

# UC Santa Cruz

## Oral History Collaborations

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## Mary Florendo Perry interviewed by Dr. Steve McKay

**Speakers: Mary Florendo Perry and Dr. Steve McKay**

**Date: June 4, 2021**

**Scope and Contents:** In this interview conducted in person, Mary Florendo Perry speaks with Dr. Steven McKay, a member of the Watsonville is in the Heart project team. Perry discusses her family's immigration story from the Philippines and Mexicali. She also discusses their labor working in the agricultural fields and canneries. Perry also talks about her time in college at Vassar College. She also offers memories of her uncle who lived in a camp with other Filipino bachelors. Lastly, she discusses her knowledge of the Watsonville Race Riots.

**Steve McKay 00:00**

Going to make sure that it is recording—okay it is recording. And I'm gonna put this [mic] little closer to you so that it picks it up. And so we just thank you again for agreeing to the interview. And just so we have it for the tape, can you say your full name?

**Mary Florendo Perry 00:05**

So my name is Mary Grace Florendo, last name Perry. Florendo was my father's name so that's my maiden name.

**Steve McKay 00:07**

Okay great, thanks! And do you mind if I call you Mary?

**Mary Florendo Perry 00:08**

That's fine.

**Steve McKay 00:08**

Okay, and what was the year of your birth?

**Mary Florendo Perry 00:09**

1963.

**Steve McKay 00:09**

Okay, great. And where were you born?

**Mary Florendo Perry 00:10**

I was born in Watsonville at the old Watsonville Community Hospital.

**Steve McKay** 00:11

Okay, that's fantastic. So just to get started—just for some background information—can you tell me your parents names and the names of your siblings?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 00:18

Okay. So my father was Clemente Estilong Florendo, and I think Estilong was his mother's maiden name. They used the mom's name as the middle name. My mother was Maria de los Angeles Quintero Florendo. Everybody is a Maria in Mexican families [laughs], like Mary Grace. My sister—eldest sister—was Maria Gapita. And after Pita— we called her Pita—was Rosario and then our brother Jesus. We had another brother, Enrique, who passed away as a baby. And then my brother Clemente, his middle name is Manuel, and then me.

**Steve McKay** 01:47

That's good. So maybe we just start there, born in Watsonville. Can you tell me what was it like growing up? Where did you grow up in Watsonville?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 01:55

I grew up on Maple Avenue which was between the high school and the old Taylor Hotdog Stand. I guess the Boys Club was next to the hotdog stand at the time—it was the smaller one across the street from the Masonic Lodge or temple. The Fox Theater was sort of at the end of the street. And at the end of Maple—when you crossed Main [Street]—it was Second Street, so that was the other side. So Maple Avenue is maybe three blocks long from Main Street to the high school. It was pretty fun, especially in high school. If I wasn't feeling well, I'd have a whole bunch of kids show up at my house to check on me. [laughs]

**Steve McKay** 02:44

That's great. Yeah, I know that area and I know the Fox Theater.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 02:49

Yeah we could walk everywhere. In fact, my family decided to live in town because my Mom didn't drive. I guess back then it wasn't that unusual that women didn't have their driver's licenses and they wanted her to be able to walk to do her errands and things like that. So yeah, it was very convenient because we could walk everywhere.

**Steve McKay** 03:11

That's great.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 03:12

Yeah.

**Steve McKay** 03:14

Do you know how your parents met and their background?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 03:17

Yes! This is a very interesting story, my cousin Manuel [Bersamin] might have shared some of this with you. But two of our older aunts—Victoria and Alejandrina—Victoria was my cousin Manuel's mother; she's my godmother, and Alejandrina. I think the eldest of my aunts was Maria DeJesus de Amaya and then of the sisters Victoria and Alejandrina. So what happened? I guess in the 1940s there was this big family feud. And the Quinteros were fighting with the in-laws and so, for their own safety, they moved to Mexicali. And from Mexicali, my tia Halina, she had two houses and so most of my mother's branch of the family lived—like her sisters with their kids—lived in my aunt's two houses. And then my aunt moved to Watsonville, my tia Victoria, and my tia Halina followed her.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 04:32

And we just went through most of my aunt's things a few years ago and we found like postcards and letters. There's one postcard that had a picture of St. Patrick's Church and it was so sweet. It was like, "Oh, you should come to Watsonville! The church is so beautiful, you would love it!"

**Steve McKay** 04:53

That's fun.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 04:53

It was really cool. I was like, "Oh my God, this is really amazing!" This is how they started coming here. They were living and working in Watsonville and their siblings came. And my aunts were helping their siblings, not just from Sinaloa to Mexicali, but from Mexicali all the way to Watsonville. And so my aunt—my godmother, Victoria—and her husband, I think they lived and worked down south. I'm not sure, probably Imperial County. And so my Aunt Alejandrina would visit them from Mexicali and she met my Uncle Fortunato Bayuga. And he said to my aunt and uncle, "That means I'm going to marry her." And he did. And they did; they got married and they moved to Watsonville on Paulsen Road, where the family farm was. So my cousins from Mexicali, including my Mom and my siblings, would come back and forth to work on my uncle and aunt's farm.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 06:04

So my mother had a first marriage and that was in the center of the family feud. Our oldest four siblings had a different father. And it was very dangerous. Her father-in-law said, "You have to

leave." And so my mother—I guess they went to court and the judge asked the kids, "Who do you want to live with?" And the oldest said my mother, of course, and my middle sister I think she also wanted to be with my mother. And my brother Jesus was a baby, maybe like two years old, and at the time he was too young to not be with his mother. So my Aunt Alejandrina helped them come to Mexicali. And they had a very difficult life because they were all living in one house. One sister per bedroom with her kids and it was hard. I think my mother made tortillas and cleaned houses to get by. When Tia Jandrina and Uncle Fortunato Bayuga were married, they had a farm in Watsonville and my mother came with the kids—her oldest, I think—just my oldest sister and my brother. Because when they were trying to escape Sinaloa-Mexcaltitan, my sister's father came on horseback. They were walking to, I don't know, the train station or whatever—however they were getting back. And I guess there were weapons involved.

**Steve McKay** 08:00

Wow.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 08:00

And he said, "I'm taking her back with me." And my aunt was like, "There will be no bloodshed. Just take her." You know? Yeah.

**Steve McKay** 08:11

That's really dramatic, oh my God!

**Mary Florendo Perry** 08:12

Isn't that crazy? And so my sister who lives in Watsonville, she's the sweetest person in the universe, stayed with her father. She said she remembers him actually taking her and putting her on his horse and riding away with her and she didn't have a choice. And back then, people remarried and just got on with their lives. And he had this little girl and no wife to take care of her. So he remarried and I guess his second wife was very, very young. My sister was little and probably no older than four and her stepmother at the time was like sixteen. So it was like a child taking care of a child. And they didn't, I guess, take the best care of her. And so my aunt and uncle—another aunt; my Mom's youngest sibling, Isabel—and her husband went back to Sinaloa years later. I think they got him drunk. [laughs] And he felt very badly because he knew that his daughter was not being treated very well by his second wife and so he'd let them bring my sister back.

**Steve McKay** 09:32

And how old was she?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 09:33

I think it was maybe just a couple of years, and so I think she was maybe six. And so our older brother, Jesus, was only like—I think he didn't remember her—and I think he might have been maybe four, she might have been six, and my other sister was probably eight around that time. And he like didn't know who she was and he wasn't very nice to her. [laughs] She had freckles and he would call her "picoosa" and she would cry.

**Steve McKay** 10:04

[laughs]

**Mary Florendo Perry** 10:05

So then my family—my older siblings—are in Mexicali living in my Aunt Alejandrina's house. And she was the magnet, really. But my Aunt Victoria—because she was the first one here—they both take credit for finding Watsonville, right?

