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Samuel “Sammy” Yoro interviewed by Hana Yamamoto

Speakers: Samuel “Sammy” Yoro; Hana Yamamoto

Date: March 23, 2023

Scope and Contents:

In this interview, originally recorded in person, Samuel “Sammy” Yoro speaks with Watsonville is in the Heart team member, Hana Yamamoto. Sammy begins by discussing how his father, Sabino Ivanos Yoro came to the United States from the Philippines and eventually settled in Watsonville to work in the lettuce fields. Sammy talks about how he began working with his father harvesting produce in high school and he describes how working in the asparagus fields helped him become a better track and field athlete in high school. Sammy goes on to describe how the agriculture industry evolved over the years and notes the influence of Cesar Chavez on farm labor strikes. Sammy discusses his involvement with The Independent Farmworkers Union. Sammy also talks about his mother, Gregor Otero, who came to Watsonville from New Mexico to start a family and work in the canneries. Sammy reflects on how growing up in a multiracial community affected his views on his parents’ interracial marriage, and he remembers his mother’s involvement in Filipino community organizations.

Hana Yamamoto 00:00

All right, so, um, my name is Hana Yamamoto. I'm here in Watsonville on Thursday, March 23 at 2:19pm with Sammy Yoro. All right, Sammy, could we start off by– could you give me your parents' full names and date of birth?

Sammy Yoro 00:25

Okay. Let's see. My dad's name was Sabino Ivanos Yoro. And let's see, he was born in 1920– wait, let's see. Oh, December 25!

Hana Yamamoto 00:49

December 25.

Sammy Yoro 00:50

December 25, 1912. Yeah. And– what else now?

Hana Yamamoto 00:56

And what about your mom?

Sammy Yoro 00:58

And my mom was– was– her name was Gregor Otero. Now, I don't– I don't know. I couldn't pronounce her middle name. She didn't– she didn't give it to me. So, Gregor Otero and she was born in– in September 7, 1927. Do you want their death date too? Or no?

Hana Yamamoto 01:20

Oh, we can get– Actually yeah, that would be–

Sammy Yoro 01:24

And then my dad passed away in– on May 12, 1989, and my mom passed away in August 7, 1999.

Hana Yamamoto 01:35

Thank you for that information.

Sammy Yoro 01:37

Okay.

Hana Yamamoto 01:38

So yeah, I guess, your–your dad, where was he raised?

Sammy Yoro 01:43

He was raised in Ilocos Sur in North Western Philippines. In a little teeny town.

Hana Yamamoto 01:54

Have you ever visited his hometown?

Sammy Yoro 01:56

No.

Hana Yamamoto 01:56

No.

Sammy Yoro 01:57

No, my sister did. That's– she– my sister's kind of– she's pretty– she knows a lot of stuff. You know, she writes it down and she keeps it. But for me– I was just– I never cared. I just– I worked with my dad for 35 years. So it's like, we were really close. So I thought I knew everything about him. But I didn't, you know, I didn't know he wasn't married.

Hana Yamamoto 02:18

Well, good– good thing your sister knows.

Sammy Yoro 02:20

Yeah, she– she said it straight.

Hana Yamamoto 02:23

So do you know when your dad came to the U.S.?

Sammy Yoro 02:27

Let's see here. I think– yeah, I do know, she gave me that. Yeah. They– he came in 1942.

Hana Yamamoto 02:37

1942. And how did he get to the United States?

Sammy Yoro 02:41

Like transportation or—?

Hana Yamamoto 02:43

Transportation, and where did he first arrive?

Sammy Yoro 02:46

He got a boat. They rode a— they got a boat. I think it was a merchant marine boat. Him and his brother. And then they— they, they went to Hawai'i and they stayed in Hawai'i for like three years.

Hana Yamamoto 02:59

Do you know which island in Hawai'i?

Sammy Yoro 03:00

Yeah. Oahu. Yeah. Cuz— because we still got a lot of family over there from my uncle.

Hana Yamamoto 03:06

Oh, cool.

Sammy Yoro 03:07

I got cousins and auntie and— and my uncle. So, they're pretty old though. Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 03:14

Do you know what he was doing in Oahu?

Sammy Yoro 03:17

They were just waiting to come to the United States.

Hana Yamamoto 03:19

Oh, okay.

Sammy Yoro 03:19

Yeah, they had to like do some kind of stuff because the United States government said they could leave the Philippines. You know, so they helped the United States leave the Philippines. And then they stayed in Hawai'i. And then when— when the war was subsided, and then they came to— to San Francisco.

Hana Yamamoto 03:39

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 03:39

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 03:40

And then how long was your dad in San Francisco?

Sammy Yoro 03:43

Oh, shoot. Maybe he was— I think— Let me see. I don't know the— let's see, from '42 to '49.

Hana Yamamoto 03:55

Okay, so seven years.

Sammy Yoro 03:57

Yeah. Then that's when he met my mother.

Hana Yamamoto 03:59

In San Francisco?

Sammy Yoro 04:00

No, here.

Hana Yamamoto 04:02

Oh, okay.

Sammy Yoro 04:02

Yeah. Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 04:04

So what— do you know what brought your dad from San Francisco to here, in Watsonville?

Sammy Yoro 04:12

Oh, yeah. They wanted to— all the Filipinos that were in San Francisco, they were all there, but they didn't want to be there. They wanted to have a career, you know, when they want to start a life. And then so they came to this area to work in the fields. They needed— they needed farmworkers so— so they came here they— the Filipinos got a big community and they— and they— they formed a harvesting unit. So all the Filipinos have their own harvesting unit. And so they— they would go out and hire themselves to the Yugoslavians and the people who own ranches and they would harvest their produce.

Hana Yamamoto 04:50

Oh, okay.

Sammy Yoro 04:51

So— so that was pretty productive. So when they were in San Francisco, they just worked on odd jobs. My dad said something like he was a cook, and then he just cleaned You know, and he drove some

people around. And, you know, but– but then he didn't like that. He wanted to– he wanted to have a life. He wanted to have– have it. You know, the American dream.

Hana Yamamoto 05:11

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 05:11

The wife and kids and the house and a million dollars.

Hana Yamamoto 05:17

Yeah. So then he moved to Watsonville. And he was harvesting produce.

Sammy Yoro 05:22

Yeah, harvesting produce.

Hana Yamamoto 05:23

Do you know which farms he worked for?

Sammy Yoro 05:25

Yeah, he worked for Crosetti. He worked for Dobler. And then he ended up– we worked together at C&V farms. Colendich and Vukasovich Farms right here in Watsonville. And Aromas. So– and that's– that's where he spent the rest of his life. But– but before I think it was, when he first– when I was born in '52, so probably– probably from '55 to let's– I guess, probably '66, or something like that. Yeah, '55 to '66. He kind of worked with all these different pharmacies or whichever they contracted.

Hana Yamamoto 06:08

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 06:08

The Filipinos would contract these things, and then harvest cabbage, lettuce, beans, you know, berries and apples and stuff like that. For– and then he went to C&V Farms and then that's where I came in. And then it was established. That was 1973. That's when Cesar Chavez came in. For here in Watsonville, Cesar Chavez came here in '73.

Hana Yamamoto 06:34

Oh, wow.

Sammy Yoro 06:34

Yeah. That kind of like, whoa, that was big for me.

Hana Yamamoto 06:38

Did you ever get to meet him?

Sammy Yoro 06:40

I didn't get to meet him. But I saw him.

Hana Yamamoto 06:42

Oh, you saw him?

Sammy Yoro 06:42

Yeah, he was working on Levee Road over here, Pajaro, right by the Pajaro River.

Hana Yamamoto 06:47

Oh, wow.

Sammy Yoro 06:47

They were waving the red flags with the black things, you know. And then I had just came out of college, I just got hurt. So I came out of college in '72. And then in '73, that's when Cesar Chavez came around. And I thought to myself, "whoa, man!", you know, because there was nothing like that, right? So we kind of— because I did my research with him. And I said, "Wow, this guy's he's— he knows something. Something's happening here", you know. Because he was doing all the boycotts and doing all kinds of stuff, you know, and helping the, the Mexican people, the Mexican farmworkers. But see if all of us— we were— they were the Mexican farmworkers, we're the Filipino farmworkers. They had their— their, their companies, you know, their— their crews, their lettuce crews, their harvesting crews. And then the Filipinos had theirs. So there was 100 people in the harvesting crews for Mexican. And then there was 100 Filipinos in their own crew, you know, so they— it was like a separate thing.

Hana Yamamoto 07:52

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 07:52

Filipino crew, Mexican crew, you know. So in '73. But uh, but with Cesar Chavez, and plus, there was a lot of guys like me, you know, that would— that knew, that went to college, and they knew that there was something happening. But I knew I was gonna stay with the produce, because I wanted to live that life. You know, I wanted to have a free life, you know. And so, I stayed in the lettuce, but I used Cesar Chavez, the way he was doing things, and put it in the Filipino crew kind of thing. So we invented our own union, Cesar Chavez had the United Farm Workers. And we had our— our union was called Independent.

Sammy Yoro 08:32

The independent Farm Workers, but they were Filipinos.

Hana Yamamoto 08:32

Independent?

Hana Yamamoto 08:37

That's awesome.

Sammy Yoro 08:38

Yeah. So we capped on that, you know, and we got, if not more of what Cesar Chavez got, and that's why I'm sitting here like I am right now. You know, in my house.

Hana Yamamoto 08:48

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 08:48

Retired. My dad never retired. My dad worked all the way till he died. You know, he was 80 years old. He, he was working on lettuce. When he was my age, he was still working the lettuce field. I don't know how he did it because sometimes I wake up in the morning and I can't even move.

Hana Yamamoto 09:02

He was working in the lettuce field when he was 70?

Sammy Yoro 09:05

75.

Hana Yamamoto 09:06

Wow. That's a long time.

Sammy Yoro 09:09

In the lettuce field!

Hana Yamamoto 09:10

Yeah, and that's hard work.

Sammy Yoro 09:11

Phew! I remember the Yugo– the Yugoslavian bosses, the two bosses. We wer– we were good friends of course. We worked 30 years with them, right. And they gave us a house to live in. We lived in this big giant– um, it was like a field. It was 100 acres. It wasn't a field– it was 100 acres. It was huge. It was a ranch. But they would do produce. They would raise cabbage, beans, lettuce, and then we'd harvest it but they let us live there. Me and my dad and our family. We lived there. So– so–

Hana Yamamoto 09:48

Where– where is this?

