Manuel Bersamin interviewed by Steve McKay

Speakers: Manuel Bersamin and Steve McKay
Date: May 6, 2021
Scope and contents: In this interview, originally recorded on Zoom, Manuel Bersamin speaks with Watsonville is in the Heart team member, Dr. Steve McKay. Manuel discusses his father, Eulalio “Max” Bersamin’s migration history— including his early life in Bangued, Philippines and his labor migration to Hawai‘i and California. He describes Max’s over fifty year career as a migrant farm laborer in Central California. Manuel explains how his father married Victoria Quintero, a Mexican woman who he met in Mexicali. After migrating to Watsonville with Max, Victoria helped many other family members immigrate to the US resulting in a large, mixed-race family unit. Manuel discusses his and his families’ mixed-race, “mestizo” identity. He also reflects on the manongs’ experiences as they endured racism and poor labor conditions. He discusses their leisure activities including gambling, cock fighting, and cooking. Finally, Manuel speaks about his father’s disillusionment from the “American Dream” as well as his resilience and resistance. Notably, he discusses Max’s passionate involvement in the United Farm Workers (UFW). Throughout the interview, Manuel explains the ways that Max's resistance and union participation influenced his own activism and careers as a Watsonville City Council member (2003-2012), mayor of Watsonville (2006-2007), and currently as a grant program director at Hartnell Community College.

Steve McKay 00:00
You know, again, you know, the reason we're really excited to be working with Roy and the whole community is to kind of capture the stories that you're mentioning. Because we really think so much happened, there's so much important things that happen in Watsonville and among Filipino families. And it really hasn't really been covered much. There are a few articles about some things, but but not much. And we really tried to capture this history, from the perspective of the families. And a lot of it is for the families so they have a record of this, you know. And eventually, we will be putting all the oral histories together, they will be stored, and we are working with the librarians and the oral history archives at UCSC. And the idea is that, you know, preserve them, but also to make them accessible, so that future generations of, you know, your kids or your grandkids and other people from all over could use the, the, the, the material, right and learn from them. So that, that's really our goal.

Steve McKay 01:05
So we just, you know, that's, that's the goal of the project. And so we're excited to just, you know, really learn the stories that you have, and that your family, your family history. We find, it's all very important. And we'd love to capture what you'd be willing to share with us. So I'll be sending, I meant to send that consent form to make sure that you get that and so I'll send that

by email and ask you to sign it. But the other thing we'll send is after the, we do the recording, we'll send you a copy of the recording. And you will get to review anything. And so if you, if there's anything at the end of this, that you don't want shared or anything like that, that you, you really have control of your story. That's—we want to make sure that you know that so and you'll get a chance to do that. So because we will be using it. But we want to make sure that it's with full consent.

Manuel Bersamin 02:01
Okay.

Steve McKay 02:02
Okay. Great. So, and thank you for sharing those pictures, by the way, those are beautiful. It helps me kind of do it. It reminds me of my own family, you know, those kind of 70s era pictures that are kind of fading. But those were lovely. So thank you for sharing that. So. So just to start, if it's okay, can you state your full name?

Manuel Bersamin 02:27
Sure. It's Manuel Bersamin.

Steve McKay 02:32
Okay. And Manuel, where were you born? And in what year?

Manuel Bersamin 02:32
Here in Watsonville. In 1957.

Steve McKay 02:37
Okay. Great. Okay. 1957. Okay. And so, I, you know, we want to kind of cover this a few different things, but you know, up to you how you want to go. But mainly, you know, we're interested in a little bit in, because this is partly from the Tobera Project, want to talk about, you know, any thing you know, or your family talked about the, the, the riots from 1930. That's one topic that we might talk about. The other is, you know, just growing up in Watsonville, what it was like, and then just memories, you have them sort of of that time and what it was like for you and your family. And I know, you mentioned to me before you want to talk about your dad and his history, and that is really important for us to capture too. So those are the general areas that we want to talk about. But again, if there's other things you'd like to talk about that that's fine, too.

Manuel Bersamin 03:41

Well, I'm growing up in Watsonville, in the in the 60s, and 70s. It really was all about my father, and who, and who I called my uncles. You know, the Filipinos that came here in the late 20s and 30s. A lot of them, they they first started in a little town called Guadalupe, which is near Santa Maria. And it's still there, there and there's still a lot of Filipino families there just like there is here in Watsonville.

Manuel Bersamin 04:41
But from Guadalupe, that's when they started the migrant stream. The manong version of the migrant stream and so they would work in Guadalupe and then we come up to Watsonville. And probably try to find work in the Salinas Valley. And then some of them would migrate to Imperial Valley. And then there was a few that knew about the Alaskan fisheries. And then they would go out and work in Alaska. Some of them would go and try to find work in the Bay Area.
Manuel Bersamin 04:46
But my dad, you know, that was the 70s was really one when he was in his prime. He had gotten here 1931. And by, you know, 30 years, after 30 years in this country, he, he really, he really was in his prime of working. And this, this, this virtual background that I have reminds me of my dad, because in our house, it wasn't unusual for my father and my mother both to wake up at four in the morning, you know, work on their breakfast and lunch. And then my mother would go to the canneries, and my father would go, you know, anywhere in the Salinas Valley from right here in Watsonville, all the way down to say, King City, which is an hour away. And that's what he would do. He would, you know, be working in row crops here in this part of California. It's really all about row crops. So, at that time, they were working on all Filipino crews. And those all Filipino crews had been together since the 1930s. We're talking friends for 30 years and a lot of them had had united by where they were from in the Philippines. Like you'd have the Ilokanos are working in one crew and maybe the Visayans working in another crew. And they had known each other literally since they were 20 years old. And now they were in their 50s. And—

Steve McKay 06:32
Sorry, it's really interesting in that I've heard similar stories. How did your dad end up in Watsonville? And where was his family from? When did he come to the United States? And what was it, you know, from what province?

Manuel Bersamin 06:45
My father is from Abra province in Northern Luzon from a town called Bangued, which is up in the, in the mountains, Cordelia mountains of Northern Luzon. And he, he left Bangued because he had had an unhappy relationship with a young woman. And my two uncles had already immigrated to Hawai'i on one of those contractor contracts. So when they heard my father wanted to leave the Philippines, they invited him to come to Hawai'i. He he didn't sign a

contract, but he went, he went to live with them. And then he started working there. But he wasn't under a contract. So when my uncles' contracts are over, they came to California and brought my father with them. And, and the first city they went to was a town that they had heard, where a lot of Ilokanos were living and that was Guadeloupe and near Santa Maria. And I guess amongst the Ilokanos, they would say, well, when there's no work in Guadalupe, we're going to go up to the Salinas Valley. And so, you know, Watsonville, even though it's not a part of the Salinas Valley, it's so connected to the agricultural region, that it's just one whole region from Watsonville, all the way down to say, King City.

Manuel Bersamin 08:15
So, you know, a lot of them, as you know, they, they tended to want to live near each other, because they felt protected amongst each other. And at that time, before the war, World War Two, you know, the, all those terrible stories of discrimination, you know, brown monkeys, you know, just terrible, terrible discrimination against Asians, not just Filipinos, and we know that. Of course, it all started with the Chinese 1880s and continued with the Japanese, but the Japanese were allowed to bring their women folk. So I'm sure that's why they, they ended up not not playing the cards. The chicken fights. The Japanese save their money and I'm sure they're women folks that you know, you're gonna buy land. So that's why a lot of the Japanese ended up landowners here. And the Filipinos who weren't allowed to bring their women, you know, they remained free spending bachelors. And my father was one of them. He got here. He got here at age 20 and didn't marry until he was 46 years old. Yeah, but he had a hell of a time. He was a great chicken fighter. And he was a, he was a great gambler as well.

Steve McKay 09:44
That's great. I bet. So did he often tell you stories about those, those years? Were there particularly ones that you remember him telling you about like his early years?

Manuel Bersamin 09:56
Well, I remember him telling me about his early years in the Philippines. And, you know, the picture I have of him now is riding a Carabao around his village. But you know, he, you know, he didn't have a happy life there. I think that— I think that he had heard stories from his brothers who had emigrated to Hawai'i. And he wanted out. And that that unhappy love relationship was his reason. Like many young men, you know, if you, if you're unlucky in love, sometimes that's an impetus to, to leave. And he left. His brother sent him the money. And he was able to go to Hawai'i. And at first they wanted him to study. You know, he had had the opportunity to go to an American school. And he was considered a good student. So my uncles wanted him to study. But my father was, was a little bit of a rebel. And instead of studying he, he just wanted to do his own thing. And, and all the other manongs around him were young as well. And they were not studying. They were, they were working. Not unlike the

lifestyle of the of the young Mexican Americans that I work with. Very few of the males have an inclination to study. Most of them want to do work. Because that's what they see around them.

Steve McKay 11:28
Yeah, they have to support themselves and families, and—

Manuel Bersamin 11:32
Well, they want to get that first car. And, you know, not, not unlike what I think happens amongst young men everywhere. You know, they want to go courting, and you're going to be much more successful if you're on a nice horse, or if you're driving a nice car. So what, the more things change, the more things stay the same, right?

Steve McKay 11:55
Yeah, there's all those great photos of the Filipinos dressed to the nines and their Mackintosh suits. And they're, you know, they just such sharp dressers with Do you know, was your dad part of that generation? And do you remember or have— does he tell stories about, you know, being a bachelor in, in Watsonville? Or before that, you know, in California?

Manuel Bersamin 12:23
Yes, we know that a lot of them would work very hard. six days out of the week, and maybe that seventh day, they would get together. And they would, they would share money and buy a car for five guys. And, you know, yes, we have pictures of them in those suits. And, you know, they, of course, you know, we know that that's what got them in trouble. Because they were not able to bring their own women. Everybody knows the story. It's about the taxi dancers. And, and, you know, the time of the of the manongs, the young manongs, fits right into the dust bowl, right in the immigration of the Okies and the Arkies to California, which, which of course, led to an explosion here in Watsonville. And in Stockton, and in Exeter, and in all these other towns, where the Filipinos felt safe.