**Steve McKay** 10:25

Ohh, okay.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 10:25

And they would fight or bicker over this. It was really hilarious. I think the anchor was probably my Aunt Victoria because she's the one that came first; who told everyone about it. And that's how my Aunt Helina and Uncle Nato were married, because they met through Victoria. So they came to Watsonville, Alejandrina and Fortunato, and we have—all the Watsonville sisters married Filipino men, so we're all Mexipino. You know, on this side of the border. [laughs]

**Steve McKay** 11:03

Yeah, that's a really fascinating development and Manuel [Bersamin] told me a little bit about that.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 11:11

Yeah.

**Steve McKay** 11:12

How did they meet? And how much did they know each other, like among the Filipino men?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 11:18

So I think they met working in the fields. And back then, as you may know, Asian men could not marry white women. And white women, for the purpose of those anti-marriage laws, were Hispanic women. Mexican women were considered white. And so my Uncle Max and Aunt

Victoria, I think they had to go to Arizona to be married. So I'm not sure where Tia Helina and Uncle Nato were married. The only romantic part of their story that I know of is when he met her, he said he was going to marry her and he did. And so then they had a farm in Watsonville and so he had friends, my father, and another branch of relatives; the Isidros I think were his cousins. And they all had farms on Paulsen road or around Paulsen road and they grew tomatoes. My relatives from Mexico—my cousins, my aunts—would come and pick the crops and when they'd be finished with my aunt and uncle's tomatoes, they'd go down the road and pick the Isidro tomatoes. Then they had friends who grew berries. It might even be where Gizdich Ranch is now because my aunt would talk about Mitchell. And I'm thinking Mitchell was Mitch Gizdich, right?

**Steve McKay** 12:57

Oh, interesting.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 12:58

So when they were done with the tomatoes, they'd go pick berries for Mitchell. Because they all knew each other and they all they shared their workers because there are different crops ready to pick at different times. It was a different world back then, now everything is so regulated. There's so many pesticide and water regulations and things. I don't know that my parents' generation could do farming the way it's done now. But my Mom and her young children came to Watsonville with my aunt and lived on the farm and there's this really interesting story. My sister said, someone reported them because they suspected that this family was not documented and said they were here in the US illegally, and they were. They snuck through the border, they came here to work. Like my sister says, "Just like the people are doing now! Just like those people are now." So they were hiding in a closet at my aunt's farmhouse. And the INS agents were—

14:11

[dog barking]

**Mary Florendo Perry** 14:11

—sorry about the dog.

**Steve McKay** 14:12

It's okay.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 14:13

I'll let her in so she stops barking. They're used to being inside.

**Steve McKay** 14:25

That's fine! No, that's alright.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 14:27

So my two older sisters and my brother are hiding in the closet. And my sister suspects that the INS agents saw them hiding. [dog barking] Okay, you have to go back outside.

**Steve McKay** 15:01

[laughs]

**Mary Florendo Perry** 15:02

So I should probably start over. So my sister thought they took pity on them because nothing happened. But my aunt was so afraid that they would come back, because she thought they had seen the children, that they moved. And my father had a farm, I forget the exact location, but it's probably at the bottom of Mount Madonna like along where Green Valley Road goes around. Sort of the base of the mountain. Because the reason I know where it is now is my sister and brother-in-law and my husband and I went wine tasting up in this winery up at Mount Madonna. We came home on Old Mount Madonna Road. And when we decided which way should we turn, right or left, "Oh, we never go left. Let's go left." And my sister, we went by my father's old farm. she's like, "Oh, that was Clemente's farm! That's where we lived and the nursery next door, that's where we worked and it was so hot." [I was] like, "Wait, Dad had a farm?"—

**Steve McKay** 16:30

[laughs]

**Mary Florendo Perry** 16:30

—"I never knew that Dad had a farm." "Oh yeah, he had two houses and he grew strawberries." And next to his farm was his friend's flower nursery and we had to work in that nursery and it was so hot. It was awful. And then I guess they went to work in the canneries, which was so much easier than working in the hot nurseries. So I guess my Dad sold his farm because he needed the money to help my mother and her three children immigrate.

**Steve McKay** 17:06

Oh, okay.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 17:07

So I was like, "Oh, that's what happened? Okay." Well, I do understand living in town versus living in the country; because it's like, you can't walk to the grocery store from way out there.



And so it was just something—if we hadn't turned right, I would not have known where my father's farm was. And so my Mom and my older siblings lived in a little house on my Dad's farm. And I guess the story is: she married the boss. [laughs] Because they worked on his farm, they lived there, and they were married and he helped them immigrate. Then I guess we rented from another relative who lived on Paulsen. And this really funny because this little, tiny house—it was like this little cottage and friends of the family, who were my Uncle Nato's cousins; I mean, they always rented to relatives, right?—And so that's where I was born, in this little—well I was born in the hospital—but that's the first house that I came home to on Paulsen Road: was this little tiny cottage. And I have good memories from there. I mean, I only lived there maybe a year or two. My first birthday was there. And then my parents and my siblings saved enough money to buy a house in town. And it was only \$13,000, which is like less than my first car. [laughs] The taxes were like \$130 a year, it was really so incredible. So that's how we ended up in town. Then after my parents and our family moved into town, my uncle and his kids rented that same house.

**Steve McKay** 19:14

Ohh, okay.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 19:14

Yeah. So then they lived down the road from my aunt and uncle's farm on Paulsen. Yeah, so that's kind of the story of how everybody got here and I guess we have to thank my aunts for being the pioneers.

**Steve McKay** 19:31

It's so fascinating, that first one person then opens up this legacy. Yeah.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 19:38

And the sisters were very religious. I remember we all went to St. Patrick's. All the moms would sit in front, all the cousins would sit back. And they would give us money for the collection basket and all of us would keep just enough to go to Fosters Freeze.

**Steve McKay** 19:55

[laughs]

**Mary Florendo Perry** 19:55

And they knew it. I mean, they knew we were gonna want ice cream after church. Like soon as a priest was out the door we'd be out the side door, counting our money, making sure we had enough for everybody to get a dipped ice cream cone at Fosters Freeze.

**Steve McKay** 20:09

That's a great image.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 20:11

Yeah, it was so fun. And every Sunday was like that. We would go to church with our moms and every house in town, except like my aunt's house on Paulsen, was within walking distance. So we would end up might stopping at the grocery store, we might do some window shopping. But we would end up at somebody's house and have a big meal, like a dinner. We had such a big family, it was always somebody's birthday.

**Steve McKay** 20:37

[both laugh] Yeah, that's wonderful. Yeah, what kind of parties—what were the parties like? What did you guys eat?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 20:45

So, my father was not a very good cook. My Dad would make sweet rice, which was good. Like he can make really good desserts like the fried bananas. You know, like mashed up bananas and rice flour. Those were excellent. But he—mackerel and that bitter, bitter melon.

**Steve McKay** 21:08

Ampalaya?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 21:09

Oh, man.

**Steve McKay** 21:12

That is so bitter.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 21:13

It's pretty better. So we'd be running out the door when he'd start like cooking his mackerel and bitter melon; nobody ate it. I mean, he would make it for himself. But we always had rice and beans and some form of protein and vegetables. And now, we call it a "Mexican Chop Suey" because it was always some kind of chopped pork or beef with a bunch of vegetables in it, like broccoli and snow peas. I think it was kind of to make the meal bigger to feed a lot of people. And if we were at my uncle's farm, it was always—he made the most amazing fried chicken. He would soak it in vinegar so it would be super tender and then just lightly shake it in flour and then fry it. I think he used lard. And it was the most amazing fried chicken. And sometimes when he would drive us to Mexico—because he had this big, giant car and all the moms would have like the kids on their laps, no seatbelts—we would drive from Watsonville and Mexicali for

Christmas and we'd have a picnic in the desert. We'd have cold rice and chicken at like six in the morning. Driving through the Salton Sea. And I think that was probably right when he needed a break because he kind of like drove through the night. And then we would rest up so we wouldn't get to the cousin's house too early or too hungry or too tired. So we'd have like this really great picnic at sunrise in the desert eating cold rice and really amazing cold fried chicken. [laughs]

**Steve McKay** 23:12

So many of our memories are connected to similar things, you know, like a picnic.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 23:17

And then my older cousins say that my uncle would also make adobo and that he would put potatoes in it because there are eighteen kids that were all—and I don't know how they fit or found places to sleep, they must have used every couch. There were couches in the living room, in the dining room, and there was a window seat that must have had pillows on it. And then some of the bedrooms had two beds in them, like two queen beds so that a bunch of people could sleep. But my cousin said and my aunt, too, that when the cousins from Mexicali were here, there'd be like eighteen kids picking tomatoes and living at their house. It was only a two bedroom house but they had the little trailer, like a little camper, out that some of the kids I guess would sleep in. But everybody fit and there was always plenty of food!