Sammy Yoro 09:49

Over in San Miguel Canyon Road right over here, off San Juan Road. You know, it was a big farm thing. But the thing was is when my dad was like 75 years old the– the boss came up to me and he goes, "Sammy", he goes, "Here is 20 bucks. Go take your dad to breakfast and tell him don't come back". Because he was too old. And my dad didn't want to leave. He wanted to keep working till he died. And then he didn't have a reason to not work. You know, he, you know, he didn't have to work for– he just wanted to work. Yeah, he just loved working. You know,

Hana Yamamoto 10:27

He worked even when he didn't have to.

Sammy Yoro 10:29

You had to make him retire.

Sammy Yoro 10:29

Yeah, he worked. And so I remember that day I took him— I— I left work. And I took him. And we had breakfast and I said, "You know, The bosses says don't go back Dad. You need to retire". And then I got my brother and my two sisters and we all said 'Dad, retire, retire!' He was so angry. But he did. He stayed home.

Sammy Yoro 10:32

We had to make him.

Hana Yamamoto 10:33

Oh my God.

Sammy Yoro 10:37

And I— I kind of like was on the fence myself—

Hana Yamamoto 10:57

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 10:58

—in 2019. Because of my knee. I had— I had planned this thing for almost 10 years with a knee replacement. And then when 2020 hit, of course, we know 2020, right.

Hana Yamamoto 11:08

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 11:09

So that that made me retire right there. I said, "That's it". I threw in the towel. I said, "I'm gonna retire". And the reason why I retired is because for my dad.

Hana Yamamoto 11:18

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 11:19

Because he didn't retire. He couldn't retire. He didn't know how. But I studied how to retire.

Hana Yamamoto 11:25

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 11:26

I made a study of it. And so I retired. I've been retired now for two years.

Hana Yamamoto 11:33

That's awesome.

Sammy Yoro 11:34

Yeah, it's pretty good.

Hana Yamamoto 11:35

Um, well, I—I guess I want to circle back to your mom.

Sammy Yoro 11:41

Okay.

Hana Yamamoto 11:41

So where did your dad meet your mom?

Sammy Yoro 11:47

Here. In Watsonville.

Hana Yamamoto 11:48

In Watsonville? How— like, how did they meet?

Sammy Yoro 11:51

Well, again, the—all the Filipinos had their— their like community, right. So the Filipinos were a tight community. And so a lot of the Filipinos, they worked in lettuce fields, but a lot of Filipinos didn't.

Hana Yamamoto 12:04

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 12:04

You know, some— most of the Filipinos working in lettuce fields and produce. But most— mos— a lot of the Filipinos didn't. Well, there was some Filipinos that were pretty intellectual. And so they figured out a way how— because one of the American dreams for the Filipinos coming from the Philippines was they needed to get married and have kids.

Hana Yamamoto 12:24

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 12:25

Because that's the dream, right?

Hana Yamamoto 12:26

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 12:27

Look at me. I got four kids. We– look at that. You know, four kids, ten grandkids I got.

Hana Yamamoto 12:32

Oh, that's a big family!

Sammy Yoro 12:34

Yeah. But that's what– that's what– what they wanted, the Filipinos.

Hana Yamamoto 12:38

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 12:38

So but they– would– there was no women.

Hana Yamamoto 12:41

Mm, it was a bachelor community.

Sammy Yoro 12:44

No, they're just– there was no such thing as Filipinos getting women.

Hana Yamamoto 12:48

Oh.

Sammy Yoro 12:48

Yeah. You know, you just don't go out. You know, there's no– you just don't go out and get it. So what happened was some of the intellectual Filipinos went down to different towns down by the border.

Hana Yamamoto 13:02

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 13:02

And they got women who were interested in men. And so they said, "Okay, you want to marry– get married? Are you interested in getting married? We got a bunch of Filipinos over here looking for women". So they brought all these women to Watsonville. And then the Filipinos just paired off to help to build their lives.

Hana Yamamoto 13:22

So that's how your dad met your mom?

Sammy Yoro 13:24

Yeah, they all came here to work in the, in the canneries. Yeah, the canneries and stuff. And then so they had these Filipino gatherings. You know, these— every week they had a dance. Saturday night dance.

Hana Yamamoto 13:40

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 13:40

And so they would invite all these women and everything. So they paired off, and then they got married. And then there you go. American dream. You got a wife. You got a job, you got, you know, you're making money. This is great.

Hana Yamamoto 13:52

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 13:52

You know, you're not in a Third World. You're in— you're in the United States. I'm an American citizen.

Hana Yamamoto 14:00

So your mom, where did she grow up?

Sammy Yoro 14:04

In New Mexico.

Hana Yamamoto 14:05

In New Mexico.

Sammy Yoro 14:06

Yeah, in a little town called Los Lunas.

Hana Yamamoto 14:10

So do you know, I guess, like what her life was like in New Mexico?

Sammy Yoro 14:18

Not really, you know, she— because she came here when she was young. I think my mom came here— I think it was— okay I don't— I'm not good with numbers. You'd have to do the numbers. But when she was born till— what did I say? She met my dad. Did I tell you?

Hana Yamamoto 14:36

Um, I think you said 1949.

Sammy Yoro 14:42

Yeah. '49. So— so she was born in 1927, right. So she— she met my dad in 1949. So I mean, what's left in between, you know? Say like she's, she's 27, 27, 37, 47. That's 20 years old. Right?

Hana Yamamoto 15:04

That's young.

Sammy Yoro 15:05

Yeah. So she was like, probably in her 20s. But I don't know. They didn't– she didn't talk about when she was growing up. She, you know– but I went– I've been to New Mexico a lot and met her side of the family.

Hana Yamamoto 15:20

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 15:20

You know, she had– she had the brothers and sisters, like three sisters and three brothers, you know, a big family, but– but I don't know what they did. I mean, I knew where they grew up. I went to their house. You know, but I mean, for me, you know, being born and raised here.

Hana Yamamoto 15:37

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 15:37

In Watsonville. Go to a little teeny town in New Mexico, wow! It was like, wow, where am I? It's like another world, cactus!

Hana Yamamoto 15:52

So, when she came to Watsonville from New Mexico, you mentioned she worked in the canneries?

Sammy Yoro 15:58

Yes, she worked in the canneries.

Hana Yamamoto 16:00

Do you know which one she worked at?

Sammy Yoro 16:04

Shoot. I know the one that she worked at, the last one before she retired. But– but I don't know the– I guess it was just Watsonville Cannery. I don't know, because her sister worked there too.

Hana Yamamoto 16:18

Okay, so she moved here with her sister.

Sammy Yoro 16:19

Yeah, her and her sister both came and they both married Filipinos. And then they were like– like this. And me and her kids and my cousins. And we all grew together.

Hana Yamamoto 16:29

Oh, that's awesome.

Sammy Yoro 16:30

Yeah. We're like, right next door. You know, it was like, my mom and her sister were like— like that. And then my dad and her husband were kind of close, but they weren't related or anything. They were just Filipinos and Filipino community. But I don't know. That's— that's really, you know, I kind of said, talked about that with my sister on the phone. Because I really didn't know a lot about my mom was— you know, when she was growing up.

Hana Yamamoto 16:59

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 17:00

And I know when she got here she was young. You know. Because it was a couple— of couple of pictures we got of her when she was really super young that my sister has.

Hana Yamamoto 17:10

Oh.

Sammy Yoro 17:11

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 17:12

That's cool. Do you have those pictures? Oh, your sister has them.

Sammy Yoro 17:17

She lives in Las Vegas. Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 17:21

So I guess, outside of work at the canneries, do you know what your mom would do for fun? Or in her free time?

Sammy Yoro 17:28

They— she belonged to the Filipino community.

Hana Yamamoto 17:30

Oh okay.

Sammy Yoro 17:31

Yeah. So they were— they're really the— the, that— the families really into like Filipino communities because— because they started having babies, right, the American dream. So they started having babies and stuff. And then so us, you know, like the kids, we'd go to the, like the dance troupe, the Filipino dance troupe. So we would go to a dance.

Hana Yamamoto 17:57

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 17:58

So we'd learn how to do traditional Filipino dances.

Hana Yamamoto 18:01

Oh, that's fun!

Sammy Yoro 18:02

So we go to school, then we'd go there. And then we go to play at the playground. And then my mom would go to work. And then she would just take— take care of us and then take us to the Filipino communities cause we were a real close knit community, you know, all the Filipinos are all— you know, every Saturday there was a dance. You know, we— we had Filipino functions for everything. You know, like Fourth of July. Like I was always in the Fourth of July parade. Little Filipinos. Having a banner says "Mabuhay Ike."

Hana Yamamoto 18:02

That's awesome. Your mom would take you to these like Filipino clubs?

Sammy Yoro 18:42

Yeah. And we learn— all learned how to dance, the Filipino traditional dances. Like— like, sometimes I tell my— my granddaughter I used to like have these coconuts, I'd crack them, and I'd say, "You know, when I was little kid, I used to do this coconut dance. It was called the coconut dance".

Hana Yamamoto 18:59

The coconut dance?

Sammy Yoro 19:00

Yeah, the coconut dance. And I'd show 'em and they'd get a kick out of it, man! They'd be doing the coconut dance, if I can remember, you know, the coconut dance. You know, I would just put the whole thing was— was the coconuts, you know, the cracked coconut shells. You can make sounds with the crack coconut. And then dance.

Hana Yamamoto 19:18

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 19:19

And then there was another one is called the tinikling and it was a bamboo dance where you danced with bamboos.

Hana Yamamoto 19:23

Oh okay.

Sammy Yoro 19:24

You know. And then there was another dance. It was called the rice dance.

Hana Yamamoto 19:27

The rice dance?

Sammy Yoro 19:28

Yeah, the rice dance. And so you acted like you were doing rice. So– so the dance– the dance troupe was really– it was kind of like my highlight of my life. I think you guys had a picture of that somewhere in there. I know. I have a picture of it somewhere, because they got my name wrong.

Hana Yamamoto 19:53

So you said your mom was very involved with the Filipino community, but I remember you said she's not Filipina?

Sammy Yoro 20:04

No, she's Mexican and Indian.

Hana Yamamoto 20:07

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 20:07

American Indian, Navajo Indian. You know, and then her mother was Mexican and Navajo. And her father was like Mexican, Spanish, kind of Spanish-Mexican.