Steve McKay 13:29
Yeah. So, so when did your dad end up living permanently or did he settle in Watsonville, then?

Manuel Bersamin 13:39
Yes, I think I think Guadalupe was— it wasn't a place that he felt safe. I think Filipinos settled where they felt safe.

Steve McKay 13:49
Yeah.

Manuel Bersamin 13:49
And so, you know, if they, if they first went to Stockton, and they felt safe, they stayed. If they want to Delano, and they felt safe. For my father, he, he felt safe here in Watsonville. And I think it's because he had enough of his Ilokano compatriots here that, he that he worked with, played with, rooster fighted with, gambled with, and, and they formed a clique. And I think, I think that's why most Filipinos of that generation settled where they settled. Because they had great friends, probably people they worked with. And then as years went on, you know, my father, here in Watsonville, in, in Roy Recio's, Watsonville is in the Heart Project, I keep seeing the, the last names of people that were descended of friends of my father. The Belesta family, the Valencia family, all those families were the descendants of friends of my father. And we all still know each other. And that's, that's our tie, you know, we will see each other and we'll know that, oh, there's a, there's a Belesta, just like the Bersamins, they've been in the city going on 60, 70, 80 years now. And you'll see the third generation, sometimes fourth generation they don't look Filipino anymore, because there's been a lot of intermarriage. But, but just like in my family, you know, you're gonna see third and fourth generations, and they have Filipino blood. But they don't, they don't look like they are Filipino. But all from that one group of Filipinos that settled here in the 1930s.

Steve McKay 15:50
Right, right. So, so your dad settles in, in Watsonville as working. And how does he meet your mom?

Manuel Bersamin 16:02
Well, the Filipino or I should say the the manong migrant trail, you know, because we had a migrant trail. In Watsonville and Salinas Valley, you can, you can work for about eight months. Then the rains come. And they come usually around October. So, you know, the Filipinos they they, this is before Social Security, workmen's comp, disability, this is in the 30s and 40s. So most of them would either go up to Alaska, in the fisheries, salmon fisheries or they're or they're going to stay doing the farm work and they'll go to the Imperial Valley, or the Coachella Valley. And in the Imperial Valley, that's where you get the winter vegetables, the winter lettuce. Coachella Valley, of course, that's grapes. And so they didn't want to go. But there was no work here. And they had to survive.

Manuel Bersamin 17:07
So my father traveled to a town called Calexico. And my mother was working right across the border in in Mexicali. And, you know, they got here in their 20s. And, of course, a lot of them their goal was to return to the Philippines as rich men. You know, not unlike the Chinese, when they came to this country and want and wanted to return with gold from the Gold Mountain.

Those manongs, you know, like, you know, they played the roosters, they played the cards, they bought the cars, they bought the fancy clothes, and they had no money to go back. So I think in their, in their 40s, they started to look around and say, You know what, I'm never going back. So who can I marry? I can't marry white women. Because you know, there's prejudice. So my father, I think he just decided to marry a Mexican woman, because by that time the Bracero movement had started. So you had all Filipino crews working alongside all Mexican crews. And, you know, the, as we know, the the Filipinos use some Spanish because of the Spanish colonists, colonization. So there was an interaction there.

Manuel Bersamin 18:33
So my father, it was kind of an arranged marriage, because he met a Filipino who had married a Mexican woman, and, and his Filipino friend had said, hey, do you want to marry a Mexican woman? I know of a Mexican woman. So the family legend is that my father, he went with his Filipino into a restaurant in Mexicali where my mother was a waitress. And they met there. And the, and the Filipino, who had introduced them both knew more Spanish. So he was kind of like the interpreter. My father knew Spanish but he wasn't fluent. So the family legend is that, you know, my father through the matchmaker said, look, if you if you agree to marry me, I will help you to immigrate. And then, you know, my mother had had kids from another marriage, two daughters, and my father promised to adopt those two daughters. And I think the big the biggest thing of all, was that my mother, she was from a very poor family from the state of Sinaloa. And they're all living in a small adobe-walled house. And I think my, my father's offer to my mother was an offer that she could not refuse because that was her ticket into this country. So they, they came to the United States. And they made a home here in Watsonville. And then within two weeks later, they got on another thing that a lot of people don't know about the manongs at that time who were marrying Mexican women, Caucasian women, were making a, I guess I call it a love trip to New Mexico. And it was in New Mexico, where they were allowed to marry. They were not allowed to marry in California or Arizona. So my father and mother tell me that they got in a car with a friend of ours. And they drove I think it was like 18 hours straight to Roswell, New Mexico. And that's where they got married. And I've since learned that's the story of a lot of our families here in this part of California.

Steve McKay 21:04
Yeah, definitely of that generation that I, when I met some other families and saw some marriage certificates. They were from Washington or New Mexico or these other places. So yeah, you know, is weren't allowed to marry outside of the, you know, Filipinos, so—

Manuel Bersamin 21:23
Yes, and, and, you know, to be honest with you, that's, that's why I have a great affinity toward gay marriage. I remember when that first came up, and I thought, let them marry, because

what I remember was what my father and mother had gone through. And, you know, it was it's ironic that that this country allowed those types of bans to last so long. And I think that marriage ban that prohibited Filipinos from marrying Caucasian women lasted until I believe, like 1965. So, you know, it's, it's a terrible thing, but it's, you know, I really believe that this country's original sin is racism. And I think what's going on right now in this country is still a residual effect of that racism, which we now call white nationalism. It's a, it's the same original sin.

Steve McKay 22:25
And it's, yeah, it's not that long ago. And I mean, like you saying, it's just these laws, simple, getting married, being, you know, illegal based on race. Did your parents ever talk about that much? Did they talk about that? How difficult it was as a mixed-race couple or what it was like before?

Manuel Bersamin 22:43
No, because, you know, my father, he didn't talk much about the suffering. I mean, I learned about that in other ways. But, you know, the discrimination, the the cat calls against the Filipinos, little brown monkeys, the way where they were treated by growers. I mean, here, here's a great example. You know, my father worked from 1931 in this country until 1980. 50 years.

Steve McKay 23:14
Yeah.

Manuel Bersamin 23:15
And, you know, they passed Social Security and a lot of benefits in the 40s, late 40s. But my father probably didn't have any Social Security taken out of his check, until probably the 50s. So from from the 1931, until the 50s, you know, he put in a lot of work that he was never really compensated for. He never complained about that. And he never complained about, you know, probably going into hotels or restaurants with famous sign, no Filipinos allowed. He was, he was pretty quiet about that.

Manuel Bersamin 23:56
But when I would talk to my uncles, they would say, oh, he was thrown in jail quite a few times for fighting those types of issues. And, you know, he was a little bit of a rebel, which, which is why I think he, he became active in the unions. Because I don't believe people join the unions when they are going to accept the status quo. I think you join a union, when you see the status quo, and you say, that is that's wrong. You know, not being paid a fair wage for for a fair day's work, or being discriminated against, or, you know, to have, you know, your growers or even

the fledgling unions be corrupt. I don't, I don't think I don't think people who accept the status quo are going to join those organizations. But my father did. And, you know, you know, Steve, one of the things I'm most proud of is when my uncles who'd tell me that my father was thrown in jail during the Salinas lettuce strikes. And there were several. And then later on when he when he joined the United Farm Workers, when when Cesar Chavez, Cesar Chavez, and, you know, the Filipino labor, labor leaders unions came in at the Salinas Valley in the 1970s. My father was one of the first to join.

Manuel Bersamin 25:24
So, you know, when we talked about this interview, you know, I wanted to pay tribute to my father, because you know, what happened to those of us that grew up in those kinds of families. We call it in Spanish mestizo families, which is probably a word they use in Tagalog as well. We were we were kind of ashamed. Because, you know, you go to school with white Caucasian kids, and you know, you're not and then the Mexicans would never accept us as totally Mexican. The Filipinos in Watsonville, and Salinas Valley, so many manongs got married to Mexican women, that we very seldom met pure Filipinos from a pure blood father, Filipino father, and a pure blood Filipino woman. When we saw a purebred Filipino woman here, in this valley, it was very, very rare. We didn't see them that often. So that kind of creates a sensitivity of who are we? We're not Mexican enough to be Mexican. And we're not Filipino enough to be Filipino. And we're not white. So I kind of think that caused a real confusion. And I know it did. It did in me and probably a lot of other people like me. And I think it took us until adulthood. And at least for me, taking classes about, you know, the Asian American experience. Or, you know, because my father would never talk about that stuff. You know what it did it for me? Reading Carlos Bulosan's book. That's what did it for me.

Steve McKay 27:15
It, yeah, it's a great, it's a great book. And I you know, that's, I reread it often just because there's some— And and just preparing for this project. And, you know, it's it's interesting. Watsonville comes up once in a while, but only in passing and that experience of like, you say that the families that stayed in Watsonville. Watsonville gets mentioned, but we really get no details. You know, so that's, that's, and to hear of your, you know, about your father's experiences. Do you know when he first joined the union, or which union was, he was involved in early on?

Manuel Bersamin 27:55
Well, what I remember him, it really wasn't him. It was more of my uncles talking about him was the Filipino unions that were formed in the 30s. And, you know, by that time, my father had chosen to stay in Watsonville. So, you know, all the Filipinos from Watsonville, which, which we call the Pajaro Valley, which is a small valley, but like I said, the Pajaro Valley is, is actually in

the same region as the Salinas Valley. So when you hear about labor troubles in the Salinas Valley, they were happening in Watsonville as well. And I think, I think John Steinbeck, one of his novels was about labor, labor strikes, I don't remember which one, but about the time that John Steinbeck was was writing about labor troubles in the Salinas Valley was when those Filipino led labor struggles were happening in the Salinas Valley and they were violent.