**Steve McKay** 24:21

Great.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 24:22

Yeah.

**Steve McKay** 24:23

So at home did you generally speak Spanish or did you speak English? Or did you—

**Mary Florendo Perry** 24:29

That's another interesting topic. So my father was Ilocano and he spoke Ilocano, Spanish, and English. My mother would only speak Spanish and so we had to speak Spanish to our Mom and English to our Dad. He would mix up the grammar and the language because he spoke the three languages and he had an accent. So you really had to know at least two out of the three languages to understand what he was saying. [laughs] But he was really sweet. My father was 4'11" but he thought he was 5'2". He was the tiniest guy but he had the biggest heart. We do have a two hour videotape. I'm going to—we had it transferred to DVD. So I'm gonna have to make copies to give to you for the archive.

**Steve McKay 24:30**

That would be wonderful.

**Mary Florendo Perry 25:37**

Yeah. It's really cute, like he just talks about coming to the US. And I learned a lot doing just the calendar page for our family. I had assumed that my father and his older brother and his cousin all came together. But then Roy—one of the people that is helping him with the research offered to do some—they were able to research the ship manifests. So I found out that my older uncle—my father's older brother, Doroteo—came in 1929 by ship. And it was the same ship, but it was two years earlier. And he worked doing janitorial work for the city of Seattle. This is all the calendar; I didn't know this. So he was here two years before my Dad. My Dad and his cousin, Uncle Cristino Estilong, came two years later in 1931. And it took like a month for them to travel by ship. When they got to Seattle my father's brother, Doroteo said, "You're here now. If you don't work, you die." Like, "No one was gonna take care of you. We're not with our parents anymore." My father was only, if he came here in 1931, he was only twenty-one years old—younger than my youngest son. Starting a new life with his older brother, who was only a couple years older than him, that would be like our kids taking a month long voyage and never coming home. I asked him, "Dad, do you miss your family? Do you want to go back? Do you want to visit?" Oh, no. He was done, he thought it was better here. He was a naturalized citizen, he was very patriotic. He's like, "Oh, they don't want me back there."

**Steve McKay 27:54**

What kind of stories did your Dad tell about that? It seems like he really enjoyed being here but didn't talk about the Philippines very much.

**Mary Florendo Perry 28:02**

He wrote letters and we have them. He used to have me read them. He said, "Just read them with a Spanish accent." I could understand the letters and I read it with a Spanish accent; I didn't know what I was saying. But I would read the letters to him and then he would translate. He'd say; "Oh, they're asking for a pair of Red Wing boots" or, "They want me to send them Pepto bismol" or, "They want to come here to visit and go to school here, so and so wants to be a nurse." And then he would get annoyed that the only time they wrote to him was when they wanted something. Because they thought he was in the US making big bucks and very successful, but he was working really hard. And you know, raising his family because there were five of us.

**Steve McKay 29:06**

After he sold his farm, then what kind of work was he doing?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 29:09

So, I think—and this is a really funny story—because in the closet, I found this little machine that made checks. And I asked him about that, he was like, "Oh yeah, I used to grow strawberries." I guess he, maybe after he sold his own land, would work on leased land with his friends. And I guess he got tired of being a sharecropper and doing all the work and sharing all the profits. Because he was such a sweet guy, you know, he probably did do most of the work and he just got tired and stopped doing it. And so then he went to work for other, bigger growers. I think he worked for CNV farms in Watsonville for, gosh, almost thirty years. Probably twenty something, yeah. But before that, he lived in San Jose, Half Moon Bay, and I think somewhere in Imperial County; I'm not sure exactly what town. But the way he described it in the video is he lived everywhere for like seven years. Then he decided that Watsonville had the best dirt and the best climate. Because it wasn't super hot, it was kind of nice year round, and the dirt was black and you could pretty much grow anything. And my Dad would come home from work and he would work in the garden. So we had vegetables and peaches and lemons and all kinds of stuff—whatever my Dad grew, strawberries, in our backyard. It was really fun, I felt like I was a little farmer. My Dad would get home and I'd go out and help him in the garden

**Steve McKay** 31:12

Wow, that he had—that he's willing, even after a whole day's work.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 31:15

Just to give way—yeah, those cold mornings and it's foggy.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 31:15

Yeah, yeah, because that's what he did! He'd get up early, like four in the morning, and he'd get to work early. I remember driving him—for some reason when I needed the car one day—I was in high school and I drove him to work and I picked him up, or he might have gotten a ride home from a friend. But they would have these big metal drums in the morning and just start a fire and just hang out and talk before working around this big metal drum with fire in it.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 31:50

Warm up and hang out before work. And I was like, "Why are they doing this? It's dark and it's cold?! But they liked it. They liked the camaraderie of it. I don't know that anybody does that kind of thing now.

**Steve McKay** 32:06

So were his coworkers at that time kind of more mixed or, who were his coworkers?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 32:11

So that's another interesting story. When he first came here, he said all of his coworkers were mostly Italian.

**Steve McKay** 32:20

Oh.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 32:21

He worked in Castroville, maybe Salinas. And I said, "Well, how are you able to communicate?" And he said, "Oh, we didn't." Because they couldn't speak the same language and he said he was so lonely that he would just sometimes—because he was like twenty—he'd just cry. That's in the tape that my husband recorded. So that's really interesting. Even as he got older and he started his own family, a lot of the other Watsonville families spoke Tagalog and I don't know if very many spoke Ilocano. Like he could talk to my uncles. But every now and then my friends would say, "Hey, you should come we're having a Filipino community barbecue." We would probably go to the church and just pick up our chicken barbecue lunches. But they had all these dances and things and he was very shy. He wouldn't participate in a lot of social activities. But I think part of the reason was the language barrier, because he spoke a different dialect.

**Steve McKay** 33:41

Sure. What year would that have been where most of them were speaking Tagalog?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 33:47

Ohh, so that was probably when I was in elementary school . . . probably in the '70s.

**Steve McKay** 33:55

Yeah, I mean, I think it's the second wave of Filipinos that came, right? Post '65

**Mary Grace Florendo Perry** 34:02

Maybe! Yeah.

**Steve McKay** 34:05

Do you know if those families were—what kind of work they did?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 34:12

My Dad's friends, they all worked thinning lettuce. And they had first the short hoes then the long hoes. I think the younger people did harder work like picking lettuce, but my Dad just did the thinning. Yeah. My cousin's worked in—well, they ended up working for Caltrans—but when they were in the fields it was always cutting lettuce, which I think might have been a little physically harder. Because you have to not just cut but load and carry.

**Steve McKay** 34:58

That's a tough, tough job.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 35:00

Yeah. Yeah, now it's different. Now the machines—the harvesters—just go out there and it's amazing how the machines go out and they harvest the lettuce. Sometimes while they're out there, they have special machines that cut the lettuce seven times to make salad mixes and all the leaves are facing up so they rinsed right on the farm, right on the field! And then they get put into this—they drain and there are people there packing. What they do now is so different from my parents' generation.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 35:00

Yeah it was all hand labor.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 35:38

Yeah.

