. But every night when the boys came home I was the one to take care of the list. How many boys, and what the name of the boys to go to another place and another place and another place. My bookkeeper worked in the field too and he didn’t know where all the boys went, so I would take care of the book every night.

Knaster: When you were running the labor camp and the boarding houses, did inspectors come to the camp?

Dangzalan: Yes, they did.

Knaster: How often did they come?

Dangzalan: Twice a month. Especially the health department, they come.

Knaster: In the house?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: What did they look for?

Dangzalan: Well, to see if it's clean.

Knaster: You never have any problems? They always checked out okay.

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: In that time were there other labor contractors?

Dangzalan: No, ma'am.

Knaster: You don't know any other labor contractors?

Dangzalan: No. Even now, I don't know anybody else.

Knaster: You stopped being a labor contractor in 1950?

Dangzalan: Yes. It's a long time.

Knaster: Did you stop doing labor contracting before the strawberries or after the strawberries?

Dangzalan: I stopped working under anybody. I farmed for myself. My company quit the business and I stopped doing the work. I don't go anyplace no more. I farmed for myself. Bought a tractor and everything, recruited men for the field. I buy all the equipment needed for the farming.

Knaster: Why did you stop farming?

Dangzalan: I was tired. I went to the field at five o'clock in the morning and I took care of two children.

Later I grew strawberries. I just took the share to the company, to Driscoll. I worked the land for half the profit. I did that for four years. Only one strawberry season, because strawberries are a three-year season. You plant strawberries every three years. But I quit. I was tired. I had a lot of business in town to take care of and my girl grew up. I got my son, my other adopted son. I put him in the back of the station wagon when I went to the fields. But I don't like very much to come to the field early in the morning and come home at five o'clock.

Knaster: What business do you have now? Only the liquor store, or do you have another business?

Dangzalan: Only the store now. I rented all my buildings, four on Main Street.

Knaster: Did you ever get a license?

Dangzalan: Just a permit to collect the tax, the compensation insurance.

Knaster: Did you like the work you did, being a labor contractor and running your rooming house?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Filipino Life in Watsonville

Knaster: You said you joined a woman's club?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Was the women's club in Watsonville?

Dangzalan: Yes, Filipino Women's Club.

Knaster: You said that was in the 1940s. When did that club start?

Dangzalan: I don't know what year.

Knaster: Who started the club?

Dangzalan: I think the Filipinos started it. But men and women weren't in the same club.

That's the way we do it.

Knaster: Did the club do things to help Filipino people?

Dangzalan: Well, if Filipino or Filipina die or get sick or something, then we help.

Knaster: Do the Filipino people in Watsonville belong to a church?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: What church do they belong to?

Dangzalan: The Ascension Catholic Church in Pajaro.

Knaster: Do you go to that church?

Dangzalan: No, I don't join yet.

Knaster: Do you celebrate the holidays and customs that you did in the Philippines?

Dangzalan: Yes, but by myself only in the house. I don't know who would want to join me.

Knaster: I find it very remarkable that you came here and established yourself so well. You started this business and that business, in this town and that town. It's very amazing to me, especially because you are a woman. Now, my own personal feeling is that women can do anything they want, if they have the mind to do it. But generally they say, "Oh, women—they should just stay in the house, they shouldn't do anything." The fact

that you came to this country and you did so much, and were able to work in business is really ingenious. That's why I asked you if you ever had any problems.

Dangzalan: No, no problem.

Knaster: That's very good. You always seem to know what to do and how to deal in the business.

Dangzalan: I guess, because nobody give me advice or anything. But many people come to me to ask for advice.

Knaster: Did you ever have any trouble getting money for your business? Did you go to a bank?

Dangzalan: I go to the bank and borrow money and then I have it.

Knaster: And they never said no?

Dangzalan: No, they never said no. I open my business at Wells Fargo Bank in 1930. They lend me fifty dollars for my business. I fill out the form and sign it.

Knaster: Do you think that if you had stayed in the Philippines that you would have been able to do as much—houses and business and everything.

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: The fact that you are a woman would not have prevented you?

Dangzalan: Not at all.

Knaster: You have been in Watsonville fifty years?