Manuel Bersamin 28:55
I mean, those those labor issues were always violent. And my one of my uncle said, Yeah, your father was once thrown in jail for threatening a Japanese American grower with a knife. And, you know, the Filipinos who worked in the lettuce, they all carried knives. And I remember my father, you know, coming home and sharpening those knives. He, he, most of the Filipinos up here worked in the lettuce, in the Iceberg lettuce now, now there's like 10 varieties of lettuce. But at that time, it was just Iceberg. And, you know, the Iceberg is a pretty thick head of lettuce. So you have to pull it, take out that knife and cut it with one stroke. You had to be very fast. So for many years, I had this image of my father threatening, you know, a Japanese American grower with a lettuce knife and being thrown in jail for it. So like I said, you know, my father and I'm sure many of the manongs didn't want their children to know about things that had happened to them because I guess they wanted to protect us or they didn't want us to grow cynical at a young age.

Manuel Bersamin 30:14
I can tell you this, my father had a chance to become a citizen during the time of Pete Wilson. Prop 187. And there was this huge drive in the state to have more people of color become citizens. And my mother asked my father, don't you want to be a citizen? My father, by that time spoke very, very good English. And, and you had he had a pretty good history of knowledge of American history. And he said, no, I don't want to be a citizen of this country. And I never asked him, but I always thought, Well, it's because of how he was treated. And I'm sure the labor the labor strikes were a lot of that. You know, my father, he knew that a lot of the labor abuses were targeted to Filipinos. And I don't think he ever forgave that, you know, short handled hoe. You know, Cesar Chavez has a lot of it's a lot of credit for that, but it wasn't the Braceros that used that thing for 40 years. It was the Filipinos. And, and, you know, that's a big thing for me to make sure that the Filipinos get their, their long delayed due for what they did for labor in this in this state. You know, everybody looks I'm Mexican and half Mexican and I'm proud of UFW, but I'm just as proud, if not more proud that it was the Filipinos that that organized labor units long before anybody heard of Cesar Chavez.

Steve McKay 31:52
Right. Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz and all the other organizers. Yeah.

Manuel Bersamin 31:59
Yeah. And those folks were, those folks are Central Valley people. Stockton to say Bakersfield. But what I'm talking about is the Salinas Valley, and no one's really written about that. That's kind of a hidden slice of labor history of what did the Filipinos do in the Salinas Valley during the 30s? I've read, I've read bits and pieces, but I don't think that's ever been studied. And, and, you know, that, I think I think the reason why has been studied is because like I said, you know, amongst Filipino Americans, a lot of history around Stockton, later on around Delano, later on about around the Coachella Valley, but not the Salinas Valley. And maybe it's because we're very, we're a small valley. But you know, 100 miles long, but 10 miles wide. And not not too much happens here. Even today. Most of my students, you know, they want to, they want to transfer out, they want to go to the Bay Area, they want to go to LA. Not a whole lot happens here even even today.

Steve McKay 33:09
Yeah, but so much still did happen and you're right. And I think there is some growing interest. We're going to have Dr. Rick Baldoz come and talk to our group. And he wrote a book called The Third Asiatic invasion. And it only goes up to the 1946, I believe. But he has a new project that he actually does want to look at Filipinos. And he said that Watsonville and Salinas were a big area. So but you know, what's interesting is he's working. He's a historian, he's working from the archives and trying to find out. And so what would you know, and he's curious, wanting to know, the stories like the stories of your father or your uncles, and you know, which groups they worked with, and, and those stories, so, so, yeah, you know, I hope that this project absolutely can capture some of those stories. So, you know, that's great.

Manuel Bersamin 34:00
My uncle's had a different life. They, they had worked the fields, but when World War Two broke out, they joined the Filipino infantry regiments. My father wanted to do the same, but he had some type of heart issue. So they did not take him and so my uncles when they joined the military, one joined the Navy, the other one joined the army. They were part of that mass citizenship movement that happened for those Filipinos and then they never returned to the fields. They, they, they got into jobs that Filipinos can do after the war, when everything changed, and then Filipinos are now accepted because they were our fighting brothers from Bataan and and Corrigedor, because I remember reading what you sent me. Every, everything changed after that they weren't little brown brothers anymore. They weren't people to, to be angry about because they're dancing with your sister. They were accepted. But my father because he never joined the military, he stayed a farm worker. And, and continued to have a farm worker's point of view, which, which I still believe I inherited, and probably some of his militant attitudes about this country because, you know, I, I, I always felt that even though I tried to assimilate once I learned the real history, instead of, you know, what I assumed it

happened in this valley. I became more militant. And I think that's been a part of my career, and my, and my political career. So, you know, I really feel a lot of affinity with my father now.

Manuel Bersamin 34:38
The only the only regret I have is that I didn't have a chance to tell him how he, how he had impacted me. And that's actually— that's actually why I started working, Roy. Because I told Roy, you know, I have an unfulfilled debt to my father. Because I never had a chance to sit with him and tell him now, you know, I really understand now what you went through. We didn't have that kind of relationship. I wish we could have. I wish when I was reading Bulosan's spoke I could have read him sections and said did this happen to you? I don't think he wanted to revisit that anyway. But it's too late now. I, I can't ask him. But I've tried to make him proud with some of the later decisions that that I've done.

Steve McKay 36:53
Yeah, no, I think he'd be very proud of all the way up accomplished. And it's been substantial to be the first Asian American mayor in Watsonville. To, to do what you've done. And lead by example. It's been exemplary. So—

Manuel Bersamin 37:09
Thank you.

Steve McKay 37:09
Yeah, he has a lot to be proud of. I did, And so this is, you know, why, you know, so it's wonderful detail. I guess, it would be you know, you mentioned a few times, just like growing up in Watsonville. And that your father didn't maybe like to talk too much about it. But so what was it like for you? And and do you have siblings did what was it like growing up in Watsonville?

Manuel Bersamin 37:35
And I should probably say, he didn't want to talk about it to me. But when the manongs got together [laughter] I'm sure they've talked about it, because, you know, that's actually another thing that I feel regrets for. Because, you know, they they spoke Ilokano. And, you know, most of his friends came from that region. And they, when they got together, all of a sudden, I couldn't understand a word they were saying, and, and yet, I'm sure, you know, he had known some of these folks, for a long, long time, they, in effect, they grew up together. So I wish, you know, now I wish you had taught us but because we came from a mixed, mixed ethnic marriage. My sisters and I, we speak Spanish, but we don't speak Ilokano. We know some words and Tagalog. But no, it's actually it's actually something that I understand. I'm sure, you

know, he, he, he was castigated for speaking his native language in places where people didn't appreciate that. So maybe he didn't want his kids to go through that too.

Manuel Bersamin 38:48
Well, after my mother and father, married, my father and mother had three children, my two older sisters and myself. But we are really a blended family because the two daughters that my mother had in Mexico, later on they they joined us. And so, you know, we, we had a very close relationship with with my older sisters. And then because my mother was the first one to come to this country, she opened the door for her, her other brothers and sisters that wanted to immigrate. And, you know, in our family, we're pretty proud of that. Because my mother's family is quite large. So a lot of her siblings came and settled in Watsonville. And even today, you know, we we say, you know, thank God that my father married my mother, and brought her here to this country. And a lot of my mom's sisters, also married manongs.

Steve McKay 39:55
Oh, really?

Manuel Bersamin 39:55
Yes. So in our family, we have a lot of cousins. Who are also mestizo like us. And, you know, we call each other Pinoy, Pinoy power. And one of them actually is very active in the Watsonville is in the Heart. Roy might arrange to interview my cousin Mary. Mary's very active. And, you know, when we get together, when my family gets together, it's a tradition to where we speak like my father. So we'll say, [Manuel imitates his father's voice] you come and eat now because the food is ready. I make for you rice and chop suey.

Manuel Bersamin 40:43
So we we like to do that. [Laughter]. It's almost a chorus. I might start it. And then my sisters will join in. And it's either I mean, pre pre-COVID You know, we would do it all the time. You know, Thanksgiving, Christmas. My father was a cook. You know, in the family legend. He he used to work in the labor camps, and he was kind of an apprentice to a Chinese cook. And my father, he learned to make chop suey. Of course, back in the Depression, the Filipinos would cook up, things that the butchers would throw. And then they knew how to make mustard greens, watercress, all the vegetables that you know the Americans would not eat. So he was a very good cook he learned to make do. And in our family, my father was the cook. Not not so much my mother. My mother knew how to cook but my dad he took he took great enjoyment in cooking. So yeah, it's just so much fun [Manuel imitates his father's voice] I make you the coconut balls and sweet rice because it is your birthday. So [Laughter]. So you know, even today. And it's fun in the family, but we're careful not to do it in front of Filipinos. I found out the hard way once that even if you're trying to explain to Filipinos, how your father spoke, to the

immigrants, it's a, it can be an insult. It can be an insult. So I found that out the hard way. I never, I never repeated that mistake.

Steve McKay 42:34
Yeah, I that's a, it's very similar in my family. We you know, also a blended family. And, you know, it's out of love that we do it that way and bonding. So—

Manuel Bersamin 42:47
It's the way we remember my father.

Steve McKay 42:49
Yeah. What did he like? What did he cook that you remember? Like, what was the dish that he like really liked to cook and that you loved to eat?

Manuel Bersamin 42:57
Well, in, in in, I have memories of accompanying him up to the—There's some mountains, not big mountains, but there were Portuguese farmers who lived in the foothills around Watsonville. And they'd raise pigs. So one of my memories is of him taking me with him and meeting a couple manongs out there and they they had bought a pig together. And, you know, they knew how to butcher a pig. And you know, once once they had the pig on the table one of them would cut the pigs throat and my job was the catch the blood in a bucket. And, you know, I, I did that many times. And I knew it was my job. So of course what they did was, you know, once they had had the pig, my father would take his half home and that night we would eat choc— what we called chocolate meat.

Steve McKay 43:59
Yeah.

Manuel Bersamin 44:00
I'm trying to remember the Filipino name for it, but it just—

Steve McKay 44:04
Dinuguan.