**Steve McKay** 35:39

There wasn't anything that wasn't done by somebody.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 35:52

Now it's like the packing shed, there's like this big machine with a harvester and people on it. It packages that basically from the field and it ends up packaged in a cardboard box. It's crazy.

**Steve McKay** 36:14

It's just really fascinating to me that this group of men from the Philippines intermarry with these Mexican families and then are here in Watsonville. And so for you growing up, like in terms of how you identified and how the community interacted, was there a sense of Philippine identity or Mexico-pino identity or Mexican?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 36:37

Kind of both. Because our Mom and our aunts were Mexican, I think we probably had more Mexican food growing up like tamales and menudo and pozole. We'd go to Spanish mass. We

didn't do as many Filipino community event. Like I would go with my friends, Linda Soriano and the Tabancay family, so I would go to their community events and watch the dancing with the—

**Steve McKay** 37:12

The tinikling?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 37:14

Yeah! [laughs] And then they had dances and events that I would occasionally go to with my friends. But my Dad was pretty shy. Like, instead of going to mass he would watch it on TV. Occasionally he would go to maybe a wedding or a funeral, but not very often. Whereas the sisters were there every Sunday. I do remember out at my uncle's farm, though, we would have that chocolate.

**Steve McKay** 37:55

Dinuguan.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 37:55

Yes! Yeah, dinuguan. Sometimes pancit, always adobo and rice. So that was another kind of fun thing that we did.

**Steve McKay** 38:07

Who would cook and organize those things?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 38:09

So my Uncle Fortunato, and sometimes they would butcher the animals like right there. I remember seeing a goat butchered and I was little, it was very traumatic. [laughs] It wasn't very often, but that was always my uncle. He was a really good cook. And I think he might have been in the military because I saw this portrait of him in uniform with others. And we gave it to his niece so that it would stay in the family after he died—after my aunt died, actually. Yeah, I wish I knew more about him. I have his passport [laughs]

**Steve McKay** 38:48

Oh really?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 38:50

Because the kids—I was so fascinated by all the letters and postcards that my aunt had kept. And because so many family members stayed with her, she had a ton of mail that had been left behind, letters that people wrote. So my cousins all collected it for me: "Oh, another batch of letters over here!" And so I have a trunk full of postcards and letters and photos and greeting



cards from my aunt's house that someday I'm going to organize and put into chronological order by date so I can sort of rebuild what they talked about and how they all came here.

**Steve McKay** 39:41

That's fascinating! Well, you know, part of the project is actually collecting and organizing material. And we, you know, it would be scanning and just doing some of that work.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 39:53

Wow.

**Steve McKay** 39:53

We have some students—

**Mary Florendo Perry** 39:55

Oh, that would be awesome.

**Steve McKay** 39:58

—who actually would be really interested—

**Mary Florendo Perry** 39:59

That would be great.

**Steve McKay** 40:00

—in working with you to do that. Because I think for the archive, those are literal treasure troves.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 40:07

Oh, yeah. Yeah, and I promised to do it for my family. I'm just like, "I'm gonna have to retire to do this." [laughs] But they thought, "well, if anyone would do it", they kind of had some confidence that I might.

**Steve McKay** 40:24

Well we'll definitely be in touch with you.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 40:26

Yeah, I'll keep in touch with you about that because I would love help with that.

**Steve McKay** 40:30

Yeah, I mean, just that postcard and some of the things you talked about.

**Mary Florendo Perry 40:34**

Yeah, yeah. The postcard about the church.

**Mary Florendo Perry 40:36**

Yeah. Oh, there's some funny ones. My godfather was always in trouble and so he would write like, really funny things. Such as, Oh, gosh, I think they went to like and sanada and, you know, just got in trouble. Got chased out of a place or some silly thing like that. He was in college. But he was really he was athletes scholar, recipient of the Emmet geyser award, you know, in watsonville. The football field is the Emmet geyser field. And there is an award that the athletes scholars get. And so there's this big trophy, like, in the living room at my aunt's house. We're all very proud of him. And he was the probably the first person to go to college here in the us in our family. So everyone looked up to him. And in fact, our cousin manual became I guess, the college administrator because he that was who his example was.

**Steve McKay 40:36**

Yeah. It's like those threads that really— it's exactly when things happen, you know, in that description. So that's wonderful.

**Steve McKay 41:52**

Okay, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

**Mary Florendo Perry 41:55**

So he was very funny, he was kind of wild and crazy. A lot of fun. He played dominoes and—what does that game on the back of the checkerboard? It has like the big long triangles.

**Steve McKay 42:10**

Backgammon?

**Mary Florendo Perry 42:11**

Backgammon! Yeah, so when I was a kid, he'd say, "Okay, let's go to the beach" and he'd bring backgammon. I knew how to play it then only because I played it a lot.

**Steve McKay 42:25**

So you grew up right near Main Street, so that must have been near to Philippine Gardens?

**Mary Florendo Perry 42:31**

Yeah, it's funny though, because I never knew where it was. It was always a mystery to me.

**Steve McKay** 42:37

[laughs]

**Mary Florendo Perry** 42:37

Because only the dads and uncles went there, right? I guess it had a cardroom in the back. So my Uncle Max was there. Sometimes after church, we'd go to my aunt's house and we'd have this big meal and Uncle Max wouldn't be home because he was at Philippine Gardens.

42:57

[both laugh]

**Mary Florendo Perry** 42:59

So that's about all I knew and I didn't even really know where it was until I was older. And this was between college and law school, I took a year off. And I worked for the El Pajaro CDC Small Business Development Center because a friend of mine was on the board and one of their employees was going on maternity leave. So I took a temporary office manager job and Mr. Tabasa would come in for help because the city was about to condemn the entire block. But by then it was too late. It had already been done and I just felt so bad and so helpless that we couldn't do anything to save the Philippine Gardens. Because the Post Office had already condemned the entire block. It was really sad because I grew up going to Daylight Market and the Surplus Store because that's where everybody bought their sailor pants and army pants and all the funny stuff that we wore back when we were kids. And my friend's family owned the Star Cafe and back then I remember [thinking]: "Why does the city want this block with all these businesses? They're taking everyone's livelihood. Why don't they move down a block and turn out all the bars where all the trouble is?" And I guess the excuse given was, "Oh, well, they wanted to leave the bars opens because they wanted to know where the trouble was. They didn't want people sneaking around and starting speakeasies or going underground." And I'm like, "That's stupid."

**Steve McKay** 44:54

Tell me more about that, the Star Cafe and that area because I think so much went on.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 45:03

So I think the Wong's owned the Daylight Market. Mr. Wong, who was an English teacher. Do you know him, Steve Wong?

**Steve McKay** 45:12

No.

**Mary Florendo Perry 45:12**

Oh my gosh, there's another treasure trove of information for you. So you have to interview Steve, we call him "Spike" Wong. But out of respect, I always call him Mr. Wong because he was a teacher in high school. He was never my English teacher, but I knew him. And he always did stuff to support us. He'd be a chaperone at the float so all his kids could go work on the homecoming floats and things like that. He was always there for us. He'd go running with us—he was a triathlete—and his wife at the time would go running with us and show us how to blow our nose without tissue in the woods. How to find a spring of water to drink out of on Mount Madonna if we were thirsty and not near a water faucet. That kind of thing, it was really cool. But he writes, plays about his family history and I think that would be really interesting. He would be such a valuable source of information for that part of Watsonville because that was his family's store, the Daylight Market. And they had the best skirt steak in the universe and the freshest produce. I remember going there and just buying a bunch of scallions because they were so beautiful. And my husband—boyfriend at the time—was like, "What are you gonna do with all those?" "I guess I'll make enchiladas. But they're so pretty!" So that was really a great place to go.