Hana Yamamoto 20:24

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 20:25

My great grandfather– and I didn't know any of my– my grandparents. That's why sometimes when I go to take my grandkids, because my daughter is– she has, like four kids too. But she has two that are five and six. And sometimes she gets– because she's– she works for the school district. And she gets like busy doing stuff. And she goes, "Oh, Dad, can you pick up the kids at daycare?" And so I'll go "Yeah, sure!" I go pick up the kids. You know, I have the afternoon with them. And then I tell her, "Oh man, you know, you're so lucky that that you got your grandpa because I never had– I never knew my grandparents". I tell my grandkids. I go "You–" cause they always go "Grandpa!" when they see me– "Grandpa!" And I laugh and I tell them "You know, I never knew my grandpa– my grandparents at all period".

Hana Yamamoto 21:12

Because both your parents moved here.

Sammy Yoro 21:14

Yeah. And my– my dad's parents are in the Philippines. My mother's parents were in New Mexico.

Hana Yamamoto 21:20

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 21:22

So never met 'em.

Hana Yamamoto 21:24

Grandparents are very special.

Sammy Yoro 21:26

Yeah, that's why I– anytime my daughter calls me, like, usually about 1:30 or 2, she'll call me. "Can you pick up the kids?" and I just go. I run. Because I like it. But she doesn't like to bother me. She likes to leave me do what I'm doing. Because she knows how busy I get.

Hana Yamamoto 21:43

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 21:44

Because right now fishing seasons like two weeks away and I need to get my boat going. So–

Hana Yamamoto 21:49

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 21:50

Out in the bay.

Hana Yamamoto 21:51

Yeah. So your mo– your mom was Mexican and Navajo. Did you ever– did she ever do any like, make any cultural foods, or did you ever learn Spanish growing up?

Sammy Yoro 22:06

Yeah, I actually spoke Spanish when I was little, like when I was like two, three, four, or five. But when I went to school, my dad had this thing. My dad could speak five languages too.

Hana Yamamoto 22:21

Oh, wow.

Sammy Yoro 22:21

I know. My dad was like he could speak– but the thing is, just one day– I don't know the real story– but one day my– my mom just said that she wasn't going to speak Spanish to us anymore. All English. Because my dad came home one day and said "Okay, no more foreign languages. Only English".

Hana Yamamoto 22:42

Oh, wow. Do you know what prompted them to stop speaking—?

Sammy Yoro 22:46

My dad. My dad just didn't want to speak any more languages. He just wanted to speak totally English.

Hana Yamamoto 22:54

Do you know why?

Sammy Yoro 22:54

I have no idea. My sister told me that that's what happened.

Hana Yamamoto 22:58

Oh.

Sammy Yoro 22:59

You know, my oldest sister said that. You know, she's— she said they— they just— because we— I could speak Spanish when I was little because my mom spoke Spanish with her sister.

Hana Yamamoto 23:09

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 23:09

And they would have her friends. And they'd all speak Spanish. We all knew Spanish. But then one day, my dad came back and and I was starting to learn how to speak Filipino too. And I actually took it up a little bit when I was working in the fields, because I wanted to understand what the Filipinos were talking about.

Hana Yamamoto 23:25

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 23:25

So I tried to learn a lot of words. And I did. I learned a lot of words. But then everybody started speaking English.

Hana Yamamoto 23:32

Yeah, so you kind of lose it after time. So did your mom just stop speaking Spanish in the house too?

Sammy Yoro 23:41

No. She— they still spoke Spanish and— but they never, you know, to talk to us in Spanish. She talked to her friends in Spanish, but not to us. You know, but we can understand words.

Hana Yamamoto 23:53

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 23:54

You know, we can understand them. But we didn't speak it.

Hana Yamamoto 23:58

I see. That's interesting.

Sammy Yoro 24:01

Yeah, that's very interesting. Because like, a lot of my friends, they could speak Spanish. Yeah. You know, the friends I grew up with, they didn't cut it out in their house. You know, they— they had languages— both languages, three languages.

Hana Yamamoto 24:13

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 24:14

Because Filipinos can speak a lot of different dialects, you know. So.

Hana Yamamoto 24:23

So, yeah, well, I guess now I want to circle back to your parents' marriage. You mentioned to me that, even though they met and they had a family earlier, they didn't get married until the 70's.

Sammy Yoro 24:39

Yeah. '78. That was— that was unusual. I guess— the way my sister said when I talked to her, she goes, "Well, you know the story" and I go "No, I don't know the story". She was "Well, because they couldn't get married!"

Hana Yamamoto 24:52

They couldn't get married?

Sammy Yoro 24:53

Yeah. And I was going "Why?" and she goes "Because my dad" and then and then I go "Why? He wasn't a citizen?" She goes "Well he wasn't a citizen for a while, but then they didn't get married". They just like common law marriage or whatever. They just never got married. But then my mom always wanted to get married. So they got married in '78.

Hana Yamamoto 25:01

Wow. So they'd been married for like 30 years pretty much.

Sammy Yoro 25:17

Yeah, together.

Hana Yamamoto 25:18

Or, together for 30 years.

Sammy Yoro 25:18

Yeah, but they– but I don't know, my mother– my dad said he wanted to go back because I guess some– something to do with his family dying. And then they were selling all the property because he had a lot of property. And then, so he wanted to go there and take care of it.

Hana Yamamoto 25:19

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 25:19

So my sister, my mom and her– and my dad went back. And then so when they came back, I guess they got married! Over there–

Hana Yamamoto 25:42

In– in the Philippines?

Sammy Yoro 25:43

Yeah. And I didn't even know anything about it. Because '78 was weird for me, because I– I had my firstborn was born in '74.

Hana Yamamoto 25:51

Oh okay.

Sammy Yoro 25:52

So I was kind of like having my own family, you know.

Hana Yamamoto 25:55

Yeah, you were busy.

Sammy Yoro 25:57

I had my own thing going on, you know.

Hana Yamamoto 25:59

So it was your younger sister that went?

Sammy Yoro 26:02

Yeah, my– my younger sister.

Hana Yamamoto 26:03

And what's– what's her name?

Sammy Yoro 26:06

Susan.

Hana Yamamoto 26:07

Okay, so she went to— with your parents while they got married.

Sammy Yoro 26:11

And she was— she was young, too. She was— see, let's see. That would have— she would have been probably, probably like 18 or 19 or something like that. 18 or 19. Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 26:11

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 26:12

Yeah, cuz she was all excited. I remember when she— I go, "What's so exciting about going to Philippines, man?" She was all excited about it. And she still says, you know, she was— she liked it. That trip. That was a good trip for her.

Hana Yamamoto 26:37

That's awesome.

Sammy Yoro 26:38

Yeah. She says to just see the countryside and everything. She goes, "Man, it's like really— no cities. No, nothing, you know, just little towns, you know, little towns. There's no buildings, no, nothing. Little places. And the houses were shacks, you know". And then where my dad grew up was— she said he was way out in the boondocks she said, but I don't know. I guess that was a good experience for her.

Hana Yamamoto 27:09

Yeah. So your— your parents, they were an interracial couple. Did you ever notice them facing any discrimination for that?

Sammy Yoro 27:25

You know what I was just thinking that. No, I never— I never even— man, for some reason I never was involved in that. I think I started learning it probably in 1968 I think. '68, '69. When they started— that guy that— that started doing the Cesar Chavez thing.

Hana Yamamoto 27:45

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 27:45

You know, that's right. It was '69 and '70. There was a lot of— ratio of, you know, stuff and I didn't even hardly notice it, you know, like, growing up because we lived in a community where were all mixed, you know, it's like Mexican, Filipinos, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Cubans. I mean, this— like we were all intermixed. I never noticed anything. Yeah, like white people or Japanese. Some of my best friends were Japanese. You know, two of my best friends are Japanese. You know, one of my best friends was Black guy.

Hana Yamamoto 28:24

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 28:24

So I never really knew, you know, and then I hung around with all the Filipinos. We had our own little Filipino crew in high school. You know?

Hana Yamamoto 28:33

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 28:35

We were basketball players and track players.

Hana Yamamoto 28:38

That's awesome.

Sammy Yoro 28:39

And we had a— we had a, we had a championship basketball team. We won a championship, like four years.

Hana Yamamoto 28:45

Wow. That's impressive.

Sammy Yoro 28:47

Oh, yeah, we— we were pretty impressive. I mean, my son. That one right there. See that guy right there? My son. That's his graduation picture. They all graduate from Watsonville, look at it, Watsonville Wildcats. You know, Watsonville '91. All my kids graduated. They're all athletes. But when my son went to high school, when he was a junior and senior, he was a basketball player too.

Hana Yamamoto 29:16

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 29:17

But they won the championship. But you know, what was so weird about it was the guys that he won the championship with, it was almost like us winning the championship in 1969 and '70. Because it's the same last name— Yoro. The same three last names, four last names. You know what I'm saying?

Hana Yamamoto 29:39

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 29:39

Their fathers—

Hana Yamamoto 29:40

It's like the descendants.

Sammy Yoro 29:42

Yeah. Their fathers were my friends on the same team.

Hana Yamamoto 29:45

That's awesome. That's really cool.

Sammy Yoro 29:47

And they haven't won a championship since then, since '70. I think the last time we won a championship was '70. And then all of us— wait '70, '80, '90— what year is that? '80, '90? What year did he graduate? They didn't have— that— Watsonville didn't have a championship all those years. And they were still talking about our team. Because they played the same way we played.

Hana Yamamoto 30:14

Okay, so you were a legendary team.

Sammy Yoro 30:17

Yeah. And— and then— and then they brought up the fact that the guy who was coaching him used to always say, "God, your dad—" cuz I never said it, you know, but he used to tell him— he goes, "You know, your dad was like, the last lightweight". You know, 1970, I was the last lightweight. And then I broke two track records in '69 and '70. And they were— they were Monterey Bay, the League Champ records. I broke them. And they were never to be broken again. They're stamped forever.

Hana Yamamoto 30:51

Wow.

Sammy Yoro 30:52

Because there's no mor— no more Division.

Hana Yamamoto 30:54

Okay,

Sammy Yoro 30:54

So 1970 the division ended, and I ended up with the the two records for the— for the— for the track records for tha— for that event. I got the high jump record, and the high hurdle record.

Hana Yamamoto 31:09

That's super cool. That's really impressive.