Manuel Bersamin 44:05
Dinuguan, dinuguan. That was one of our favorites too because he was a great cook. And of course you know, anything had to do with pork, you know, dinuguan and then the Filipinos they, they, they love their, their ampalaya so they would you know, we would always grow some ampalaya in the backyard and you know, he loved it with chicken. He loved his noodles

whether it was rice noodles. He he didn't always eat a lot of the of the traditional Filipino foods because of course, his family was blended. And his kids were assimilating. But what we really loved was the, the chocolate meat, what we'd call the chocolate meat. Of course, the ampalaya, the eggplant, all the, all the Filipino vegetables. And then of course, rarely, he would get together with his manong friends and they would go to the chicken fights and just buy bags full of coconut balls.

Manuel Bersamin 45:20
There's a Tagalog name for those, it escapes me now, but you probably remember when you had to get a pound the coconut to, where it got to the consistency of a flour. And then, and then you would fry those coconut balls and coat them with with brown sugar and, and sweet rice. I mean, that was a great treat to make all that. And then he'd make fried fried banana patties. Oh, that was really good, too. So his menu was the menu of a manog that went through the Depression.

Steve McKay 46:03
That's interesting.

Manuel Bersamin 46:04
Yeah, they, they, they have their own delicacies that they developed as young men when they could not buy meat, or they couldn't afford anything. And so they may do. Chop suey is one of our favorites too, because, of course, chop suey is where you put anything and everything in the pot. And, you know, one Filipino might be working in the in asparagus. So he'll share the asparagus with others, maybe another manong would work in cauliflower. Another one would work in the broccoli. And maybe they had just enough meat to chop up and then just, you know that that would serve a lot of people even today, when we want to serve a lot of people will make a big pot of chop suey. And it's it just reminds us of our dad. It's like it's our version of, of Pinoy soul food. And we and we do and we do make it from time to time to remember him.

Manuel Bersamin 47:09
What I like to do is go to a Filipino store that I know in Salinas and you can still buy the coconut balls. You probably remember them, though. They'll make the coconut balls and then they're gonna put them in a long wooden skewer.

Steve McKay 47:23
Yeah.

Manuel Bersamin 47:23

Yeah, you walk around and eat them that way. Well, I want to remember my father, I'll go into that Filipino market in Salinas, and I'll buy the coconut balls, and, you know, I'll even buy some bagoong you know, season the foods that, that I still eat when I want to remember him. Not a big fan of baluts though. [Laughter]. But you know, my father was he just was a great cook seafood, pork. But it's kind of a specific cuisine. Manong depression. That's what it was.

Steve McKay 48:10
Do you remember big parties? Or were there times when everyone got together? Was he the kind of the cook for those like parties and things?

Manuel Bersamin 48:17
Yes, yes, he would. And, and, you know, the wonderful thing was that there was enough of his friends around to where if they wanted to make a huge pot of chocolate meat. Or if they wanted to, we didn't do a lot of the, the lechon, the entire pig. They never did that. Maybe it's because they just couldn't afford it. They never got in the habit of it. But, you know, they, they were really good about. And I really, you know, thinking back I, I really think that they, they'd get together. And they would cook the food that they would probably have eaten when they were still on the farm labor camps. Because a lot of the Filipinos at that time were living in farm labor camps, all Filipinos. And so they got used to cooking in scale for a group of people. And that's what they would cook, you know, whatever, whatever would feed, you know, 100 men who were living in a farm labor camp, that's what they would make. Nothing fancy. But you know, good wholesome food that, that got them through the Depression. And, you know, nowadays, you know, when I look at videos about Philippines, the I see the big lechon pigs and, you know, huge, you know, big pigs and, and I think, you know, why didn't my my father and my uncles ever make something like that for a birthday party and I just think that they just didn't have the money to do that.

Steve McKay 49:51
Yeah, that's that's really expensive, but and it makes sense. Their taste was, you know, from their days working. Yeah.

Manuel Bersamin 49:57
Well, here's the funny story for you. My father was an active chicken fighter. And one of my memories is, my father at times would collect the losers in the chicken fights and, and we had a huge pot. And sometimes I'd playing out in the front yard or something or playing with my friends. And I see my father come home from the chicken fights and thinking please, I hope you didn't bring any home today. And then when I walked into the, into the house, I'd smell the aroma of five or six roosters in a large pot. Dad was boiling in order to loosen the feathers. And you know, we wouldn't eat that. But he would feed it to our dogs. And, you know, we always

had some dogs in the backyard to guard the fighting roosters. One of my, one of my father's you know, my you know, I didn't know this until later. You just take it for granted when you're growing up, but cockfighting is a national sport in the Philippines, and you know, a lot of the mqnongs they brought that with them. I didn't know that.

Manuel Bersamin 51:14
All I knew was that oh, of course, we have roosters. Of course, we're going to be waking up in the morning starting around five o'clock by the roosters. Of course, when my father's you know, traveling, looking for work, I have to feed the roosters. I have to water the roosters. And then, you know, there came a time when oh, it's my turn to clean out the chicken shed from the cages. And you know, it's oh, my father's bringing home a bunch of roosters that have been cut in the fight. It's my job to hold the hydrogen peroxide and wash out those wounds. And then it's my job to hold the rooster while he sutures some of those wounds. And so, you know, you take it for granted. And remember I told you I was a little ashamed of some of our customs. And you know, that's, that's not, you know, holding a fighting rooster while your father's suturing it isn't something that you're going to share with your, with your blonde, white friend in second grade. You know, and I really think that that's what led to a lot of us in the project of having a who am I? Who are we?

Steve McKay 52:33
Yeah.

Manuel Bersamin 52:34
And I think that's why I appreciate Roy. Because Roy was the one who started the project when we knew we had matured enough to know who we were. And who we are. I don't know if we would have joined the project at at in our 20s. Maybe not in 30s. But I think you know, I'm 63 and some of my other friends in the project, they're in their 50s. And I'm thinking they're saying, yes, we're Pinoy. We are mestizo. We live, we come from Watsonville. And now we're proud of it. And I think that's the evolution that— And that's why Roy has a pretty good following in the project now. Because I think we've matured enough and we we've grown to appreciate that.

Steve McKay 53:24
Yeah, no, that that's a great just the image of you holding your dad sutures. And yeah, is the thing we're embarrassed about, you know, like, my dad has a very strong accent and when I brought friends home, you know, like they were, you know, I felt bad. Like, you know, why can't he just talk like, you know, like, my friends' fathers, you know, things like that. You know, we don't appreciate it when we're kids. And then you realize, you know, they didn't have an easy life that, you know, they did all this stuff for us. So that's— so did so were there get togethers

with different families. I know other people talk about the picnics, and they're doing different places where they would have the cockfights as kids, were you going to those events and those get togethers?

Manuel Bersamin 54:11
Well, there were, you know, there were the cockfights, which were, you know, pretty much my father, his friends, some of the Mexican Braceros that, that later on found their way back and started this migration from Mexico. Those were pretty much male– oriented events. And those were held at the farm labor camps. And as those days they weren't raided very much. Now they're raided all the time.

Manuel Bersamin 54:42
And then and then of course, there were the family events where, you know, all the blended families would get together. And you know, my mother, at least three or four sisters, of her sisters, married friends of my father. So we all have kind of a mestizo tribe in Watsonville. And we would get together a lot. And, and we'd get together with our Mexican cousins. So, um, you know, I think I share that, I'm sure that that's been the case of these kinds of blended families, at least the farm worker families from from Watsonville, all the way down to the Imperial Valley. And those are great memories, because one of the stories that I love to hear was my mother's family was very poor. In Mexicali and the Mexicans that still live there, relatives of my mother would say, oh, when your father and my, my Uncle Nato, who was my father's best friend, they would make trips from Watsonville, with 100 pound sacks of, of, of rice, and 100 pound sacks of cornmeal, and, and butchered pigs, and they would make trips down from Watsonville. And then, you know, if you had fresh meat and it wasn't really refrigerated, you needed to get to your destination pretty quickly. So they would drive straight. You know, it's possible to drive from Watsonville and make it down to the border in maybe 10-11 hours driving straight. And the Mexican families, my mother's Mexican families, were very happy when those Filipinos pulled up. Because they knew that they were going to eat pretty well. You know, at least for a while. So those families later, some of those families later immigrated. So even today, I think the Mexican side of my family really admire the, you know, what they would call tios or uncles. Yeah. You know, those Mexican families have done very well now. And now they're sending kids to very good schools, they, those families have assimilated. But, you know, they still remember stories of what the Filipino tios did for them, when they were still under dire straits in the border towns.

Manuel Bersamin 57:27
And so yes, we'd get together a lot, not so much. Now. It's actually a sad thing. But I think this is true of all immigrant families. When you first get here, you need each other, and you only trust each other. But as you assimilate to American society, and American cultural values, and

it probably starts with the first generation of teenagers, pretty soon, you know, you lose that. Because the teenagers, they they don't want to hang out with the immigrant parents, or the uncles and aunts, they want to, they want to be American. So when those first teenagers start to move away from the family, I think that's when it all ends. And as an educator, who works mostly with immigrant families in Salinas, I see the same patterns. I see the same patterns, you know, the families stay together when they're immigrant families. But when the teenagers get to a certain age, they want to do their own thing. And I keep telling my, my students look, appreciate your families as much as you can, because I know you want to assimilate to American values. But you know, there's something special about who we are, about who we are and where we come from. But it's that old thing where, you know, everybody's in a hurry to grow up. And then when they get to a certain age, they wish, oh, man, I wish I was a kid again. I see that all the time with my college students.

Steve McKay 58:56
Yeah. Yeah. So when you mentioned that there are a lot of the blended families and the mestizo families got together did was there a particular area of Watsonville that folks settled in them, you know, where did the Filipino families live? And where did it was a different place than the mestizo families?

Manuel Bersamin 59:15
Well, because most of my mother's sister started to work in the canneries of Watsonville. I one time wants to go had about I think about ten frozen food, canneries. All that changed when, when NAFTA was signed, but before NAFTA, Watsonville was known as frozen food capital. And every vegetable you can think of and even fish, they were processed in our canneries here. So my aunts and my mother wanted to live in town. But we had and then and then my father didn't mind living in town because the city had not passed an ordinance against roosters at that time. It's changed now.