**Mary Florendo Perry 46:59**

Watsonville at that time, everybody knew my parents. Everybody knew my mom. I remember going to Freedom Food Center and sometimes if she didn't—because she paid cash, she didn't have a checkbook until really late—and I remember we would go to the store and Freedom Food Center had a little spiral notebook. And if she didn't have enough money, she'd start taking stuff out of the basket to have enough to pay, and they'd say, "Oh, no, no, no. It's okay! It's only \$3, just pay us next time." And then they would write in the little notebook: "Maria owes \$3", or whatever it was. And because she didn't drive and she paid all her bills in person, the whole town knew her.

**Steve McKay 47:20**

Wow, that's great.

**Mary Florendo Perry 47:47**

Yeah! And then some of my friends that owned the Monterey Bay Clothing Company, they loved her flour tortillas. So I go in there, and I try on clothes. And I always had in high school little part time jobs so I could buy my own stuff. And they'd say, "Well, if you bring us a dozen tortillas, we'll give you a 20% discount." I'm like, "Okay. Mom, can you make some tortillas?"

**Steve McKay 48:27**

[laughs] How did they know of your mom's tortillas?

**Mary Florendo Perry 48:30**

I think she might have just brought them some? You know, like she might have gone there to pick something out for me for my birthday or something. She might have gone there without me. Because I had the same question!

**Steve McKay 48:48**

[laughs] What a request! Because your mom wasn't selling tortillas, right?

**Mary Florendo Perry 48:53**

No, no, no. I think she just liked them. Because it was kind of a hippie-dippie store, very Santa Cruz but in Watsonville, across the street from the park. And I think they just liked her. And I think when I went away to college especially she'd go in and just say hello to them. But she's so funny like I remember on her days off, we would just go to the bank, get money. Or on Thursday nights, you know how Ford's department stores stayed late? After the earthquake it closed but, Thursday night in Watsonville was like a cruising night. Because the stores stay opened until nine. So after work, people would cash their checks on Thursday night. And so the cashier at Ford's would be counting out hundreds of dollars for people and the people would be paying their credit card bills or buying stuff and so it was very, very good for the store. And convenient for our parents! Because then it was hard to get to the bank because they were always working. And so Ford's would cash their checks and they're all from like the canneries. My mother worked at Watsonville Canning, which was across the street from my aunt. And all my other aunts worked for JJ Crosetti's in Pajaro. When I came home from college, I had a summer job working in their payroll personnel office. During the swing shift, sometimes I'd call 400 people that were on call to come in and work because they have produce delivered and people were home waiting for a call to get to work. And I mean, it didn't happen often because most the time it was pretty steady. But once in a while they'd say, "Okay, come in at 3:00 because we need however many people by 4:30." I'm like, "What?!" So I'd be like, "Can you come in at four? Can you come in at four? Can you come?" You know, dialing. [laughs]

**Steve McKay 48:54**

No speed dial either. [laughs]

**Mary Florendo Perry 50:03**

Oh no it was a rotary back then. Yeah, that was a fun job. But it was kind of funny because there was a sort of business payroll personnel office that was open during the day. But at night, it was like just this little room right next to the cannery—right next to where they're doing all the packing. So it smelled like broccoli and it was pretty yucky. Like everybody knows broccoli smells really bad. [laughs]

**Steve McKay 52:01**

Did your mom talk much about her job?

**Mary Florendo Perry 52:04**

Yeah! She actually started working when I went to kindergarten because my older siblings all got married the year I went to kindergarten. So her life changed drastically. She no longer had three kids—adult kids in their twenties—working and helping with the household bills. So it was just my Mom and Dad. And so then she went to the cannery, and she made a lot of friends so she liked that. But it was sometimes hard because she didn't drive. In the daytime she could walk to work, but at night she always had to make sure she had a way to get home and so she always had to rely on her friends to give her a ride home. It wasn't really a big deal because a lot of them lived in the same neighborhood so they would just drop her off on the way home. But she was very loyal to I think the console's at Watsonville Canning. If she had a little tiff with the ladies in the personnel office, she would go straight to the owner. Really, because she was such a hard worker. They knew her and they really liked her.

**Mary Florendo Perry 53:25**

And I remember one time, it was when the cannery would close down for Christmas—I don't know if it's because they didn't have produce or they knew that all the workers were going to leave for a three week vacation to go visit family in Mexico, which we did that a lot. Because my Mom still had two sisters and lots of nieces and nephews in Mexico. So it was the downtime from work, not just from the fields but the canneries. So I remember one time, they didn't want to give her her check. And we're leaving in a couple of days because she had all this vacation that she had accrued. She went in and it was sort of late in the afternoon and she said, "Well, can you just cut me the check to cash out my vacation hours because we're going on a trip." And I think they kind of gave her a bad time and said, "Maybe come back tomorrow or the day after tomorrow." But we didn't have the time to do that. And so she went to the owner and said, "Hey they're giving me grief about cashing out my vacation hours and we're going on a trip to see family in Mexico in a day or two." Within minutes she walked out of there with a paycheck. Because that's how much they appreciated her; at least the owners did. But the office ladies, they probably didn't like that.

**Mary Florendo Perry 55:14**

She worked really hard and when I was in college I think she worked a lot of overtime so she could afford to pay for my airfare. When she went to my graduation, she and my aunt Tia Helina—I went to Vassar in upstate New York and my friend—I don't know if you know the Ragsacs? They're on the calendar.

**Steve McKay** 55:41

Oh, yeah. Uhm-hmm.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 55:42

So Frank Ragsac and his wife, Noriko Akiyama, they—I don't know if they were married then—but they were like highschool sweethearts that got married and had a family. They were like, "What are those two old ladies gonna do in Manhattan? They're not gonna know their way around!" And they were such good friends and so close to our family. Frisco and my cousin Fidel Juan, his dad was Filipino also. They're the cousins that lived in the house down the street—or down the road on Paulsen—down the road from the big farm.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 56:22

Anyway, so Frisco, Frank, and his wife went; they flew to New York with my Mom, my aunt. And I guess they took the train Upstate and then we arranged for a shuttle to pick them up to bring them to campus. It was really great! They spent a few days there before graduation. And then after graduation, this limo took us back to the city and we had dinner at Tavern On the Green. The limo was late and I don't know what happened. They were about an hour and a half late. So it was really curious because I was on the phone with the company and they're like, "Do you have anybody in your party who's overweight?" And I was like, "I don't think so. Like, what do you consider overweight?" You know, everybody's probably like between 100 and 140, maybe 150 pounds max? Maybe between 110 and 150. Then so my friend who was had spent the day with me because he knew I was distressed about leaving my little circle of friends and graduating, he was like, "Oh my gosh. Now I understand why they asked you if there was anyone overweight, because the limo driver was like the size of a piano." And I don't know if that had anything to do with him being an hour and a half late. But I call the restaurant and I was like, "I am so sorry, but our limo was an hour and a half late. Can you stay open because this is my graduation dinner?" They're like, "Of course, of course." We checked into the hotel, got to dinner—it was like 10 o'clock—and they kept the restaurant open for us because they knew it was special.

**Steve McKay** 58:21

That's amazing!

**Mary Grace Florendo Perry** 58:21

We had all these people hovering around us because we're the only ones there! They stayed open for us. By then, my aunt and my Mom it was too late for them. So it was just me and one of my friends from college and Frank, Frisco, and his wife Noriko. And we were at this big table in the middle of the room at Tavern On the Green with more waitstaff than people in our party. Because I had never been to such a fancy place, I was like, "Oh my gosh. Do they have to

hover so close, and why is there so many of them? And one of them heard me, "Where would you like us to hover?" I was like, "Oh, I'm sorry." I just shut up after that because here they had gone through all this trouble to keep everybody there for us. I don't even remember the food or what we had. I just remember how beautiful it was and how nice they were. [laughs]

**Steve McKay** 59:26

That's great.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 59:27

Yeah and that was a real, I don't know, kind of an unusual adventure for my Mom and my aunt. The day they arrived, I guess, Frisco and Noriko took them to the shopping: Bergdorf, Goodman, and Neiman Marcus—and all those big stores, Saks Fifth Avenue—and they had a good time.