Sammy Yoro 31:12

Yeah, so that— and they talk about it, because I— when I was over at the golf tournament, someone that had mentioned it, and I said, "Wow". And then my daughter, she's like, really into it. You know, she worked for the school district. And so when I went to my— when I went to my class reunion, she made

me this thing to put him— on— because I built that car the '84 Mustang, really cherry, right. And they had a car— a car show. So they said when— when I bought my ticket, they go "If you have a classical car, you can enter it in the car show". And so I ended my car in the car show. And then my daughter says, "Oh, Dad, you should put this!" and she made this thing, man. This little thing about me being the last lightweight and holding the records.

Hana Yamamoto 31:14

That's awesome.

Sammy Yoro 31:20

I don't even think about that stuff. It's like a thing of the past 40 years ago, you know,

Hana Yamamoto 32:03

Yeah, so when you were in high school you were playing a lot of basketball. You were playing— you're running track.

Sammy Yoro 32:12

Yeah, track and basketball.

Hana Yamamoto 32:14

Outside of those sports, what else did you do for fun when you were growing up in Watsonville?

Sammy Yoro 32:19

Surfing.

Hana Yamamoto 32:20

Surfing, okay.

Sammy Yoro 32:21

Yeah, I started— I started surfing when I was 14.

Hana Yamamoto 32:26

That's young. And you're still surfing?

Sammy Yoro 32:30

I'm still surfing. I don't know now. The fear has struck me.

Hana Yamamoto 32:37

So you were— you were surfing a lot and playing a lot of sports. Did you— did you do anything else? Like were you involved with any, um—

Sammy Yoro 32:48

Just cars, a little bit of cars. You know, a lot of my friends— well, actually, my— my two brothers were like backyard mechanics. Yeah. But I dabbled in it. But I— that wasn't my thing. You know, I liked surfing, you know, more.

Hana Yamamoto 33:02

You were more an outdoorsy person.

Sammy Yoro 33:04

Yeah, surfing and fishing. And my dad was a fisherman and most of the Filipinos were fishermen.

Hana Yamamoto 33:09

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 33:10

You know, they— they— my dad grew up in a fishing town when he was little. So when they came over here, all those Filipinos, they were tight knit remember. They all would go fishing.

Hana Yamamoto 33:20

Do you know where they would go fishing?

Sammy Yoro 33:21

Yeah, right here. Beaches.

Hana Yamamoto 33:23

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 33:24

Like Manresa. Palm Beach.

Hana Yamamoto 33:26

Would you ever go fishing with them?

Sammy Yoro 33:28

Oh every weekend. That's why I'm a fishermen now.

Hana Yamamoto 33:32

Because they taught you?

Sammy Yoro 33:33

Yeah. My son is— I don't have a picture of my son here. Oh, yeah. There's one on the left side. That side, left side there. Well, there he is. Right there. See that's holding those fish?

Hana Yamamoto 33:42

Oh!

Sammy Yoro 33:43

Yeah. See? That's me and Samuel holding halibut. He's— he's a professional fisherman. He does it for living.

Hana Yamamoto 33:53

Did you teach him how to fish?

Sammy Yoro 33:55

Yeah. My dad taught me and I taught him. And then see my other son Gary. Right there. The one to the right. See all the way to the right.

Hana Yamamoto 34:01

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 34:01

Okay. You know who that guy is that he's standing with?

Hana Yamamoto 34:04

No.

Sammy Yoro 34:05

You don't know that guy?

Hana Yamamoto 34:06

I don't.

Sammy Yoro 34:07

Okay. He's a world famous. He's like— like the—the most famous surfer there is in the world, ever.

Hana Yamamoto 34:15

Oh, who is it?

Sammy Yoro 34:16

Kelly Slater.

Hana Yamamoto 34:17

Oh, okay. I've heard Kelly Slater. Oh my gosh, that's awesome.

Sammy Yoro 34:21

And you know what he's doing there with him? It's— he's a caddy. That's his caddy.

Hana Yamamoto 34:27

What's a caddy?

Sammy Yoro 34:28

You know, golf caddy.

Hana Yamamoto 34:29

Oh, okay.

Sammy Yoro 34:30

Yeah, my son's a professional golfer.

Hana Yamamoto 34:33

Ohh.

Sammy Yoro 34:33

Yeah. I think my son goes on the Golf Tour. He'– he's a professional golfer.

Hana Yamamoto 34:38

That's really cool.

Sammy Yoro 34:39

That's the one right there. The one that played on the, on the, that championship basketball team. And then that's my daughter. She just– just– she's just gorgeous.

Hana Yamamoto 34:51

Yeah, she's really pretty.

Sammy Yoro 34:53

Yeah, but she's like– she's into like– she's an athlete, but she does other things. But– I don't know. So, what else you need here?

Hana Yamamoto 35:06

Yeah, I guess I'm wondering, you mentioned your dad was a cook in San Francisco.

Sammy Yoro 35:11

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 35:11

Did he ever cook like traditional Filipino food for you guys growing up?

Sammy Yoro 35:16

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 35:17

What kind of food would he make?

Sammy Yoro 35:19

Well, we ate a lot of fish. He was really special at fish. So I learned a lot of traditional Filipino fish dinners, you know, like, like, with everything, all the trimmings, you know. And we cook halibut— it's our favorite— and salmon, because we catch them here. We catch our own fish. But my dad taught me chicken dinners, taught me how to do chicken adobos and pork adobos, and just all kinds of like, noodle dishes. And I cook— I cook em. Matter of fact, my son there every time he comes over, because he lives out of town. He wants me to cook the Filipino traditional chicken adobo dish. He loves it. He loves it.

Hana Yamamoto 36:06

Have you taught him how to cook it?

Sammy Yoro 36:08

Yeah, but he— it doesn't stick. I've actually went to his house for like, three, four days. And made him— I made him do it. I made him do it. And then, I don't know, he just doesn't do it. I don't know. Because he'— he's just not like that. See now, I like cooking.

Hana Yamamoto 36:25

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 36:26

You know, I— I'll still cook. Matter of fact, my my friend Marie. She goes, "Where do you learn how to do this?" And I go, "I just been cooking all my life, you know?"

Hana Yamamoto 36:37

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 36:37

And then she goes— she goes, "But you don't do it when you're by yourself". I go "No, because it's no fun". I go "When you're here you help me. And then we have fun doing it".

Hana Yamamoto 36:47

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 36:48

And then she goes, : "Yeah, but this is— this is so good. You— you should share with other people". I go "Well I'm sharing with you" and I go, "You're learning how to cook". And she goes, "Yeah", because she's Mexican and— and then she's just loves that Filipino dishes. She loves them.

Hana Yamamoto 37:05

That's awesome. Yeah. So I guess I want to— I want to move over to your work in the lettuce fields, and your— and your dad's work. But when did you start working in the lettuce fields?

Sammy Yoro 37:22

I probably started when I was 16. So that was probably 1966, '67 But my dad been working in lettuce field forever, you know, he— I guess he probably started in the 50s. Probably— I just want to say 50 because that's a good number. But I— but I know he was there before.

Hana Yamamoto 37:41

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 37:41

You know. But when I started it was— it was a big deal because— because the— they had already established— the Filipinos had already established their place in the— in the produce business, in the harvest business. And so they— they— they followed the lettuce, they follow the produce, like they would start in Watsonville and they would go to Salinas— Watsonville, Salinas do produce all like, April, May, June and July, August, September, and in October, that would be it here.

Hana Yamamoto 37:41

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 37:41

And then they would go down South, they would go to Bakersfield until Thanksgiving, and then— then come back home. And then Christmas. December, January, February, March, they would be down south like Arizona, El Centro, Yuma, Blythe. I don't know. I guess life is California. Who knows? You know what, that's weird. Blythe is actually two. Does that make sense? Blythe is actually right on the border of Nevada and Calif— uh, Arizona. Wow, that's a good question. But I used to go to Blythe all the time.

Hana Yamamoto 39:07

So you would travel with them?

Sammy Yoro 39:09

At first I did.

Hana Yamamoto 39:10

Okay. When you were sixteen?

Sammy Yoro 39:12

No. '73, 1973. So I was probably twenty.

Hana Yamamoto 39:16

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 39:17

No, at sixteen I just worked here, because I would work in the lettuce field here and then go to school, because I had to go to school, right. But matter of fact, all the way till I was a senior in high school. But I

started when I was sixteen. But, but my track coach used to tell me you know, because the first time my dad saw me do sports— because he always wanted to see me do sports, he liked to see me do sports— but the first time he ever saw me run track was we had a Central Coast Section track— uh it was like— it was called the Central Coast Relays. And he was working in Gonzales in the asparagus fields.

Hana Yamamoto 40:00

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 40:00

And so they had— Gonzalez had a brand new tartan track. It was like really good. So they were going to have the big track meet there, right. As a matter of fact the— what's his name? Bruce Jenner did that one.

Hana Yamamoto 40:13

Really? Oh my gosh!

Sammy Yoro 40:13

Yeah. What's Bruce Jenner's name?

Hana Yamamoto 40:16

Uh, Caitlyn Jenner.

Sammy Yoro 40:18

Caitlyn Jenner! I saw— I competed with Bruce Jenner.

Hana Yamamoto 40:21

No way!

Sammy Yoro 40:22

He was pole vault. You know, he was— he was at the— Olympiam.

Hana Yamamoto 40:26

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 40:27

Anyway, Bruce Jenner was there.

Hana Yamamoto 40:29

So you were competing against an Olympian?

Sammy Yoro 40:32

Not really. I think I sat down before— I think I was out of it already. Matter of fact I remember watching him but I didn't compete against him. He was— he was too good. He was like, really, really super good. But— and then, so my dad came to watch me play or run. And my coach wanted to meet my dad,

because my coach really loved me, you know. And he came up and I go— I introduced him— I go, "Coach Garvey, this is my dad Sammy Yoro". And then my— and they stood up and they introduce each other and they talked and he goes— and then he— he'd said some stuff, like praising me, you know? And it was my dad goes, "Well, you know, he's a good worker, too". [laughter] Because I worked.

Hana Yamamoto 41:19

Yeah. So you— were you were working in the lettuce field, going to school and then running track?

Sammy Yoro 41:25

Yeah, running track. And then I remember after, I think I was a junior— junior or senior, because I used to work in the asparagus fields, too.

Hana Yamamoto 41:34

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 41:35

In Gonzales.