Manuel Bersamin 1:00:02
But where we would get together would usually be on a farm, that my father's best friend, my Uncle Nato, had outside of town, and it became a gathering place for all the families because it was far away from town. And, you know, we kids loved it because you know, was out in the country. And the parents would they loved it to because it became a gathering place very early in their marriages even before they had kids. So that's where we would get together. We didn't really go to parks very much. It was, you know, I really think that most immigrant families follow that pattern where they, they don't want to, they don't feel that they have the right to impinge on where the Americans or the Caucasians go. And maybe it's because they feel a sense of segregation. I don't know. I think I still see it you know, you know, you don't see here here and in our valley now the newest immigrants are the Oaxacans. You don't see many Oaxacans

going to the parks on Sundays, where people are playing baseball or, or even where the northern Mexicans are playing soccer, the Oaxacans pretty much stay segregated. And you know, here in the Salinas Valley we have a lot of Oaxacans. So no, they tend to be a little clannish. And they tend to want to do their own thing. But when their kids come to school, they, I can see them assimilating. But I think that must be the same story for all immigrants.

Manuel Bersamin 1:01:48
The Filipinos, of course, when they came to this country, and this is another thing I learned from Carlos Bulosan, they had the thought that this was the land of democracy where everybody was considered equal. And their American teachers taught them that, you know, this was a country that really believed in equality, or the modern word equity. But they certainly learned that nope. If you are different, you are a target. And if you're at the low end of the pyramid, you are more of a target. And I think, you know, that's, that's been a legacy of the Filipinos that came and I still feel it. Because when I finally made it to the university, I had to fight that imposter syndrome. You know, everywhere at every level, I went, I went to the community college first. Cabrillo College, and the main campus, all you had were Caucasian people. And I was riding the bus in from Watsonville, son of farmworkers. So I felt that imposter syndrome transferred to UC Irvine, felt it there too. Republican Orange County. And then, you know, no matter where I went, San Jose State, Stanford, University of Arizona, and I still feel it today. I can be in a meeting with administrators and I still feel it. And I have, I have as much education of is not more from from maybe better schools. And I still feel it, they'll come from Central Michigan, or some some Midwestern school that I have to look up because I don't know. And I'm here in Salinas and I attended Irvine and Stanford and, but I still feel it. And I think that comes from my father. I think it's a legacy of my dad, he he I don't think my dad ever felt accepted. And I think that's one reason why he didn't want to be a citizen.

Manuel Bersamin 1:03:52
And I think, in a way, I think, in a way, as I was getting my education, I think my father, you really didn't encourage me because I think he was afraid that my dreams, were going to end up like whatever dreams he had. Because I don't think that he dreamt of being a farm worker for fifty years. And I don't think that, you know, he was, he was the brother that was supposed to study. And I think he might have studied if he, if he had had a healthy heart, he probably would have joined the military. And if he had survived, he might have studied or became a postman or, you know, some some job that the servicemen are able to do because they have a little bit of an advantage when they're hired. But no, my father—I tell my sisters, that heart murmur is why we exist. If he had not had that heart murmur, he never would have met my mother. So, you know, thank God for the heart murmur because I like my life.

Steve McKay 1:05:01

Yeah. Well, all those sacrifices he made. I mean, and like you're saying it's the immigrant story of the sacrifices of that generation?

Manuel Bersamin 1:05:10
Yes.

Steve McKay 1:05:11
It's —they put it into their kids, right?

Manuel Bersamin 1:05:14
Yes. But look at this, look at this background picture. [Manuel is referring to his Zoom background which depicted Filipino farm workers]. Yeah. That that's what he did. From I'd say 1931. Until, until he couldn't lift those boxes anymore, which would have been in the 70s. But he still kept working in the fields, because one of the jobs that the farm workers do when they're too— when they've grown too old to manhandle those boxes of lettuces, they do the weeding. And so even after he couldn't lift those boxes, he was out there weeding and when you drive through our Salinas Valley where we do mostly row crops, you still you, still see them, manhandling these boxes of Romaine, or you'll see the women because now there's women out there, when I was growing up, you didn't see women, and they're doing the weeding. So my father stopped working, when he started to grow faint in the fields. He he, he wanted to keep working. And then after a while, you know, he worked until his late 70s. And then after a while, the sun beating on, on, on him, he started to grow faint.

Manuel Bersamin 1:06:39
And so, you know, I was in school, I was at Irvine. And, you know, it's, it's, it's been a real journey, because for me to progress, I had to leave my, my parents, and, you know, living these lives that they had lived here for so long. And even today, I feel a little bit of regret. And sometimes they'll say, like I should have, I should have went to UC Santa Cruz instead of going down to Irvine. Well, Santa Cruz didn't accept me. That's why, that's why I went to Irvine who, who in his right mind is going to go to Orange County and try to fight against all those Republicans. But that's what also made me a militant, because when I got to Irvine, there was a very strong [unknown]. Yeah, very strong Black Student Union. The Filipinos weren't as militant because most of those Filipinos when I went there, they, they weren't of the manong generation. And as you know, there's, there's this really strong drive to assimilate. And I think it's because you know, a lot of the immigrants, they know how hard it was in the Philippines, and this is their chance.

Manuel Bersamin 1:07:58

So, you know, when I was the mayor of Watsonville, I was invited to go speak to the Filipino community of Watsonville. My father and the manongs, they got together in the 40s, and 50s, and 60s, and they built that building. So for many years, it was another gathering place of the manongs. But as they died off, the new generation that took it over, where all the Filipinos that had come after 1965.

Steve McKay 1:08:28
Right.

Manuel Bersamin 1:08:29
And so I remember saying yes to the invitation, it was the, it was the event where they were going to crown you know, a lot of Filipinos they, they really liked their, not beauty contest, but you know, crowning a queen? Then they like to do the waltz. That's a big thing for them. And I remember saying, yes, I'll go. Thank you for the invite. And I started talking about the manongs and in my dad's generation, and the fact that we had, they had built the building, and it took hundreds of maybe thousands of chicken dinners to build that building. But they could not relate. They couldn't relate. They were proud of me, because they knew I was the first Filipino mayor of the city. But they just couldn't relate to everything I've shared with you now. And what they wanted to do was they wanted to get to the waltz. And they didn't tell me this, but, you know, I was the one that was supposed to lead the reigning queen in a waltz. I don't waltz. [Steve laughs] Again, I can disco [laughter]. I can slow dance to some slow jams. But I'm not a waltz-er so, you know, they hadn't told me that I had to do that. So try to picture me trying to fake waltz [Steve laughs in the background].

Manuel Bersamin 1:10:03
That's actually, you know, here in Watsonville, there's still a separation between those of us who were the sons and daughters of the manong generation, and the Filipinos that came after 65. And when, when I tried to lobby to get the apology for Fermin Tobera through the city council, the mayor of Watsonville, a woman by the name of Rebecca Garcia, she said to me, Manuel, have you spoken to the Filipino Community about the apology? Shouldn't there be a representative of the Filipino Community? And, you know, Rebecca is very conservative. I've known her a long time. And so I told her, you know, Rebecca, they're not going to know a lot about the history of Fermin. But this is really important to those of us who are the descendants of the manongs. But now she wanted me to approach the Filipino Community and tell them to please, what would be the word, bless the apology. Well, I never did, because, first of all, I think they just don't know about it. And I think they really would have shied away from acknowledging it. Because you know, that generation, they're really about, you know, success, achievement, assimilation. And to hear about how a Filipino had once been killed, just for the

fact that he was Filipino. I don't think that would have brought them any—what's the word? Satisfaction. I think, I think would, would be something they would want to bury. You know?

Steve McKay 1:12:03
No, that's, that is really interesting. And I've heard that story from other, you know, from Roy, and some others. And so, so you say there's a separation? What did you feel that growing up that they were kind of post-65 Filipinos? And how did that? How did you get that feeling that they, you know, saw you differently, or your families differently?

Manuel Bersamin 1:12:25
Well, I didn't feel it in 65. In fact, I was pretty happy when, you know, my two uncles that joined the navy and the army, they settled in Santa Barbara. And they actually had a chance to go back to the Philippines during the war. And visit, you know, Bangued, where, you know, they had enough resources to fix the house, because, you know, family legend is that some American plane had to bomb their neighborhood to drive the Japanese out and damaged the house. So my uncles went back and they started to fix that house during their deployments before they were called back. First one uncle went and then he left, then another uncle went, and then he, he continued. And they went in 65, they helped a lot of our relatives to come to this country, mostly, to study nursing.

Steve McKay 1:13:25
Yeah.

Manuel Bersamin 1:13:25
So my two uncles was a, they were a conduit to try to get a lot of my female cousins out of Bangued, and come to this country in, you know, 17- 18 years old. And then those, those female cousins, they were able to go to nursing school. And they became very successful, and they helped other people to come. So when I was a kid, because I was only eight years old in 65, I was happy, because they would tell me stories about you know, this cousin and that cousin been able to come after many years, and I was happy.

Manuel Bersamin 1:14:03
Where it finally hit me though, was when I was attending UC Irvine. And there was Kababayan Club. And, you know, when I would, when I joined the Kababayan Club, you know, I was pretty happy because I would be able to celebrate some of my Filipino heritage. But you know, getting to know those kids, because, you know, I was, I was in my 20s by the time I transferred and they were still teens, but their parents have been the post-65 generation and I was one of manong generation. And I realized oh, we only have food in common. We have food in common, we have, you know, the fact that we still send the, what we call the in my family, the

Christmas boxes home. But when it came to my experience, and their experience, they were totally different. They were on a fast track. And, and I even felt sorry for them because a lot of them even wanted to, they were trying to forget their Filipino customs. And I remember thinking, you know, assimilation, total assimilation is not the way. I'll let you figure out, figure it out on your own. But, you know, I think it was their parents saying, hey, we hit the lotto, we left great poverty, we're the ones that were fortunate. You're going to study, you're going to assimilate, and you're going to help the parents. And, you know, if we're lucky, we can bring some other people back from the Philippines. But you know, you're, you're an American. And, you know, don't waste this opportunity. And they assimilated very quickly.