**Steve McKay** 59:54

That's wonderful for them to experience all of that. How did you end up at Vassar?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:00:00

Oh, we had the most amazing high school counselor. His name was Michael Sullivan. And he got kids into school and he focused on I guess the Ivy League, Seven Sisters. He was criticized quite a bit for that because people accused him of taking the cream of the crop and if these kids go to these Ivy League and Seven Sister schools, they are never going to come back to Watsonville. Why should they? And we're like, "Well, we came! We went and we came back! There were about seven of us at Vassar at one time. Three in my class: Carla Gomez, Cindy Perlick, and myself. And then Libby Tarkington, Ellen Okamoto, Jane Wong—Jane Wong's family owned the Star Cafe, that's how I know about the Star Cafe. And then after us—I forget her name, I think her last name was Volpi, I forget—I should know because I drove cross country with her. In my sophomore year, I had saved enough money to put a down payment on this little pickup truck. It was a Datsun. I think I was like eighteen years old. I had \$1,000 and I went and made a down payment. I picked this little pickup truck, it was a four-wheel drive because maybe there was going to be snow and so I had to be prepared. And I remember it was like this big family affair after church on a Sunday. My parents, and my aunt, and my godfather, and his son, my cousin, we all went to Dave Hart Datson. I picked up this car and my father had to cosign for me—and the payments were little, like \$200 a month, no big deal. And I knew I could afford it because I was making at least that much working. So my Dad cosigned for me. While I was home, I would make the payments and while I was at school, he would sometimes make them for me just so that I wouldn't have to spend my money. He was very sweet.



**Mary Florendo Perry 1:02:30**

But I remember driving out and it was a standard—and I had learned to drive on a standard—but my father had an automatic and so I wasn't used to driving a standard stick shift. And my twelve year old cousin, my godfather's son, jumped in the car with me and I was like, "Hey, Matt, I don't remember how to shift." He was like rolling his eyes—twelve year old kid—"Okay, well what you do is: you step on the clutch and the brake and then you put it in gear and then as you go, you slowly let the clutch out and then hit the gas." And I was like, "Okay." So then we're going out the driveway in my Dave Hart Datsun and I'm not getting it after a while. I was so embarrassed because here's this twelve year old kid. Because he's driving the vehicles at my uncle's farm and no big deal. [laughs] So that was a story about my car. And so I got to drive that back and forth a whole bunch of times with different friends. That was really an adventure. I remember my Dad, he had this little twinkle in his eye the first time I drove away—like 3000 miles away. I think it reminded him of leaving the Philippines, right. I'm getting a little bit teary eyed. I'll show you a picture!

**Steve McKay 1:04:13**

Oh, yeah. I'd love to see a picture.

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:04:19**

So this is a tiny picture of my parents.

**Steve McKay 1:04:24**

Oh, wow.

**Mary Grace Florendo Perry 1:04:26**

And that's the first time that I drove off to Vassar. It was my sophomore year because, freshman year, they took me to the airport. But I remember a friend of mine, Annie Terese, her parents were super helpful in organizing this trip for us because, back then, Triple A had these triptychs, like flipagram kind of maps. They would highlight the route for you and they would give you books that told you where to stay. Then all you had to do was follow the highlight and it was your GPS now in paper form. So we had the triptychs and my friend—Annie's mom—had relatives along the way in Nebraska and Ohio. So we got to stay with her great aunt and uncle. I think it was Sydney, Nebraska. And then we stopped in Ohio, I think it was Cleveland. I'm not sure exactly. But stopping in Nebraska was amazing. Because we got to this little town and it was so small that the aunt and uncle said, "Well, when you get here just go to such and such bar and we'll be there waiting for you." So we went to this bar and there are like big game animals in glass cases.

**Steve McKay 1:05:49**

[laughs]

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:05:51**

So we get there and the nice great aunt and uncle—they were probably eighty years old—were waiting for us and they introduced us to their friends. It was like a big to-do. Then we went to their house and we talked about what they did. Because it was so rural, the whole town would go watch football games on Friday night—like high school sports were their entertainment. Sometimes watching TV wasn't all that interesting and so they would listen to the truck drivers on their CB radios. They had a CB radio in their house and they would listen. And they asked us what it was like driving through Wyoming. And I said, "Oh, it was so beautiful because the sky was so dark. We just saw shooting stars all night long." "Oh, yeah, that's what the truck drivers talk about."

**Steve McKay 1:06:45**

Oh that's funny. That's sweet. This is a great picture, where is this?

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:06:53**

That's my parent's house in Watsonville. Yeah, that's on Maple Avenue. And the people who bought the house now, they have taken such loving care. They've stayed with the kind of pastel color; my Mom had painted the house pink right before she passed away and so it was maybe pink and green. It was really cute, it looked like a little gingerbread house. They kind of kept that sort of orange-pinky theme. But it's so pretty now I'll show you a picture. This is how it was in white. But we were just there, my friend Bob Ash; we call him Mr. High School. [getting picture] I keep getting these ads on my phone. [pause] So we went to the high school to make a little videotape to congratulate the Class of 2021.

**Steve McKay 1:08:20**

Oh, that's sweet!

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:08:21**

[showing picture to Steve] So this is the house that I grew up in.

**Steve McKay 1:08:34**

Wow, that is really beautiful. And this is on?

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:08:39**

Maple Avenue. The cross street is Marchant. It's two houses from the corner over there.

**Steve McKay 1:08:42**

Wow, well they really did keep it up beautifully. Just the turned porch supports and the fencing and everything. They really have kept it really nice.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:08:59

Yeah, it's really pretty now.

**Steve McKay** 1:09:01

That's good. And till how long did you live there?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:09:06

So I think I turned two there. And I came home from college and I lived there part of the time through law school. But we—my Mom, my parents—they kept the house until 2004. My Dad died in '94 and my Mom passed away in 2004. I think we sold the house maybe a year later in 2005. So that was—how many years ago—sixteen years ago. So probably forty years that they lived there. Yeah, so that was another thing. My sister and I did a lot of the packing of forty years of family history. So I got to keep all the photo albums because one of the things my Mom and I did was, when we'd be in town, we'd go to Woolworths and buy photo albums.

**Steve McKay** 1:10:12

Oh, that's great!

**Steve McKay** 1:10:13

And all the aunts shared their pictures and negatives so I'm thinking my cousin's probably all have the same photos. Oh, interesting. That's cool though!

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:10:22

Yeah. So I got to keep the photo albums because I was the photographer/organizer/historian, I guess. And I mean, this is sort of a sad thing to say, but when one of our relatives—and usually lately it's been mostly like my Mom's siblings—I'll go through the albums and people want pictures for slideshows. And so I'll let—I have a whole stack of pictures that I have to put back in the photo albums. And then another relative: "Oh, I have to find all the pictures with tio Mateo in them." So then as I'm going through the albums I find other really cool pictures: "Oh! So and so's wedding, I have to take pictures of these." So a lot of my picture taking lately has been taking pictures of pictures so that I can share them on—we have like family group pages and Facebook, WhatsApp. My Mexican relatives have this whole like WhatsApp thing going, I can't keep up with it though it's too much. [laughs]

**Steve McKay** 1:11:40

Are they still split, some in Mexico and some here?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:11:42

Yeah, yeah. So my Mom's oldest sister and youngest sister stayed in Mexicali. They also had children and, now, probably grandchildren and great grandchildren. Yeah, so we still have family in Mexicali and I think part of what keeps us close is that they would come here every summer.