Hana Yamamoto 41:36

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 41:36

You know, but periodically. You know, like— like, whenever there was like, Easter vacation. I think Easter vacation was the big one. And then right— right— the— June. Right when we got out of work in June, then I would go over there for a little bit. But my coach even asked me, he goes— he goes, "Man, how do you— how do you do this?" Because I have this technique about running, you know, because I ran the hurdles.

Hana Yamamoto 41:59

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 42:00

And I was really good at the hurdles. And I showed him "Well, that's just like working in the— in the asparagus. I have to run and pick up and run just like running track".

Hana Yamamoto 42:12

Ohh, okay.

Sammy Yoro 42:13

So I would do that like— like all day. And it was like running track.

Hana Yamamoto 42:18

You were training—

Sammy Yoro 42:19

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 42:19

–at the same time!

Sammy Yoro 42:20

Yeah. And it was like– and then that's what made me get so much faster than everybody.

Hana Yamamoto 42:25

So when you were harvesting asparagus, you had to run a lot?

Sammy Yoro 42:30

Yeah, cause you had a– you were on a truck. And then the truck would go automatic– automatically down the road at a speed. And then you jump off the truck. And then pick up a bundle of asparagus with your hands and then run and put it back on the truck, you'd have to jump up into the thing and then put it in it.

Hana Yamamoto 42:48

Ohh, okay.

Sammy Yoro 42:49

So you had to run– you had to fill it up. So there would be a pile and you get it. Then a pile and you get. And then you just did that like– pffft– for like a mile!

Hana Yamamoto 42:59

Oh my gosh, that sounds so hard.

Sammy Yoro 43:03

Nah, not if you're good.

Hana Yamamoto 43:05

Yeah. And you were–

Sammy Yoro 43:06

Young, I was young!

Hana Yamamoto 43:07

And it was helping you with hurdles!

Sammy Yoro 43:09

I didn't notice it. You know, I didn't notice it. And all of a sudden I was just a champion. You know, got two track records. You know and I was just going– and then my coach said, "How can you do that?" and I go "Maybe it's working in the lettuce field". [laughter] He used to– he got a kick out of that.

Hana Yamamoto 43:26

So in high school when you're working in the— in the lettuce fields, could you describe, I guess, a day in the life of going to work, going to school, and then doing your track practice?

Sammy Yoro 43:41

Well, getting up in the morning, the Filipinos always got up in the morning early. You know.

Hana Yamamoto 43:47

How early?

Sammy Yoro 43:48

Oh, shoot, we were up like 5:30, way before the sun came up. And then we get ready to go to work. And we start working— towards the end because of Cesar Chavez we didn't do that. But in the beginning, it was like work, work work. And like we got up there at the crack of dawn. But then when Cesar Chavez came in, he made rules. You know, we're not working that many hours and we're not doing it, you know, which was cool. You know, I liked it. Then we invented our own union, right? Independent Union. Yeah, Oscar Hernandez. Man, that was the guy that was the president.

Sammy Yoro 44:21

Oh okay.

Sammy Yoro 44:22

Yeah. Never forget it. We kicked ass. That's why I retired. We got such a good retirement.

Hana Yamamoto 44:27

That's awesome.

Sammy Yoro 44:28

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 44:28

So you would get up early in the morning. And then what would you do?

Sammy Yoro 44:33

Then we go down to the field. And then we'd start harvesting lettuce and then we— we used—we the— pack lettuce in boxes. We'd have two cutters, and then a packer— pack it— and then you— a guy would put— close the boxes and then somebody would load them in the truck and take them out of the field.

Hana Yamamoto 44:55

How long would you usually work in the mornings?

Sammy Yoro 44:59

Maybe five, six hours.

Hana Yamamoto 45:01

Wow.

Sammy Yoro 45:01

Yeah. But after Cesar Chavez, four.

Hana Yamamoto 45:06

Nice. So would you work during school days or—?

Sammy Yoro 45:09

No. No.

Hana Yamamoto 45:10

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 45:11

Always— always during the summer and vacations.

Hana Yamamoto 45:13

Okay. Okay.

Sammy Yoro 45:14

Yeah, no, my dad was really wanting me to go to school. So I went all the way to two years of college.

So—

Hana Yamamoto 45:21

School is important.

Sammy Yoro 45:22

Yeah. That's why it used to crack me up when I used to see him do that, used to make me laugh.

Hana Yamamoto 45:27

When he would write— practice writing—

Sammy Yoro 45:29

Practice writing his name. And then he'd tell me "Oh, I gotta learn how to write my name to sign my papers".

Hana Yamamoto 45:34

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 45:36

So, and then, then, we would always finish work like early and then we'd like, either eat and then we'd go to sleep early, you know. And then, during school, I would go to school and then I would go to track practice, or I go to school or I go to basketball practice.

Hana Yamamoto 45:53

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 45:54

And I did that year round, practically. I trained year round.

Hana Yamamoto 45:57

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 45:58

Because most of the people that I hung out with were on my team and we trained together.

Hana Yamamoto 46:02

Ah okay.

Sammy Yoro 46:03

So— and we were friends.

Hana Yamamoto 46:05

That's awesome.

Sammy Yoro 46:06

Yeah. So— so that was like my day, you know, I get up on the— on the summer times, I would go to work and then hang out with my dad. And then I did that for 35 years, I worked with my dad for 35 years! We were close, man! You know, we'd ride together, eat together, everything. But we lived in separate houses. But uh— but we were always together, you know? And then right towards the end when he— when he was like, kind of old. Like he was like 79 [years old] I'd say, yeah about 79, he would come over the house like every other day, and hang out with me because we'd work on the fishing gear.

Hana Yamamoto 46:48

Oh, okay.

Sammy Yoro 46:49

Because he was a fisherman too. So we'd work on the fishing gear. So— and then he fished with me too! Some of my favorite pictures are with my dad, fishing. Like that right there. There's my dad right there with the two boys, with— that's Ashley and Samuel right there when they were little. And that's my uncle. You know, my uncle's the oldest one, the one in the middle.

Hana Yamamoto 47:13

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 47:13

And then— and then that was one of his best friends. So those those— those three Filipino guys there— they were probably like 70.

Hana Yamamoto 47:25

Wow.

Sammy Yoro 47:25

They were probably 71, 72 I guess. Cause— cause Samuel is born in '81— '84. So look at it— Samuel is only what? Like, what, not even a year old. So that's '84. So you figure, he was like, right around 70, 71. And I know his brother was a little bit older, like close to 80.

Hana Yamamoto 47:47

That's a great picture.

Sammy Yoro 47:49

Yeah, yeah I remember that— that house too. That was kind of cool, that house. Because I had just got my own place in a cul-de-sac— the American dream, right? You know, two story, two car garage, in a cul-de-sac, with two brand new cars and a boat and a backyard with barbecue.

Hana Yamamoto 48:07

Oh, that's the life! [laughter]

Sammy Yoro 48:10

And here's the best part, is I only worked five months out of the year.

Hana Yamamoto 48:15

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 48:16

And I got to go surfing and fishing—

Hana Yamamoto 48:17

In the off season?

Sammy Yoro 48:20

Yeah, and there was no off season. Because remember I told you, we used to follow the lettuce from from here, April to October, here and then from October to down South all the way back the whole full circle. I did that for like maybe five years. But then I got smart and I started doing something else. And then— but I remember one time we were down in San Diego because we like to surf, right?

Hana Yamamoto 48:46

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 48:47

We were down in San Diego— it was probably January or something. And we were down there and we were living on the beach. We were living on a campground. We pitched tents and we lived up— we had our cars— and we pitched tents on the beach at a campground and this one lady like you came up and interviewed us. I told you this story, huh?

Hana Yamamoto 49:05

Yeah! You did.

Sammy Yoro 49:06

And then I thought— she goes "Wow, you know what, you're— you guys are living like the Endless Summer!" Because we never had a winter it was like always summer. Like we just followed the- the cycle you know, and it was never winter for us. It was always summer. And I got to be thinking like "Wow, that's a trip". You know, and I did that my whole life. I'm still doing it.

Hana Yamamoto 49:30

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 49:30

You know, but more intense. Now I go to Hawai'i now. I don't surf around here too much. So this year was probably a record breaking year for me because I went four times to Hawai'i.

Hana Yamamoto 49:43

Wow. All for surfing?

Sammy Yoro 49:46

Yeah, just surfing and just family and friends. I got a lot of family and friends over there—

Hana Yamamoto 49:50

Yeah, in Oahu.

Sammy Yoro 49:50

—I lived there. Matter of fact today some guy called me today from the 80s. I haven't talked to him in over 25 years.

Hana Yamamoto 49:58

Wow.

Sammy Yoro 49:59

He just called me today. I was sitting here doing my paperwork and doing some stuff. And he called me and he was the guy I lived with in Hawaii, in Manoa. He was my roommate.

Hana Yamamoto 50:10

Oh okay.

Sammy Yoro 50:10

And I hung around with him the whole 80s. He's a surfer guy.

Hana Yamamoto 50:13

So when did you live in Hawai'i?

Sammy Yoro 50:15

All of the 80s.

Hana Yamamoto 50:16

Okay, and what– what made you– what prompted you to move to Hawai'i?

Sammy Yoro 50:22

Because that's where surfing.

Hana Yamamoto 50:24

Just to surf.

Sammy Yoro 50:25

Yeah, because I went to Hawai'i in 1970 and I said, "Oh, my God, look at this place!" You know, but I couldn't do anything about it, because I was still too young, you know, 1970. And then 1973 I was married with a baby. Sonya, 1991. But I still went back and forth to Hawai'i, you know, periodically just to surf. So, but then in the 80s, I lived here, and then went to Hawai'i for like four months and then came back every year I did that. I had a place over there.

Hana Yamamoto 51:03

Okay, that's awesome. Yeah. Hawai'i has a lot of good surf spots. I want to return back to your work in the lettuce fields. I remember you mentioned you sued the company you worked for. And you were– and you started a union. Right?

Sammy Yoro 51:27

Yeah. First we started union and then it was like '73, we started union.

Hana Yamamoto 51:32

Okay, and what was the name of the union again?

Sammy Yoro 51:34

Independent Union. Independent. Yeah, it was pretty good.

Hana Yamamoto 51:38

So how did–

Sammy Yoro 51:38

Oscar

Hana Yamamoto 51:39

–How did that happen?