Manuel Bersamin 1:15:51
But because they came from a different social class, because that separates us too, because the folks that came in 65, and after they were from a different social class. They were educated. They came from a real Philippine nation. They had never known when the Philippines was not a nation, because a lot of them were born, you know, after 46. My parents, my father came when he was still considered a US national. Philippines were not a nation and he came from the bottom of the Philippine pyramid, social class pyramid. These folks came maybe from, I don't, I can't say the middle, but that's where they aspired to be. So, you know, class differences.

Manuel Bersamin 1:16:43
You know, just very different and, and, and even the Filipinos, you know, my father when he would get sick, and when the manongs were in their last days. They'd go to the hospitals. And you'd see the Filipina nurses trying to relate to the manongs. And the Filipina nurses were most married to other Filipinos. So I guess, you know, even they learned, oh, you're, you're 70 years old, and you are married to the Mexican woman, and your kids coming, and they're part Mexican. And, you know, I'm sure my father spoke to them in Tagalong. And they'd say, Oh, I came in 1970 and graduated from nursing school in Manila. And I had a chance to come to this country. And my son's at Berkeley and my daughter's at Stanford, and it's just different. Just different. I don't I don't begrudge them though. Because, you know, anybody who can get out of the Philippines has hit the lotto. And, you know, as we know, Philippines they still struggle. So that's why we used to send what we call the Christmas boxes. And, you know, a lot of Filipinos still do that. Right? There's a name for them. There's a Tagalog name for them. It starts with a B?

Steve McKay 1:18:03
It's a balikbayan box.

Manuel Bersamin 1:18:05

There you go. Yeah, yeah, I just, we would just call it the Christmas box, because they would send us a list of everything that they, that they didn't have access to. And so—

Steve McKay 1:18:16
What kind of stuff did you put in your Christmas boxes?

Manuel Bersamin 1:18:18
Coffee, Nescafe. You know, stuff that they couldn't get. But also, they, they, they opened a little store. So it would be stuff they couldn't get. What I remember, most is Nescafe. I don't know, why just, you know, coffee. And, you know, stuff that that they would ask for. But after a while, we just sent them money. And we just figured, you know, it's just better. And it's easier, you know, as as the, as the money transfer became possible without being stolen. We just said, no, let's just send them the money. And that's what we started doing. But I just remember, you know, every year my father and my uncles, everybody would send my grandma—my grandma lived until 100 years old. So she got the Christmas box, but my aunts that cared for my grandma, they're the ones who had the store.

Steve McKay 1:19:26
Okay.

Manuel Bersamin 1:19:26
So my father would be on the phone saying you send this, you send— my Uncle Paul, send this Uncle Alex, you send this and we'll send this. And so it wasn't the same things, they would coordinate it. Yeah. But they got to— we all got to the point where it was just send the money easier. And all the, all the money that we would have spent to pay to transport the box we can put into the money transfer.

Steve McKay 1:19:58
Yeah, yeah, that's, yeah. I think so many people have that. I remember my parents, also. It was always spam, you known, canned meats, you know, I think it's from the period of the Americans things, but so yeah, coffee and yeah, spam.

Manuel Bersamin 1:20:16
Remember big bottles of Nescafe.

Steve McKay 1:20:19
Yeah.

Manuel Bersamin 1:20:19

That's what I remember. Big, big bottles of Nescafe.

Steve McKay 1:20:23
Yeah. So, and, you know, let me know, too, I'd take a break, or, you know, we could do that—these are great stories. And, you know, I think it's for, it just really wonderful to hear the different kinds of stories from Watsonville and growing up. So did your, your family, as you know, as you were growing up, what schools did you go to when you were, when you were young?

Manuel Bersamin 1:20:53
Well, I think all of us mestizos went to Watsonville high. And then you know, some of them went to the community college. I'm the only one that went to the university. And it was because my father would put me on a Greyhound bus and send me to my uncle's in Santa Barbara. So when I would get to Santa Barbara, my my uncles, and and their wives, my my Uncle Alex married a white woman, who was actually an Okie, from Arkansas. And an Okie from Arkansas. I think they would call her an Arkie instead. And then my other uncle married a Spanish woman, not a Mexican woman, but a woman from Spain. But my Aunt Ruby, my my Arkie aunt. And she just said, Look, you're going to go to college, you're, you're supposed to go to college.

Manuel Bersamin 1:21:52
And you know, I came from a farm worker family. So, you know, we lived in the west side of Watsonville, which is where all the immigrant families live. I still live in the west side. And, you know, we identified with the working class, but my Uncle Alex, he was a 20-year Navy vet. And he was a ship steward, but a ship steward to a Navy captain on an aircraft carrier. And so my uncle, he, he was really considered a success. He became a first, first class petty officer, you know, 20 years. And, you know, from a farm worker, this whole story of how they were, you know, first brought to Salinas and, and some of them went to the regiments, and others join the Navy. So, my aunt was the one who planted college in my mind. So from her and I'm still grateful for her to her to this day, because, you know, I, he, they, she, they didn't have kids. My Aunt Ruby and my Uncle Alex. So they would put me and my two sisters on those Greyhound buses. And we would spend the summers with my Uncle Alex and Aunt Ruby, and thanks to thanks to them playing that idea of college. My two sisters, they graduated from the community colleges. And then I was able to transfer from Cabrillo College to UC Irvine. And the wonderful thing is, my Uncle Alex was still alive when I made it to Irvine. And my Aunt Ruby had died. She had been a heavy smoker. So she died of emphysema actually the year that I transferred. But every time I would either come from Watsonville to to Irvine, I'd always stop in Santa Barbara. And my father would load me up with vegetables and, and things that that he knew my uncle would appreciate. Fresh strawberries, artichokes. Fresh. And then when I would

come back from what Irvine I would always stop in Santa Barbara and my uncle had an avocado tree. And he'd always load me up with avocados and oranges. So, you know, that was a wonderful thing. So you know, even today, there's only two of us that went to school. Myself and my my cousin Mary. And my cousin Mary went to Santa Clara. No, she went to Vassar and then she she went to Santa Clara law school. And, you know, Mary's more active than I am in the project. And I hope, I hope you interview Mary too, because she she has a lot of sheep. You know, Mary's going to be able to tell you more about the intimate family stuff. My focus, especially after reading Bulosan was trying to get a little, a little revenge. I don't know a better word.

Manuel Bersamin 1:25:15
I mean, here's another story. As the manong, every every city was the Filipino population of manongs probably had a card house—a card place, a barber shop, you know, and a store. Well, once we had a card place called the Philippine Gardens, and the manongs would gather there, and they would serve, you know, really good Filipino foods, and they would just gather. And as they got older, that place became more and more important to them. Well, just about the time that they were trying to knock down the International Hotel in San Francisco, the city fathers in Wattsonvile was decided that, oh, it's time to buy this area, where the people of color would gather, and do some redevelopment. So I was at Irvine and then one day, I got word from my mother, that the city was going to close down the Philippine Gardens, which was the last area, the last spot in town where all the manongs would gather. And I was shocked to hear that, because where would they go? Where would they gather? You know, where were they, you know, talked about the last 30 years and 40 years they spent with each other. And when I got back from Irvine, they had purchased that lot. Just like the International Hotel, it's like actually our version, our little version of what happened in San Francisco to the to the manongs. They knocked down the building. And then they they let that lot alone for 10 years. Built nothing.

Manuel Bersamin 1:27:05
And my father—

Steve McKay 1:27:07
Now just just quick, what year was it what that they bought and closed the Philippine Gardens?

Manuel Bersamin 1:27:14
Well, must have been around 84. And in and they didn't build anything on until around 94. What they built was a new post office. But you know, in those 10 years, they could have left it open. And and let those Filipinos, who had known each other since their 20s, have a place to congregate. You know, a lot of them, you know, a lot of them were bachelors who never

married. I mean, that's another phenomenon, a lot of my father's friends, you know, instead of marrying Mexican women, they got too old. And they said, well, I'm too old to marry now or, you know, they had no resources, they were living on the farm labor camps throughout the Salinas Valley. I mean, that's, that's, that's a hidden, in my opinion, that's a hidden story where many of the manongs never married, and spent their last days in farm labor camps that were terrible places to live.

Manuel Bersamin 1:28:24
You know, they build villages for them. And most famous one is the, is the village that they built in, in Delano. No, but we never built one here in the Salinas Valley. And we had hundreds of older Filipino men. But I think I'm getting off track, Steve. I do remember feeling angry about what the city council in Watsonville did. And by this time, you know, I had read a lot about the labor fights that the Filipinos had fought, apart from Delano, apart from Alaska, apart from the Bay Area. And I remember thinking, you know, my father, my father really was a victim. He, he never would have described himself that way. He would have described himself as a fighter. But we all know what happened when Cesar Chavez came to the Salinas Valley. A lot of the Filipinos had heard what had happened during the grape strike. And they felt that Cesar and the other Filipino members of the UFW board, we're going to bring the same changes to the Salinas Valley only for [laughs] only for the growers to make these sweetheart deals with the Teamsters. And then what you had is, you had a bunch of UFW folks and Teamster goons fighting in the fields of the Salinas Valley, and my father was a part of those fights.