**Steve McKay** 1:12:09

That's wonderful.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:12:10

Yeah, I don't know their kids or their grandkids all that well. I know who they are and we keep in touch through Facebook, mostly. But the cousins that came here to pick tomatoes and berries, it was like they were siblings we spent so much time together. It was great because I was at that time one of the youngest, and so they would tease me because my uncle at 12:00 would just make me go inside and have lunch and watch TV for the rest of the day—because he thought it was too hot for a little kid to be outside, or maybe he thought I was in the way. But they would get mad and they would call me "la princesa" because my Dad sometimes would call me "Princess" because I was the youngest. That's what Filipinos do, right?

**Steve McKay** 1:13:03

[laughs] Yeah, yeah.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:13:04

And so they wouldn't always say it that nicely. They would say it kind of sarcastically. [laughs] But we had fun. They loved coming to town because there's so much to do. They could go shopping and not be picking tomatoes and berries and just hang out with my older sisters. They would go to the movies and dances and just do fun stuff on the weekends. So yeah, we're still really close. But I think it's part of . . . just spending so much time together, like the whole summer and after church.

**Steve McKay** 1:13:47

Yeah, that's wonderful and amazing that across all that distance you can have such great, close ties.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:13:55

Yeah, I get a little sad though because we just lost my aunt. And I have a friend who wrote this song about being the elders now. It's like, "We're the unwilling elders. We never asked to be the elders."

**Steve McKay 1:14:16**

Yeah, it creeps up on you.

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:14:21**

It does, yeah. I try to instill the same with our kids. This year has been kind of hard, though. Because usually we have these big family gatherings and this February one of our cousins passed away and we couldn't even visit him. Had it been pre-pandemic, he would have had like forty people at the hospital every day. It was really hard. He died of cancer. And he was very—my sister says, "Un hombre de pocas palabras; A man of very few words." He was just sort of very mellow, meditative zen. Always smiling. Everybody loved him and apparently he was our grandmother's favorite. But we couldn't go visit him and it was really distressing. We finally had a little graveside service because my cousin couldn't sleep because he had his brother's ashes in his house—February, March, April—for two months. And we finally did a little graveside—not a full funeral, like with communion—but a little mass over at Valley Catholic in Watsonville.

**Steve McKay 1:14:35**

That's great.

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:15:57**

Yeah. It was very uplifting. You have to have your rituals, you know?

**Steve McKay 1:16:03**

Yeah, that's right.

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:16:04**

So that was comforting because everyone felt so bad that we couldn't go visit him and then he died. He died of cancer and his brother would see him in the park like that's where they would meet and sit and talk and visit; in the park. He said he stopped going to the park so he went to look for him. He had been so weak he had been in bed for about three weeks. So he said, "Well, I'll try it as far as treatment." So he tried the chemo and it made him feel really bad. And he's like, "Oh, I don't want to do this. It makes me feel really bad." And so we had to respect, of course, my cousin. It was very hard, but he had to respect his brother's wishes, you know?

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:16:20**

What park did he like to hang out at?

**Mary Grace Florendo Perry 1:16:43**

I'm thinking probably the Plaza because it's the nicest one and probably the closest to him.

**Steve McKay** 1:17:17

Where did he live?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:17:19

My cousin lived in Pajaro and the brother who found him, my cousin Leon, lives in the tunnel area. Over where—I was gonna say Lambert's, but it's not called Lambert's anymore—there's this little shopping center on East Lake Avenue and it's where the Villager is and Roundtable and the grocery store. I think it might be New Leaf now. But when we're growing up, it was Lambert's. It was a local family that owned it. And so I have a couple of cousins that live in the neighborhoods sort of behind that shopping center. It's kind of quiet. It used to be apple orchards behind it but now it's all—I think it's all—subdivisions now. Before it was like, everywhere outside of town was an apple orchard. My Dad had all these friends, we'd go visit people and they'd be at a house in the middle of an apple orchard.

**Steve McKay** 1:18:26

And they would be his friends from—

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:18:28

Friends from work. And I think—we would call him Uncle Subiaco—he wasn't our uncle but he was very nice. Then I think a lot of those people, my father and his friends that he worked with, a lot of them were bachelors just because of those anti marriage laws. When I was little I'd hang out with my Dad a lot, especially like if my Mom was working. So we'd go and visit his friends. There is a house next to a little park on Riverside, I think the park is still there and his friends—they were all like very elderly—we'd just go and sit in the kitchen and talk. My Dad would, I don't know, drink tea or coffee and just hang out with his friends. After a little while I'd say, "Okay, can I go play in the playground?" and they could see me through the window. So I'd go and play the playground and then go back and hang out with them. But it was a lot of that. I remember my uncle lived in this, I guess a boarding house—I don't know if it's still there—but it was also on Riverside. I remember feeling really sad going there only because it was mostly elderly workers that were living alone in a room without a family. My uncle would walk to our house because it was only two blocks from our house and come visit us. But I think he got lonely because he didn't have his own family. So he moved back to the Philippines.

**Steve McKay** 1:20:15

Oh, he did?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:20:15

Uncle Cristino, yeah. So he was the one that came with my Dad in 1931.

**Steve McKay** 1:20:22

Wow.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:20:23

Yeah. So he stayed until I think we were in high school; 1975-ish. So he stayed here for forty-four years and then he went back to the Philippines. My sisters think that he went back because he had a girlfriend and I hope that's true. [laughs] I hope that's true. Because I remember him being kind of lonely. He spent a lot of time with us, but he didn't live with us. Then he always had to go back to his little room in the boarding house two blocks away. I just remember feeling very sad when I went there.

**Steve McKay** 1:21:05

Were most of the guys living there Filipino back then?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:21:08

Yeah, they were retired Filipino bachelors that had worked in the fields for forty, fifty years. I remember at my Dad's funeral, a couple of his friends showed up and they're like, "We knew your dad." "Aww, thank you so much." It was really sweet.

**Steve McKay** 1:21:34

And when they got together were they speaking Ilokano or?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:21:37

Yes. Yeah, they spoke Ilocano. Sometimes they'd speak in English, like if they wanted us to change the channel for them or something. [laughs] But mostly, if they were having a conversation, it was mostly in Filipino. I think that was comforting for them to have somebody to talk to in their native language.

**Steve McKay** 1:22:01

Of course, yeah. Did they just talk or did they play cards? Or did they—

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:22:09

They mostly watched TV. My Dad and uncle didn't really play cards or gamble. My father didn't drink. He didn't gamble. He said he went to a chicken fight once and he had bet and he won some money, and it scared him so he never went back. Because I had cousins who were really into that; the roosters fighting?

**Steve McKay** 1:22:43

Yeah.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:22:45

But it scared my Dad so he never got to go and we never got to go because my Dad was afraid of it. And I don't know if it was him afraid of gambling or him afraid of doing something illegal, because it wasn't legal.

**Steve McKay** 1:23:02

Right.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:23:03

I remember my cousin's kids talking about it and it sounded a little exciting, but kind of scary. They were at a chicken fight and law enforcement showed up. And their dads said, "If the cops show up, just run." I was like, "Oh my God! No wonder my father never goes." Because he was very timid, we never did anything like that. [laughs] But sometimes I was like, "Oh, gosh, I wonder what that was like." But it's a cultural thing. I remember—we have in Monterey County a rooster ordinance—and I don't know, I had a friend who worked in the AG Commissioner's Office and he's like, "Well, you know, it's a cultural thing. They do it in other countries; Puerto Rico, the Philippines." And I don't know, it's hard to form an opinion because I know I had a cousin who was really into that and he just loved his birds. They were his babies. But then you have the other opinion of how cruel it is because they're fighting and they're killing each other.

**Steve McKay** 1:24:28

When I interviewed Manuel [Bersamin], he was talking about having to take care of his father's chickens. Then he had to feed them but then he also had to hold them while his dad sutured them after the fights.

**Mary Grace Florendo Perry** 1:24:42

Yeah!