Dangzalan: Yes, I come here in 1927, until now. Fifty years exactly.

Knaster: What changes have you seen since 1927? What's different in agriculture from when your boys first started working? Do they grow the same crops? Do they use the same machinery or do they have new machinery?

Dangzalan: Well they have a lot of different machinery, I guess, but I can't say very much because I don't go to work anyplace now. I quit the nightclub. I have a lot of headaches. Too many places to go. I can't sleep. How could I sleep? I close the club at two o'clock, and at six o'clock I have to get up, to fix again the place. I stayed on at the club. I go to the bar. I go to the grocery. I go to the hotel to look around, night and day. I quit the nightclub. But I don't quit the grocery. After that I quit the bar. I give lease to the people. I stop doing the dry cleaning business because not much good business.

Knaster: Did you ever get sick?

Dangzalan: Well, I sick in 1952. I got an operation for my tumor. That's why I sell the bar, because I am tired after my operation.

Knaster: Was it cancer?

Dangzalan: Look like cancer tumor. After that I don't know how many years, I had an operation on my kidney to take it out. The doctor told me I had cancer of the kidney. So they cut it. And a year or two ago I went again to the hospital because of an ulcer.

Knaster: Did you have to have an operation?

Dangzalan: No, no operation. He just give me medicine. And from that time to now, it's all right. I go to check-up to the doctor and he say, "You're okay, you're all right now, but be careful of hot spices. Don't use it very much."

Knaster: Do you cook Filipino food?

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: Is it very spicy?

Dangzalan: Well, usually. [laughter]

Knaster: How do you feel now?

Dangzalan: Okay. I work in the store at twelve o'clock, sometimes until two o'clock in the morning when I have something very important to do.

Knaster: Even now?

Dangzalan: Yes, ma'am. I close the store at two o'clock.

Knaster: The liquor store.

Dangzalan: Yes.

Knaster: It stays open so late?

Dangzalan: I close the store at 2:00, take the money out, and put it in the safe. After that I go pick up Patricia and come home before 3:00. And Patricia she can't sleep, sometime 3:30 or 4:00 before she sleeps.

Knaster: Where do you pick her up?

Dangzalan: The place where I got somebody to take care of her.

Knaster: Are you in the store by yourself at 2:30 in the morning?

Dangzalan: Well, my cook and my helper, because I got two registers and I got one guy working with me during the night.

Knaster: Isn't it dangerous for you to be there so late? Somebody could come in there with a gun.

Dangzalan: Nobody comes to make a bothering.

Knaster: You never had that happen?

Dangzalan: No, nothing yet.

Knaster: Not even once.

Dangzalan: Nothing yet, no.

Knaster: In fifty years? Nobody ever tried to do anything?

Dangzalan: No, nobody threw me yet down there. No fight yet, anything in that place. Some kids start to fight, to argue, I talk to them, "Please don't do that. What for? You're good boys, both of you and if you like to argue, too small the place. You go outside and argue on the side. Oh, okay, Mama. I'm sorry. Okay, okay. Even American guy, even Mexican go argue on the outside. I don't let them argue inside.

The only trouble is when people steal some wine. The other night somebody stole one gallon of wine, and my cook ran after him and the policeman ran after him. So the policeman says, "Mama, you sign the claim for the boys?" I don't like to sign that claim. Hurt me to sign that claim. I talk to the boys, say, "Please don't do this anymore. Because this is not good. If you need something and you got no money, you ask me and I give it to you. Don't steal it. Because stealing is not good now. The policeman catch you and like me to sign that claim to you." "Mama, please, please. I won't do it no more. Please help me, don't put me in the jail." I say to the boys, "Well all right, but you promise not to do that in my store, or anyplace. "Okay, Mama. I come in to buy things to eat, but I don't do it no more." So I free the boys. And the policeman gets mad at me, "What's a matter with you, Mama," he say, "You like to cover the people who make it do bad to you?"

Knaster: Do you ever have to pay the policeman anything?

Dangzalan: The police, no.

Knaster: They don't come up and ask you for money or anything?

Dangzalan: No.

Knaster: Thank you very much.