Manuel Bersamin 1:29:54
And remember, I told you that the manongs married Mexican women? Well, a lot of, a lot of my cousins had reached the age of when they entered the fields. So now, not only were the manongs fighting against the Teamsters, but my cousins, my older cousins, who decided to go into farm work were also a part of those big fights. And they were terrible fights, terrible fights and, and the Teamsters were very powerful. So, you know, a lot of a lot of bad things happened during those 70s. Cesar Chavez was thrown in jail and Salinas. The Filipinos, the manongs, you know, they were angry. And I think even today, you know, amongst a lot of us a lot of our anger toward what happened to the Filipinos, the manongs, during those labor fights. We wanted to get some revenge. And so, you know, running for office was a part of that. I got a lot of motivation. You know, I knocked on thousands of doors and what helping climb up all those stairs was thinking, you know, what, if I get a chance to be on the city council, I'm gonna pay these guys back for what they did to my dad, and all the manongs for our little version of the International Hotel. And, you know, if they ever have a chance to, you know, let labor come into town with some, you know sweetheart deals, it's going to be to build labor back up after what Reagan and a lot of other folks had done to labor. So, I mean, that's, I could talk for hours on that subject alone.

Steve McKay 1:31:51
Yeah, I think, I think that's a, it's, it is so fascinating that, you know, that the kind of disappearance of the Filipino, you know, labor leaders in that fight, you know, that some are now recognized, but still, it's overwhelmingly, you know, Cesar Chavez gets a lot of credit, and, you know, for good reason, but there are a lot of also Filipino leaders. And then just what happened? So, yeah, it depends on how much you want to talk. I would love to, you know, I think that's, you're right, that those that what happened in the 70s is not well known, particularly in the Watsonville area and the Salinas area.

Manuel Bersamin 1:32:31
Yeah. It's, it's a shame because everybody focuses on what happened in the Central Valley. And, and I admire those people too. But, you know, we had our own, we had our own manong leaders here. Yeah. In the Salinas Valley, just as powerful. Maybe, maybe. I mean, when Cesar Chavez came, he came with Larry [Itliong], and, and in. I mean, that was, that was a big reason why the Filipinos here welcomed Cesar because Larry was coming too. And then, you know, we knew that the spark of that strike in the Central Valley, the Filipinos knew it wasn't the Mexicans. It was not the Mexicans, because the Filipinos in Delano and the Filipinos on the coast there was there's still family connections, you know. And so the Delano, Filipino, the Coachella Valley Filipinos, they probably called their cousins and say, hey, guess what we're about to do. And, you know, this is what's happening. And, and we knew that, you know, my father definitely knew that because my father was one of the ones that would say, no, the, the Filipinos started that strike, and they forced Cesar to join. And really, that's the real history. They forced him to join. They said, as you will know, right.

Steve McKay 1:33:57
Yeah.

Manuel Bersamin 1:33:57
That's, that's not known and I love to tell my Mexican friends that yeah, Cesar Chevas is a hero, but it was a it was the Filipinos that was the needle that pushed them. And, of course, we love Dolores Huerta too. But you know, no, Dolores Huerta, no Cesar Chavez in 1965. Without those Filipinos from Delano. And then, later on, when you study the Chicano movement, a lot of times the Chicano movement said, well, a lot of that started with farm workers movement. So it's kind of cool to say to my Chicano friends, you know, without the Filipinos no Chicano movement, not for this, at least not— at least not when it happened.

Steve McKay 1:34:52

We're so that, so the—how did that play out in in Watsonville and Salinas given that was going on in, you know, like how did it how did it play out? When, when did they come to Salinas? And and yeah, and—because I think I think that part isn't well known.

Manuel Bersamin 1:36:10
And you're talking about the UFW?

Steve McKay 1:36:12
Yeah, UFW.

Manuel Bersamin 1:36:13
Well, because of the five year fight that everybody watched in the Delano. And, you know, of course, the marches and the boycott. You know, I know that everybody here on the coasts was watching that. And, you know, when they won everybody thought, well, if Cesar Chavez will come to the coast with with Larry, then maybe we have a chance for better conditions here too. But, you know, the the farmworkers here on the coast were known as—they—the, the skills that are required to harvest Iceberg lettuce and all the row crops, that's kind of a specialized workforce. And unlike, you know, the grapes where you can get, you know, masses of people out there and with a little bit of training, you can train them to to cut the grapes, or to prepare the raisins. And it's not as specialized. But here the crews are really proud. You know, the, the Filipino lettuce harvesters, the Mexican lettuce harvesters. They were known for being very speedy workers. Like this picture here [Manuel refers to his Zoom background photograph]. These guys are are they're paid by piecework, which means they're not paid by the hour. They're paid—how many boxes they can actually, as you well know, right, a labor expert. These guys consider themselves a specialist. There was a lot of a lot of pride. So what happened was these guys really looking forward to Cesar Chavez was coming but they were a little bit more militant.

Manuel Bersamin 1:38:09
My father was one of them. He was, Cesar Chavez came in the 70s, my father was in his prime, he's like 50, very still strong. The Filipinos that he worked with, they had worked together for in some cases, 20 years. So they could actually anticipate what the team needed to do without even speaking. They would enter a field and they didn't even have to talk much they knew what they had to do. So I think that they wanted change, and they wanted better pay, and better conditions. I remember going out there myself. No, no bathrooms. No water. El cortito, short handled hoe was still out there. And of course, you know, medical care, the pay, all the stuff that you know about. So there was great excitement. But what happened was very quickly the Teamster deals, the sweetheart deals. The goons. The Monterey County Sheriff fighting on the side of the growers and and [uknown]. You know there was a very famous

grower you know the name, Bruce Church. Bruce church died. A lot of us blame him for killing Cesar Chavez at the end because of those court decisions in Yuma. But his his grandchildren are still around their name. Their name is is the, The Taylor Farms still the biggest outfit in the Salinas Valley, grandsons of Bruce Church.

Manuel Bersamin 1:39:49
So you know, in my opinion, once, once the growers made those three sweetheart deals with the growers, and then later on over time once the growers started to work only with labor contractors, nothing's really changed. And I think that's why I do what I do because most of my students come from farm worker families. You know, I deal with first generation, low income students trying to get them to transfer from Hartnell College to the state universities. And when I meet somebody who comes from a farm worker family, and they're mostly all Mexican now, very few Filipinos, Filipino families work in the fields, it's almost like meeting myself. At a time when the labor conditions in the fields are worse. They're worse now. Because they're they're Oaxacans, Mixtecos, the Northern Mexicans have moved out. And, and, you know, I feel bad because my own cousins, you know, some of them went into agriculture. And when I, when I expressed my support of the unions, I get in big fights with my cousins.

Manuel Bersamin 1:41:12
Because some of my cousin's, you know, they, they, they moved up into management, and they have forgotten how we started. And it's a shame. We try not to talk about those issues when we get together. A lot of them work for Driscoll, strawberries, some of them work for Taylor Farms. And I have to keep reminding them in my own way that, you know, we started as workers, we didn't start as middle management. And if we were able to get anything it was because of the labor struggles, not because we were handed anything. But they're the ones who were the supervisors of the mixtecos now. And so that's, that's hard.

Manuel Bersamin 1:42:01
Here's, here's a great story. My father, is even into his 80s, when the UFW would come to town, sometimes in Watsonville, the UFW would have marches, small marches. And this was in, this was in the 1980s. And my father would say, you know, I want to go to the UFW March. By that time, after years of doing irrigation, arthritis had affected one of his knees, and he couldn't walk without a cane. So, you know, he couldn't join the march. And he felt bad. And then my mother said, Well, just get in your car. Get in the car and join the march. So you'd see the UFW marching in, in Watsonville, which is, which was, you know, we're a city of 50,000 now, but back then we must have been about 25,000. So you have all these, you know, Mexican, mostly, Mexican marchers. And then you'd have my father, you know, driving his little white Chevette [laughter] following the marchers. To, to my father, he was still following the, the, the dreams of, of not, not just —you know, when when the UFW was able to establish they

did get, you know, the medical care. They did get, you know, the pension plan. But I think, I think my father, the main thing for my father was that imposter syndrome thing that he never outgrew. I think the Union helped him to feel like you know what, I still remember how I was treated. But you know what, I'm going to go out belonging to something. And this something is something that, you know, it's given me a dignity.

Manuel Bersamin 1:44:01
So, you know, later on when I ran for office, the first people I went to was the UFW. And I said to them, you know, I'm, I'm a supporter of the union. My father was a huge supporter of the union. I had to go to a meeting. And what's the name? What's the name of their, their headquarters in, in Kern County?

Steve McKay 1:44:29
I'm not sure.

Manuel Bersamin 1:44:30
Yeah, they have two. They have two centers. I had to drive out there to talk to them. It's a board and they're not going to support you unless you prove that you're going to be a supporter. That you have union connections and that once you're elected official, you will not forget the union. So I went there, and I talked to them, talked to them about my dad, and then they approved me. And Watsonville used to have an office of the UFW. And it was great because the person running the office, he, they were all Mixtecos. And they helped me in my campaigns. And it was great. You know, they were, they helped me to canvass. And when would meet for strategy sessions, it was in the headquarters of UFW here in Watsonville. By that time, my dad was dead, you know, but it was just really cool to have the help of the union. And I had their help twice. So I won twice. So that was pretty cool. That was pretty cool.

Steve McKay 1:45:37
That, that, that is, that's amazing. I'm struck by what you said that your dad, you know, he wanted to belong to something, and it was the union that welcomed and you know, he was able to do that.

Manuel Bersamin 1:45:50
Yeah.

Steve McKay 1:45:51
Was that true of the other manongs? Did they? Did he and many other Filipinos joined the UFW at that point, or?

Manuel Bersamin 1:45:58
Well, I think, like I said, I think it had to do with my father's personality. He was a bit of a rebel. And, you know, it really made sense later on when my you know, when my uncles were the ones that talked to me about my father. And they'd say, you know, your father's a hot head. I remember hearing that from my uncles. My Uncle Alex, in particular. And I think I think what my uncle was trying to say was that my father didn't want to, my father didn't want to accept bad treatment. My Uncle Alex went into the Navy for 20 years. And so I think he became very used to a regimented life where you follow orders. And you know, you you have to, what's the word, you have to follow the orders and comply. My father was not going to be that person. Maybe that's another reason why it's good that he had the heart murmur, because his whole life was a little bit of a rebel, rebellious nature. And I think that when he faced poor conditions, working conditions, he would fight.