Sammy Yoro 51:41

Because Cesar Chavez was making a lot of hoopla, you know. And so– and then the Filipinos didn't know what to do. You know, they didn't know whether to go Cesar Chavez or whatever. You know, I mean, everybody was going unionized. You know, that was the thing to do, get union and get your rights, you know. You know, we didn't have no rights. We had no bathrooms, we– no working conditions. I mean, when we– when the lettuce was ready, and the price was up– work! The people who run the company at work, "Cut all that lettuce, make me a million dollars. Here's 10 cents for you!"

Hana Yamamoto 52:14

Oh my gosh.

Sammy Yoro 52:15

You know?

Hana Yamamoto 52:16

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 52:16

And then– and then after '73 it was like, no man, you know, we're only working so much. We're getting paid so much, which was good. And we're having retirement benefits, everything! Bathrooms, a place to go to the bathroom.

Hana Yamamoto 52:34

Do you know if your dad was ever involved in the unions?

Sammy Yoro 52:38

He was part of it changing. You know, he didn't get involved.

Sammy Yoro 52:43

I got involved, but he didn't, because he was more into like– he was just changing over. You know, because they had the– they grew up, they worked in really terrible conditions. I mean, you know, in –from– let's say, the 50s to the 60s, it was terrible. You know, I mean– but they made a living and they were good. You know, they were happy. But– but us it was different. Because, you know, everything changing. You know, the– the– Cesar Chavez changed everything. But it was kind of a trip because– because the union– my dad, he– he liked it and he supported us.

Hana Yamamoto 52:43

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 53:26

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 53:27

You know, and all the Filipinos— all the— his Filipino people at his age, they supported it.

Hana Yamamoto 53:32

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 53:33

You know, then we moved into it. And then our generation took over, you know, all the Filipinos they got old and retired and couldn't work. Then people like me and all my friends, we took over, but we had it made. But they didn't like it. So—

Sammy Yoro 53:48

The— the companies, the people who own the companies and the growers and the sellers— everything you know— we— we had a lot of control. And so what happened was they— the— it was moving over, the— the unions— the independent unions were getting pushed out because they were getting these— I don't know the word what they called them, but it was uh, the— these harvest companies, they were called something but it was— they were— they weren't getting paid. See we got paid by how much we make— we produced. You know how much we— we harvested. We got paid for. But they were moving over into like, "Well, we're gonna pay you \$10 an hour". You know, work eight hours, ten hours, and people were— were fine with that. You know, that was that thing. But we didn't want to go there. So the company, they got rid of our— our crews. The Filipino crew is our crews, Independent stuff, and they weren't going over to them. I forget the name of them. They called it something. God I forgot what it— I can't remember what it was. But the— but that side was called something, that kind of harvesting was called something. And they were moving it. Well, they got— they got rid of us. They fired us.

Hana Yamamoto 53:49

Who didn't like it?

Sammy Yoro 54:05

They fired you? Which company fired you?

Sammy Yoro 55:16

All the companies. Yeah, the big companies like— like the C&V Farms, the Dobler, the— the— I think it was Crosetti. I forget who it was. Anil, all these big people. And so— and they were going the other way— I wish I could remember the— the way that— they had machines, and they were harvesting with machines. But we are manual, we get there with a knife and gloves and just—

Hana Yamamoto 55:43

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 55:44

You know, do it. But they came out with machines. And then they came in and it was like— like a big thing. You know, the big machines and they just tear up these fields. You know, the people were— the owners and the— and the— the growers and the sellers and everybody were making a lot of money because they go in there and just tear up the field.

Hana Yamamoto 56:06

When did these machines start?

Sammy Yoro 56:09

It started right about then.

Hana Yamamoto 56:11

And what year was it?

Sammy Yoro 56:13

Probably— probably, let's see, okay, probably '85 or something like that.

Hana Yamamoto 56:19

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 56:19

'85. Because I think it was '90-something when they stopped us. It was— like I want to say '95 but it probably '90 to '95, something like that. I don't remember. But I remember— I remember it was— it was the year of the flood. Ah, this year. The year the flood I think was '95 was the last time it flooded like this, took out all the fields.

Hana Yamamoto 56:44

Oh.

Sammy Yoro 56:44

All the fields were gone, man. Like right now. Same thing. But guess what happened? We had some fields that were worth a million dollars!

Hana Yamamoto 56:55

Wow.

Sammy Yoro 56:57

Million dollar fields, because it was no fields! From— from the south of the Pajaro River there was nothing. It was flooded! But north of the Pajaro River, which my company ran—

Sammy Yoro 57:09

—They had like six, seven fields, like 100 acres. And that was like big money! They made billions.

Hana Yamamoto 57:09

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 57:18

Wow.

Sammy Yoro 57:21

So that's when I retired. And that's when they fired us. And then that's when we sued.

Hana Yamamoto 57:28

That's when you sued?

Sammy Yoro 57:29

Yeah. And then it took me maybe, let's say eight years, but— but I got a settlement. And I even threw in a little physical thing too.

Hana Yamamoto 57:40

So what did you sue them— how did you like— what did you sue them for? How did you sue them?

Sammy Yoro 57:47

Well, we— our company, our— our union hired a lawyer, a lawyer team. And so we have a team of lawyers. And so we took them to court and said that that was— that was unlawful for you to just fire us because we had a contract. So they fired us. Then they hired this other— I can't remember the name— but they hired these other people to do it. And then so they just— it was against the law for them to fire us but they go "No no, we don't— we don't need em" and you know, and so they fired us.

Hana Yamamoto 58:22

Wow.

Sammy Yoro 58:22

You know and so we hired— our union hired lawyers and they went— the battle went on for like eight years. Then we finally won. Every— and then everybody got a chunk. Everybody that was on the— the— that got fired, they got a big chunk. And it was— it was cool, man, because I just put it right into the Roth. No shoot, I can't even believe it. It's like— it's like, quadrupled!

Hana Yamamoto 58:53

So you retired and you got your money from the lawsuit?

Sammy Yoro 58:56

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 58:57

That's awesome!

Sammy Yoro 59:00

Yeah, well, it's— it was a way to do it. But I didn't really retire. I kind of retired but I went to work in the— I drove school bus.

Sammy Yoro 59:09

So I drove school was for like 15 years. Which was fun. It was fun. I didn't even care. It was just fun. Yeah, because— you know my personality, man. I had a blast.

Hana Yamamoto 59:09

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 59:21

Yeah, you'd be a fun bus driver! [laughter]

Sammy Yoro 59:23

I did. I had a— I had a blast, man. It was fun.

Hana Yamamoto 59:27

And you were driving school kids?

Sammy Yoro 59:29

Yes. School kids. Special Needs. So that was— that was my specialty. It was fun. I miss 'em. Matter of fact, one guy still calls me I think I erased his name. But one guy— and I feel bad, I don't want to talk to him. I really don't want to talk to him.

Hana Yamamoto 59:45

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 59:46

Oh, there it is right there. Look at that. "Josias Bus".

Hana Yamamoto 59:52

Oh, because he was on the bus.

Sammy Yoro 59:54

Yes. And that's the only one I ever kept because he was really kind of a cool dude. You know. And like he's, what, 27 years old now?

Hana Yamamoto 1:00:02

Wow.

Sammy Yoro 1:00:03

You know, he still calls me. He wants to know what I'm doing. Like he loves it when I send him pictures when I'm in Hawai'i, because as a matter of fact, I know his mother. His mother is really cool. And then

one time I started at the store, and she goes "Those pictures you sent Josias are unreal!" Man, I go "That's what it's like in Hawai'i, man. Beautiful sunsets. Beautiful beaches".

Hana Yamamoto 1:00:25

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:00:25

It's just beautiful.

Hana Yamamoto 1:00:27

Yeah, it's beautiful there. I— I just— I'm wondering, um, maybe you told me earlier, but when did you— when did the union that you formed, when did that— when was that when it for— sorry. When did you first start the union?

Sammy Yoro 1:00:45

That was right around '73.

Hana Yamamoto 1:00:47

Okay.

Sammy Yoro 1:00:48

Yeah. Right around 1973. Because that's when Cesar Chavez came.

Hana Yamamoto 1:00:52

And so you were inspired by Cesar Chavez?

Sammy Yoro 1:00:54

Yeah, he was waving the flag is walking on the levee, "Welga, welga! Strike, strike!" You know? And, you know, we didn't think about none of it. We were just working. You know, we made money, we were working. We didn't care. We didn't know the idea of striking. Look what happened when they flooded? Man, I really realized that what can happen because the flood is just like striking is like the flood. There's no more lettuce. No more work.

Hana Yamamoto 1:01:23

Yeah. Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:01:24

You know?

Hana Yamamoto 1:01:26

So did you ever strike?

Sammy Yoro 1:01:30

No, no. No, because we didn't want to do that. Because we really, you know– I mean, they were radical. They struck man.

Hana Yamamoto 1:01:39

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:01:40

Cesar Chavez struck, they struck. But see, we wanted to keep working. But we wanted to get what they were asking for.

Hana Yamamoto 1:01:46

I see.

Sammy Yoro 1:01:46

So we just kept working. You know, we kept– that's why we formed our own union because we could sit down at the table and say, "Okay, well, look at– you you know, the Chavez guys, they're gonna get 10 cents a box. How come we can't get 10 cents a box?" You know?

Hana Yamamoto 1:02:01

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:02:01

And we're gonna keep working. We're not gonna strike. We're not gonna strike on you guys.

Hana Yamamoto 1:02:05

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:02:05

You know, just pay us and we'll be alright. We'd be nice about it. You know?

Hana Yamamoto 1:02:13

Did you ever hear about strikes growing up?

Sammy Yoro 1:02:16

Oh, yeah. That was the big deal.

Hana Yamamoto 1:02:18

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:02:18

Delano. That one– Cesar Chavez– Delano. There's always been strikes, man. There's been strikes since 1920 on the– what do you call that? You see movies all the time. But see, we knew about that stuff. We knew about strikes. You know what I'm talking about? 1920s in New York City. And the– on the fish docks, you know, the– the docks.

Hana Yamamoto 1:02:41

I don't think I'm familiar with that.

Sammy Yoro 1:02:43

Yeah. In— in probably the 20s, the 20s, 30s, something like that, they— it was the dock— and the union— the docks, you know, where they brought all the— everything in those docks and they unloaded them?

Hana Yamamoto 1:02:57

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:02:58

Those guys struck.

Hana Yamamoto 1:02:59

Oh okay.