Manuel Bersamin 1:47:14
And I think there was a group of manongs that were prone to that. Because, you know, a lot of the manongs they became actually prize fighters and labor organizers. I mean, if Larry had been a, had a comply—a compliant attitude, he's not going to be the labor leader that we know, today. Philip, if Philip had been that way. And a lot of unsung manongs too. You know that we remember the names of the famous ones. But we don't know the names of the ones that were not famous. And I'm sure that the folks that my father looked up to were the ones that were not famous here on the coast. But I don't think a lot of manongs joined. I think only the ones that really felt that that was an answer to better treatment. And I don't even, I don't even, I never spoke to my father about it. I never asked him. What, what were you asking for? Bathrooms, clean water, health care, better pay? I think he would have said better pay.

Manuel Bersamin 1:48:22
But, you know, here's another story. My mother was deathly afraid of labor strikes. Because I think she always felt that they were living on the edge. And one day, there was a labor strike. And it was the one that was happening during the 70s. The crew that my father belonged to, at that time, they were working for a company called West Coast. And everybody voted to go on strike because they didn't like what the grower had done by going with the Teamsters. So my father tells my mother, you know, we're going to strike. And my mother says, don't. Look at, we need the money for the rent, we need the money for the kids. We need the money for food. And then my father, his answer was, it can't just always be about the money. It's got to be about respect, too. And so I think that the folks that joined the union were the folks that it wasn't just the money. It was the it was a chance to be or to gain some kind of respect. And remember, my father never joined the military. So he was a farm worker his whole life. And I think the things that he saw from the time he was 20, until, until he left the fields at 80, he felt

he knew that what they were doing was worth attention. I mean, it's like today, right when COVID happened. And the farm workers were named, they're essential.

Manuel Bersamin 1:50:03
You know, it's like, no, they were out there for years, right? And, and under poor conditions, and, you know, no, no real union. And yet, all of a sudden, because of COVID, and then people doing the runs at the supermarkets where they weren't finding anything to eat. The farm workers are now considered essential. You're essential workers. We need you to stay out there.

Manuel Bersamin 1:50:29
I think my father, he knew. He knew what they were doing was important. And he was a rebel enough to say I'm joining the union. But I think amongst the manogs some of them, maybe they saw so much violence that is that no, we'll never be, you know. We're not strong and maybe when, when Fermin was killed, maybe some of the Filipinos they became afraid. And said no, if we, if we do anything, they're going to kill us too. So let's just go with the flow. And maybe some other Filipinos said you know what, we're starting labor unions, we're gonna organize, we're gonna organize. When I get up to Alaska, we're going to organize. When I get to Delano, we're going to organize. When I get to the Bay Area, we're going to organize. When we get to the Merchant Marine, or the Longshoreman. you know, when I get back to the Philippines. I think, I think he—you have to be a rebel, you have to be someone who does not—who won't accept the status quo. Because the folks that accept the status quo, I don't, I don't think they're going to want to organize. I think they're just gonna want to play it safe.

Manuel Bersamin 1:51:51
So, and this is the sad part, you know, I only recognized this about my father, probably after he passed away, because I was so busy just trying to get through grad school. You know, for me, grad school was the answer. You know, if I could only get enough credentials, then, you know, I can get these good jobs, you know. And Aunt Ruby, you know, she was the one that planted college, in my mind. My own mother would just say, you know, you know, in Spanish, she'd say me mijo, no quiero que trabajes en el field. And, you know, between my aunt and my mother, I felt well, the one of the things I'm good at is school. I wasn't very good at working in the fields and I wasn't very good at working in the canneries. I was good at, I was good at school. After, after I had stopped out from the community college a couple years, but that matured me. And that, if I didn't realize I can only, I'm the only one that can save myself. But I'm gonna have to reinvent myself as a student. And so that's what I did. When I got to Irvine, you know, I was a super student. And stayed the super student until I finished grad school.

Manuel Bersamin 1:53:15
So yeah, I just wish I had told my father some of this stuff. And, and I told Roy, you know, this is for my father, if if I'm going to be active in what we're doing here, it was, it was for my father. And actually trying to get the council to pass the apology was it for my dad, but really, for all, all my generation that still live in Watsonville, but had never heard, had never heard the council talk about that. And it's really funny, because I had been on the council 11 years then I left. And then and then then I was finally inspired to do something about Fermin. Why didn't I do something about it when I was on the council? That I don't know, it's a mystery to me. I don't know.

Steve McKay 1:54:10
Oh, you know, there's other there's always some other thing like, immediate, we don't always recognize these, you know, big sometimes, you know, it's longer term. But like you said, you know, recognizing it now and, you know, we want to make sure we do that ourselves and recognize maybe we didn't tell my dad this or that, but there's still time, you know, to for the next generation. So the stories that you're sharing are really important. And I think particularly the, like you're saying the labor stories, the stories of your father, and finding a place to belong, you know, and that that and for that respect is really important. And I think everyone is looking for that.

Manuel Bersamin 1:54:58
Yes, the cool thing is the next generation, my sister's kids, and my friends, my generation their kids, they, they never questioned their identity. And that's been pretty cool to see. Because, you know, they know they have Filipino blood. But they never felt this need to say, well, I'm not, I'm not Filipino enough for the Filipinos, I'm not Mexican enough for the Mexicans, and I'm not American enough for the Americans. Those kids, they, they never felt that. No, they, they go about their lives. We live in a more multicultural environment now. So, you know, it's kind of cool to be from different ethnicities. That's been cool. The only problem is that they don't know their history.

Steve McKay 1:55:47
Yeah.

Manuel Bersamin 1:55:47
They just they don't know. They only know about the food, you know, because my father, he lived long enough for a lot of his grandchildren to know about, oh, you know, Grandpa Max, you know, he makes really good food. You know, they knew that. They didn't, they didn't know about, you know, him as a, as a laborer. As a person active in the labor movement.

Steve McKay 1:56:13
Yeah.

Manuel Bersamin 1:56:13
And the cool thing is, you know, a lot of them, one of them's labor, labor carpenter. Another one is a laborer, he's active in the electrical union. And so, you know, they just don't know that maybe what my father had done, had contributed, in some way to the labor movement, that that they later became a part of, and I speak to them about that a little bit. But, you know, it'd be different if they had, if I had had a chance to learn about it.

Steve McKay 1:56:53
Yeah, well, we hope this project, in some ways, helps to tell that story and make those connections, you know, for because I think you're right, there is a growing interest among the younger population, but they don't—so there's a hunger, but that, but the details aren't there. They're from those two newspaper stories written by you know, you know, whomever, you know, it's not a perspective from the community. And that's, that's what we're really hoping to capture.

Manuel Bersamin 1:57:25
Yeah, I'm actually looking forward to listening to some of the interviews of the other folks that you'll be able to interview because I'm sure I know those people, but we, we don't normally sit down and talk about this stuff. You know, we, we just talked about our fathers in a very nostalgic way. But we don't, you know, we don't really get into deep discussion. So I hope what I had to say helps them to.

Steve McKay 1:57:51
Yeah, no, I think absolutely. And, you know, I think we there has been a really strong interest in you know, we have a lot of people lined up to who want to be interviewed, and, and so we're looking forward to it. And, and we have a lot of interest, also, from the university side, they they're very excited for this project, because it is so organic, it really is, you know, community-driven. Yeah, that's often unusual. You know, usually it's coming from the university from up here, right. And so it's this chance to have turn it around a little bit, right? And, and, so, so thanks so much. And I know, it's, you know, we've already gone for two hours. And I know you I could tell you have many more stories that I would love to hear your own story. And I think, you know, that's another part. But so maybe, you know, if you're willing we can, you know, keep in touch and maybe do another session if you're interested or, you know, because I really enjoyed hearing your stories, and it really is, it was eye-opening to me.

Manuel Bersamin 1:58:57

Well, it's been a pleasure. And, you know, like, like you said, also in your email to me, you know, you do a lot of this work to recognize, you know, your heritage, and your father, and your, your, your own lineage. Like I told Roy, you know, I, I know, my father's able to watch me doing this. And even if I didn't have a chance to talk to him a lot about the stuff I I want him from heaven to hear me acknowledge his existence, his contributions in a way that I never had a chance to tell him. Yeah.

Steve McKay 1:59:36
Well, and we'll save it, posterity for him, and for your family, and their kids, and everyone else. So—

Manuel Bersamin 1:59:44
Thanks, Steve.

Steve McKay 1:59:46
Okay. Okay, so I will, once I get this all wrapped up, I'll send you a copy. So that you could if there's any part of it that you know, you want to clarify or things like that. So just make sure that you're okay and also send the consent form.

Manuel Bersamin 2:00:05
I'll definitely sign the consent form. But you know, I, when I was on the city council all that time I got really used to just saying, whatever I put out there is out there, I'm not gonna go back and censor it.

Steve McKay 2:00:18
Okay. All right, we just got to let you know, you can if you would like to.

Manuel Bersamin 2:00:22
Yeah, whatever I said, whatever I said is there for posterity. And I will sign that consent form Steve.

Steve McKay 2:00:30
Okay, so I'll send all that to you. And, and, you know, this, we're planning, you know, you know, we're gonna be doing this for probably the next year at least. And then we have to, you know, kind of put it all together and, you know, archive it, and do all that. But we're gonna plan a series of community events, to share the stories. And now we're negotiating with the Museum of Art and History in Santa Cruz to do an event around the oral histories. You know, some it's probably a few years down the road. But we, you know, we hope we do the community proud.

Manuel Bersamin 2:01:07
Very cool. I'll bring the chocolate meat.

Steve McKay 2:01:10
Yeah, perfect [laughter]. Manuel, it was a real pleasure to talk this evening. Thank you so much.

Manuel Bersamin 2:01:16
Thanks, Steve. Goodluck with everything.

Steve McKay 2:01:19
Thank you very much. Okay.

Manuel Bersamin 2:01:21
Bye.

Steve McKay 2:01:21
Take care.

Manuel Bersamin 2:01:23
You too.