Sammy Yoro 1:03:01

Can you imagine what happened? They just— they leveled everything. They struck! And that's just like— like, remember when just recently when— when the boats came into the thing and they couldn't unload them? Do you remember hearing about that in the news?

Hana Yamamoto 1:03:16

I don't. No.

Sammy Yoro 1:03:18

That was just recently. That's kind of— that's like a strike.

Hana Yamamoto 1:03:21

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:03:21

You know, everything's like a strike, like this floods like a strike.

Hana Yamamoto 1:03:24

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:03:25

No work! Okay. Produce goes up. You pay me double to harvest that lettuce. Cost double that. A box of lettuce— if a box lettuce is \$10 a box, man, that's— that's big. I think it went for \$25 a box.

Hana Yamamoto 1:03:41

Wow.

Sammy Yoro 1:03:42

Can you imagine that?

Hana Yamamoto 1:03:44

So did you ever hear about or encounter strikes while working in the lettuce fields?

Sammy Yoro 1:03:52

Yeah. Cesar Chavez.

Hana Yamamoto 1:03:53

But you didn't take part in them?

Sammy Yoro 1:03:54

No, no, because we had our own. That's why we developed our own union. Okay, so we had a bargaining agent. Well, they're striking. We're not going to strike. You want us to strike. I remember one time sitting next to the Oscar and that's the union president. The one that really kind of did it. And I remember him telling me "Come sit by me". And I go "What?", he goes, "No, come and sit by me". All he wanted me to do is sit by him at the bargaining table. And he says "Don't open your mouth" because I talk all the time. And he goes, "Don't talk. Just sit there". So he just wanted me to sit there. Because I would represent all of the— my side of my— my Filipino— the young Filipino people's side. You know, if they saw me there, they— they would—they would support us. Okay, so we got a lot of support.

Hana Yamamoto 1:04:46

Wow. So—

Sammy Yoro 1:04:46

Because my dad was pretty famous in the lettuce business.

Hana Yamamoto 1:04:49

He was famous?

Sammy Yoro 1:04:50

Yeah. The Filipinos man— they harvested Man. They were badass, you know.

Hana Yamamoto 1:04:57

How did the bargaining meetings go?

Sammy Yoro 1:05:03

Oh, shoot, they were— it was hard sometimes.

Hana Yamamoto 1:05:08

Yeah?

Sammy Yoro 1:05:08

Yeah, it went on and on and on and on. You know, like, we went, like, probably one year, the first couple of times, we never changed our— our— everything was the same for like a year, even though we wanted to change.

Hana Yamamoto 1:05:24

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:05:24

We wanted to change everything. But nothing got changed. So we just little by little, you know, got little by little— for a whole year, it was— it was hard for a year. You know, I remember that. We'd go like every month, you know, to the bargaining table. You know, say, "Okay, if this is our contract, okay, this is going to be our tentative contract. Okay, this is where we're gonna get now, but this is not a contract". [laughter] You know, it went like that. You know, we're— finally I think it was probably '76 I think that we've had a hardcore contract. You know, where we had it, you know, we had it the way we wanted it. And that was the way it was. And then we never changed it until they— we had another— the contract was up, like we'd signed contracts for three, four years at a time.

Hana Yamamoto 1:06:15

Oh okay.

Sammy Yoro 1:06:16

So they could change it for three years or four years. That's why we sued him because they fired us. And then in the contract it says, hey, you know, you can't hire anybody as long as we're doing a contract work. You can't hire him. Like, you can hire these guys after we're done with our contract. But you can't fire us, then hire somebody else when we're in a contract. Boom, we got them! [laughter]

Hana Yamamoto 1:06:39

Okay. Wow.

Sammy Yoro 1:06:43

Man, I haven't talked about this a long time. That was weird because Oscar, he died. You know, he got killed.

Hana Yamamoto 1:06:49

He got killed?

Sammy Yoro 1:06:50

Yeah. And his wife came to me and she was really upset. And because I was real close with the union thing, I was kind of, like, involved with the union. But I wasn't like a head figure. I was always behind. You know, I was always like— like, the guys, the workers. They were like, because my dad was kind of famous and working. That it was like that kind of stuff. You know, it— but I wasn't really a figure. But I knew what was going on all the time. And she goes "Man"— she goes "Man, you guys came so long. So far. So hard. Man. I just can't understand, man, I don't know how come". I go "Man, that's the way it is". You know, people get greedy. You know, it's just— you know, it's hard. You know, people— people get

greedy man. Money's— and I never really wanted— you know, I never wanted to become rich. You know, I mean, I have money. But it was funny because I used to laugh because people go well, how much money you make, and I go \$20,000 a year. Every time, twenty— all my life \$20,000 a year, period! Like right now. It's still \$20,000 a year. All my life, \$20,000 a year.

Hana Yamamoto 1:08:04

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:08:04

But look at me, I'm happy.

Hana Yamamoto 1:08:06

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:08:06

Look at how healthy I am. I mean, I don't— I mean, between me and you, I'm not healthy. But you know.

Hana Yamamoto 1:08:13

Yeah. Do you know who killed Oscar?

Sammy Yoro 1:08:19

Nobody knows.

Hana Yamamoto 1:08:21

Nobody knows?

Sammy Yoro 1:08:22

Nobody knows. It was just one of those things.

Hana Yamamoto 1:08:25

That's horrible.

Sammy Yoro 1:08:26

I know. It was crazy. Oscar Hernandez. Man. He was a good guy.

Hana Yamamoto 1:08:30

He was the president of the Union?

Sammy Yoro 1:08:33

Yeah, Oscar Hernandez, president of the Union. It was weird. Martha was his wife. She was— she was kind of nice. I liked her. I don't know what happened to her, someone told me she was still around but you know all this stuff's gone, you know. You know, that part of my life. I'm on the— I'm on the grazing path. At one point in my life, right, it was probably the latter part of the 70s, like say 76, 77, 78 something like that. Everything was changing. You know, my life was— it was kind of crazy intense. You

know? Kind of scary sometimes too but– but you know when you're young like that that's– that's life you know, but like now– like I know like now like– like I told you I wake up in the morning I go "Oh God, my back, my leg!" It's like, who would've thought it?

Hana Yamamoto 1:09:21

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:09:22

I wouldn't have thought it.

Hana Yamamoto 1:09:23

It sounds like you did a lot of good work growing up.

Sammy Yoro 1:09:28

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 1:09:28

With the unions too, you and Oscar.

Sammy Yoro 1:09:31

Right there. That's my– my life right there. See that– see that top picture right there?

Hana Yamamoto 1:09:36

On the surfboard?

Sammy Yoro 1:09:37

Yeah, that's Fiji.

Hana Yamamoto 1:09:39

Oh, wow.

Sammy Yoro 1:09:40

That's one of the most– everybody asked me because they know I travel the world surfing. Then they go where's the best place you ever surfed? Right there, Fiji.

Hana Yamamoto 1:09:49

I mean, the water looks beautiful.

Sammy Yoro 1:09:52

You wouldn't believe it. I– even me, man. I surfed Hawai'i. Like all of the 80s I surfed Hawaii and like– when I– when I first got there, as a matter of fact that– because of the way that I know everything, you know, my– my experience, I took my two boys, Gary and Samuel, those two went to Fiji with me we surfed world class break that– that wasn't even famous at the time, but we knew that it was. I learned in 1970. But– but– matter of fact, my son just mentioned the story about that trip, because– because we

will have a lot of rich guys, you know, and white people. And— and like I was really the only brown one. Because my two boys, they look white, you know. And— and he mentioned this— Samuel was telling— telling somebody— one of his friends— about— about us going to Fiji. And there was a lot of things I don't want to tell you about, you know, because too long. But one of the things that he remembered is that they were all going to go. We had to wait for our boat to go to this island is out in the ocean in the middle. It's a little teeny island about this big in the middle of the ocean. Yet it takes 30 minutes to go out there on a boat. So we have to wait for the boat. So they wanted to go eat. So they all went to this really nice hotel and everything and I stop our kids and I go, "We're not going in there". You know, and so we kind of backed off, you know, went in the street and stuff. And then, you know my personality a little bit already. And then we met this guy. And he took us to this place. It was like a local area. And we ate at a local place. Oh! Food was so good. It was so cheap.

Hana Yamamoto 1:11:37

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:11:37

And he remembered that day and I almost kind of forgotten it. Because— because I remember that day. I got off the plane and it was so hot. And I was so hungry. And you know, I went— I just wanted to go and like drink a couple beers, you know, just kick back and— and then everybody goes, "Well, we're not going to eat at the hotel. We're gonna go over here to eat". And I go, "I don't want to eat here", you know, because it's a big rich thing. You know, just like for tourists.

Hana Yamamoto 1:12:05

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:12:05

I didn't want to be tourists.

Hana Yamamoto 1:12:07

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:12:07

That's why I went to this place.

Hana Yamamoto 1:12:09

I'm sure that food was much better.

Sammy Yoro 1:12:10

Oh, yeah, I wanted to go to this place. And it's the middle of the island. You know, it's like, there's— it's not a tourist place. Like you have to get on a boat and go there. And you— people don't go there. They don't do that.

Hana Yamamoto 1:12:22

Wow. That's really cool.

Sammy Yoro 1:12:25

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 1:12:28

Well, I guess we're nearing the end of the interview. I want to wrap up with a few questions. Do you have a favorite memory of your dad growing up?

Sammy Yoro 1:12:44

There's too many. Too many. Let's see. Oh, God. I don't know if it's like— that's a hard one. I don't know. My dad was always around all the time. You know, my— my memory of my— my favorite memory of my dad is just him being with me all the time. You know, you know, being always they're always they're always helping me. You know, never— you know, he was the type of guy that was— he was uh, he always did right. You know, he wanted to do right. You know, and so— so he taught me how to, like, take care of my family. People even come to me nowadays and they go, "God, we want to meet you", just like my coach wanted to meet him in the 70— the 60s. People— they meet me with my son because my son's a professional golfer, and they come up and going "You're Gary's dad? Oh, my God. You taught him how to play golf?" And I go "Not really". And then he goes, "You tell him something man. Because he's like, the nicest guy". You know, everybody loves that guy. You know, he's— matter of fact they're doing a big golf tournament in his honor. They invited me too, they just sent me an invitation. It's the weirdest thing, I gotta show you. It's the weirdest thing.

Hana Yamamoto 1:14:02

Where's the golf tournament?

Sammy Yoro 1:14:05

It's right here. This is his home thing.

Hana Yamamoto 1:14:08

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:14:09

Okay, let's see for— oh, I know what I did with it. See, I don't even know how to use my phone. Okay. Yeah, they're having a golf tournament here. It— and it's a golf tournament. They support people. You know, they support people. So I can't— I can't see. I'm so excited about this. This golf tournament.

Hana Yamamoto 1:14:37

Are you gonna go?

Sammy Yoro 1:14:38

Of course, it's for my son. Here it is right there.

Hana Yamamoto 1:14:43

Oh! Is that your son?

Sammy Yoro 1:14:44

Yeah. That's my son. Playing golf.

Hana Yamamoto 1:14:47

Wow. That's so amazing!

Sammy Yoro 1:14:52

It's a— it's a golf tournament in his honor. And they're going to— they're going to have it here at Spring Hills and they do a lot of— lot of stuff like, for cancer patients, they do— they just, they give. Because everybody knows him in the— everybody— he's kind of famous, you know, and so they go "Gary Yoro!", then they all, you know, it's like a lot of money to join, you know, just to get in is a thousand dollars. You know, so they, they make like hundreds of thousands dollars, and they— they donate it out, like to cancer patients and all kinds of stuff. It's a really good thing.

Hana Yamamoto 1:15:30

Yeah. So—

Sammy Yoro 1:15:32

So I don't know, my memory for my dad, I can't— I can't really think of anything that— I mean, my memories are just like, he taught me how to work.

Hana Yamamoto 1:15:41

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:15:42

And he taught me how to be fair, and be nice to people. You know, and— and he always said, you know, he always told me that if I— if I did the right thing then that I'd be rewarded. That's what I remember, that's what he used to teach me.

Hana Yamamoto 1:15:58

Yeah. So he taught you how to be a good person.

Sammy Yoro 1:16:02

Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 1:16:03

Be a good family member.

Sammy Yoro 1:16:05

Yeah. Look at this guy right here. This one. Then Ashley, that's my daughter. She worked for the— She's the nurse at the school district. She's like the head nurse for the school district. And she was a great athlete, you know? And then Samuel is a professional fisherman, and he's a great surfer. The— that's me surfing. That's a world class surf spot that we're paddling out at right there. You know, and that was

that was in— God, what year was that? I forget what year it was? I think it was— oh shoot. No, I know what year it is. How I could I forget? It's a big year.

Hana Yamamoto 1:16:44

What year was it?

Sammy Yoro 1:16:46

1999! How can you forget like 1999?

Hana Yamamoto 1:16:52

I mean, I don't know. I wasn't even alive!

Sammy Yoro 1:16:56

1999. You know what 1999 was?

Hana Yamamoto 1:16:58

No

Sammy Yoro 1:16:59

That was the turn of the— of the calendar.

Hana Yamamoto 1:17:03

Oh. Yes. The new millennium.

Sammy Yoro 1:17:05

Yeah. It was a new millennium. And here's the biggest one of all time. Prince song 1999. Do you know that one?

Hana Yamamoto 1:17:15

I don't.

Sammy Yoro 1:17:16

You better look it up!

Hana Yamamoto 1:17:17

Ok. [laughter] I'll listen to it on my— on my drive home.

Sammy Yoro 1:17:20

That's— that's that. 1999. Because I remember because it was the millennium. We actually watched the first day of the millennium, but because Fiji is the first day. You know, the first day happens in Fiji?

Hana Yamamoto 1:17:37

I did not know that.

Sammy Yoro 1:17:38

Yeah, because it's right there. On the dateline. Wow, as a matter of fact, that one and that one are born on the same day, April 5 a year apart. Except for when?

Hana Yamamoto 1:17:52

Oh, one was born—?

Sammy Yoro 1:17:53

No, only that one was born a year— they're born on the same day a year apart. But except their birthday wasn't on the same day. Except for what year? 1999 Because he went to Fiji. And so Fiji is the dateline, so it's another— it's a day before. So today, it would be Thursday here. It's the day before over there. It's like it's Wednesday. It's the first day. So the first day of 19— of 2000 Fiji was the first day of 2000.

Hana Yamamoto 1:18:31

You were the first— you were some of— one of the first people to enter the new millennium.

Sammy Yoro 1:18:35

To see the day. Yeah.

Hana Yamamoto 1:18:36

That's awesome. [laughter]

Sammy Yoro 1:18:37

See that, how could I forget? I forgot for a second. And I do forget a lot, man. Well, I hope this interview went well. I talk too much. Matter of fact, you know, when I was telling my my girlfriend over there, she was saying, she goes "Oh, you gonna do an interview?" and she goes, "Oh", she goes "I feel sorry for her". And I go "What are you talking about?" I go, you know Kunta Kinte? You know Alex Haley?

Hana Yamamoto 1:19:06

I don't, I'm so sorry I don't know any of these people.

Sammy Yoro 1:19:09

Alex Haley. Alex Haley. You look— you can look it up. Alex Haley. What was it? He wrote the book— Alex Haley wrote the book. You have to look it up. It's— it's about the slaves. Kunta Kinte was a slave.

Hana Yamamoto 1:19:29

Oh okay, like— like here, like—

Sammy Yoro 1:19:33

Yeah, here.

Sammy Yoro 1:19:34

Alex Haley is a— is a writer. And he wrote about slaves or something like that. You have to look it up Alex Haley. But the thing was when Alex Haley was learning about slavery and all these— these people,

that he went to Africa and talked to an old guy like me, you know, and he went with a pad and pencil to the old guy in a village in the middle of Africa, and the guy was— in the movie, it pro— it set— it— in the movie. If you watch the movie, it shows him sitting there like this. And then like, the guy like me, would just be going. Non-stop.

Hana Yamamoto 1:19:34

Okay.

Hana Yamamoto 1:20:18

Just talking.

Sammy Yoro 1:20:19

Yeah. And then Alex Haley's going like this: "What? What'd you say? What was that? Hold it." You know? And then he said, "Okay", and he wrote it down. Well, that's how they found Kunta Kinte through that story, but the guy was just going on and on and on and on, and then all sudden, he said something that clicked, you know? And then he said, "Oh, that's when it was, that was the era" because the guy went off. Like, it would be like me, you know, going off talking about lettuce fields, all this stuff going on. But whatever would interest you like this. 1999. The millennium. That's big. You weren't even alive, huh.

Hana Yamamoto 1:21:09

Well, okay, I think we could wrap up the interview. Is there anything else you want to add about growing up in Watsonville, or your dad or your mom?

Sammy Yoro 1:21:24

Just this, it was a good life growing up, you know, with the Filipinos, you know, that Filipino tight knit community in Watsonville. You know, I grew up over there. Right next to the Pajaro River, that's where the whole community was, you know, it was, it was pretty good. Pretty good life. You know, and I— I thank, my dad, you know, for how he brought me up, because now I'm living his dream that he wanted to do, but he couldn't, because he didn't know how to do it, you know, and I did, you know, and the way— the way I learned is through him, and then I really couldn't either, but— but the power of— of the COVID, you know, made me understand, you know, this is what I need to do.

Sammy Yoro 1:22:12

You know, and then 10 years ago, because being from Watsonville— but I travel around surfing around the world, I go to all these different places so I know the difference between for how things are— and so it made me realize, man, you know what? This is the time in my life where I need to do something from 2010 to 2020. Who would have thought, 2020? And 2010 I knew I was gonna do something so 2000 all the way. But then 2020 came and I was like, wow, okay, this is it. You know, and I'm living it, this is my second year. So I appreciate my dad teaching me.

Hana Yamamoto 1:22:51

Yeah. All right. Okay, well, thank you for sharing all of your stories.

Sammy Yoro 1:22:59

Yeah, anytime. I don't know if I got off the track a little bit, but I mean, I know you wanted to find out about my dad and everything, you know, that I really didn't know a lot about my mother, my dad, I knew a lot, you know, cuz him and his brother used to tell me all the time, you know, about them growing up and eating monkeys. And, you know, and then when the war hit, you know, and then coming to Hawai'i and coming here, you know, and then— and then when they were here already, you know, like, in the 50s I was born in '52— like, like— like, say '48 or something like that. '46, '47, '48, let's go back, '45, '45's good. '45 you know, it was like— that was like, a heavy part in their life. You know, they they really— they had a— you know, I think that I'm pretty fearless, man, those guys were fearless, man. I mean, to come all the way from Hawai'i to here on a boat.

Hana Yamamoto 1:23:54

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:23:55

I can't even think about that. And they went from the Philippines to Hawai'i from Hawai'i to here on a boat?

Hana Yamamoto 1:24:01

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:24:02

Oh my god! I mean, I get on a plane. I— this year was world breaking for me. I travel all around the world surfing. But it was 10 hours from LA to Fiji. Okay, that was probably my longest trip. But I go to— I go all around. I do little trips. You know, five hour trips.

Hana Yamamoto 1:24:18

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:24:19

You know, from here to Mexico. Some of my favorite surfing spots and Mexico. Five hours. I can— I can leave here in the morning. And I can watch sunset in Mexico. You know? Ha! My dad gets on a boat. What? Two weeks later he ends up in Hawai'i.

Hana Yamamoto 1:24:33

Yeah. Sounds like a crazy trip.

Sammy Yoro 1:24:36

Four months later he ends up here. That was fearless. So I gotta hand it to my dad. And my uncle. They were badass.

Hana Yamamoto 1:24:48

They sound like it.

Sammy Yoro 1:24:49

Yeah. But you know they had a good life. You know I'm trying to fulfill with my life you know and stuff I'm having a good time with— with my grandkids and— and my oldest daughter, man, she's— she's, like, really independent. You know? She got a divorce like, five years ago. And man, she's so de— independent. She's like her own person that she's got her own thing going on, man. It's like, it's great.

Hana Yamamoto 1:25:15

She sounds really cool.

Sammy Yoro 1:25:16

Yeah, she's cool. And we're close. That's great. Because I tell her she knows about me and my dad and and she wants to be close like that with me even though she lives in Texas. You know, but we— because you know, phones.

Hana Yamamoto 1:25:30

Yeah.

Sammy Yoro 1:25:30

God. 10 years ago, I didn't even know about these things 10 years ago. I didn't even have one. I didn't know how to text you— how we texted.

Hana Yamamoto 1:25:43

Well, yeah. Well, is it okay if I stop the recording now?

Sammy Yoro 1:25:47

Sure. Yes. I thought you already did. [laughter] Lucky I didn't say anything—