**Steve McKay** 1:24:42

But he was so proud, he took such good care of them and things like that.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:24:46

Yes, yes, yes, yes. Yeah, I know. I mean, that's a kind of a tough topic because you see these little chicks and they're so cute and they take such care of the chickens and the roosters. But then, they do these fights.



**Steve McKay** 1:25:08

But it is, I think, it's another form of community for them, right?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:25:12

Yeah, yeah, definitely. So I'll grab that DVD and I'll try to make a copy myself. If I'm not successful, I'll take it to the photo lab and have them do it because they can do it probably a lot better than I could.

**Steve McKay** 1:25:30

And we might be able to! I think we have all this stuff at the university to be able to do it too.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:25:38

Yeah! Because I was gonna make one for Roy also, just because he asked. I told Mr. Tabasa—do you know Mr. Jess Tabasa?

**Steve McKay** 1:25:46

I haven't met him, no.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:25:47

So he's sort of a local historian. He was a teacher in E.A. Hall. I guess it was junior high, everybody was afraid of him. I never had him, I had a different teacher. I think he taught either history or sociology. But his Mom owned Philippine Gardens.

**Steve McKay** 1:26:07

Oh, okay.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:26:07

Yeah, Jess Tabasa.

**Steve McKay** 1:26:09

Yeah.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:26:10

He goes to our church so every now and then I see him if I go to the Saturday afternoon mass. But I told him about that tape and he was like, "Oh, I have to have that tape." And then I told him about a book I saw in the Watsonville High School Library and there was a picture of my Dad in it. It was called "Agriculture in the Pajaro Valley." My friend Frisco Ragsac showed it to me and then we put it back on the shelf. Then like a week later, I was looking for it and it was gone. I was so sad. I told Mr. Tabasa about it and he was like, "Oh, I had my hands on that

book. Why didn't I keep it?" I'm like, "I don't know." I've been to every antique store in Moss Landing and thrift shop to try to find it, but I have not been able to find it. I'll show you that other picture, though, of my Dad.

**Steve McKay** 1:27:05

Oh, yeah, that'd be great! I don't know if at the Watsonville Library they have a section on AG.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:27:13

You know, I have to look.

**Steve McKay** 1:27:16

They might have it there too.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:27:18

Just having a picture of the cover—I'll have to take it out because I stuck my Dad's driver's license. But we have multiple copies of this. I think the photographer let him just—

**Steve McKay** 1:27:38

Oh, wow!

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:27:38

Here's some more pictures of people I don't know. [laughs]

**Steve McKay** 1:27:42

Wow, these are—

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:27:44

So my Dad was so funny. Like, he would glue pictures together—

**Steve McKay** 1:27:48

[laughs] Yeah, I see these are!

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:27:50

—like this was so floppy; to make them stronger. And I don't know how to take them apart without tearing. [reading caption on photo] "Mary Lou seven years old", so it must have been a relative.

**Steve McKay** 1:28:05

These are great! So that's your dad?

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:28:06**

That's my Dad.

**Steve McKay 1:28:07**

Wow!

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:28:10**

So I've taken pictures of it and edited it. You know, you can do so much with your phone now.

**Steve McKay 1:28:16**

Yeah, no, it's amazing what you can do.

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:28:20**

I have a whole photo album of—I'm trying to find my Dad's pictures. [searching through photo stacks]

**Steve McKay 1:28:34**

These are great. So we do have a number of our other people helping with the research doing primarily photos. So I'm gonna take pictures of this maybe informally?

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:28:49**

Oh, okay! Maybe they can touch them up, yeah.

**Steve McKay 1:28:50**

But I think they would be really interested in getting—

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:28:55**

I don't know who they are, I'm sorry.

**Steve McKay 1:28:57**

Oh, no, that's fine.

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:28:59**

Other people might, I don't know if they're still alive.

**Steve McKay 1:29:02**

Yeah, that would, you know—but one thing is they could come with equipment, too. So I'm not gonna—we want to be really careful about making sure everyone's material gets handled

properly. So what I'd likely do is, Meleia is the other person involved and she's a PhD candidate in history, so she might be in touch if it's okay?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:29:29

Oh, okay, yeah!

**Steve McKay** 1:29:30

And I think she'll be really interested in your other treasure trove.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:29:34

Oh, my aunt's—

**Steve McKay** 1:29:35

—Other pictures? Yeah, and that. Is that okay if I take that with me?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:29:39

Yeah.

**Steve McKay** 1:29:40

That'd be great, I'll actually take this one. And is this—do you know who this is?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:29:45

I don't know who that is. It must be a friend. Yeah, it's not him. Yeah, some of the pictures in the albums have the names on the backs. I'll have to look for those because there was a whole album that I put together just have my Dad's. That would probably be the most interesting. Then I still have all the letters from the Philippines.

**Steve McKay** 1:30:20

Wow, really?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:30:21

I don't know what they say. Like I have a book on Ilokano.

**Steve McKay** 1:30:26

Oh yeah, I saw that there and I was wondering.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:30:29

[laughs] Yeah, like I'm gonna have to learn the language so I can [read the letters]

**Steve McKay** 1:30:33

So one of the things, it's harder now because there are fewer of the students who—my parents grew up in Manila so they're Tagalog speakers. But maybe we could find some other students or other folks who might be able to help.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:30:49

I went to, I think it was like a Filipino festival, in Monterey—at the Monterey Plaza. That's where I bought the little book on how to speak Ilokano. My husband hates the [unknown] so he refuses to hang it.

**Steve McKay** 1:31:23

Now we've been going through a lot of family photos. My Mom passed about three years ago and we took the opportunity to go through a lot of photos, very similar. And then we had a big party, and we took pictures of pictures. But we gave them the copies to lots of the relatives. And some of them were from the—well my parents came—they got married 1957 and came in 1958. And so had pictures from that period when they first arrived. It was just so nice to be able to give those to relatives. Because there's like pictures you have of other family that they don't have, you know? Like, "I've never seen this picture!" That's what's so nice: to be able to share.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:32:19

That is what is so great about sharing. And for some reason, I can't find that particular album, it's got a green cover.

**Steve McKay** 1:32:26

Okay. Oh, no worries.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:32:28

I'll have to find it, because that's probably the most interesting.

**Steve McKay** 1:32:32

That would be wonderful if we could go through it. Maybe, and depending on your time and energy, to—often it's really nice to go through and we mainly do it on videotape, or film it, so we can get your comments and stories as you look at your photos.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:32:56

Oh, yeah, yeah.

**Steve McKay** 1:32:56

So only if—so part of the project is collecting the stories and the other part is to digitize images and we're working toward another big exhibit—

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:32:57

Oh, neat.

**Steve McKay** 1:33:03

—where we'll kind of combine the stories, the images, and [heavy mic feedback begins] some other Filipino American artists as they look through the archive and think about it. We're gonna probably be working on the project for the next few years.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:33:26

Wow, interesting

**Steve McKay** 1:33:28

The big art exhibit probably won't happen until 2024.

**Mary Grace Florendo Perry** 1:33:31

Oh, cool.

**Steve McKay** 1:33:33

That's when [the Santa Cruz MAH] can have time to do our schedule. But that gives us time to collect.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:33:38

Oh, absolutely, yeah.

**Steve McKay** 1:33:39

And so, if it's okay, Meleia will be in touch.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:33:45

Yeah! I'll have to find my Dad's photo album. I can't believe—it's too important to not be here.

**Steve McKay** 1:33:59

That's great, okay.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:34:01

[showing Steve photo] That's my Dad. Did you already get that?

**Steve McKay** 1:34:05

Yeah, okay. But this one, was this your Dad?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:34:10

No, this is my Dad. I have a picture that my Mom said that there's a little break in it because when I was little I used to kiss it. [laughs; mic feedback ends]

**Steve McKay** 1:34:35

Aww, how sweet!

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:34:36

Because I don't remember my Dad being that young. He was fifty-three when I was born. He was fifty-one when my brother was born. But he had his hands full because he had our older siblings to take care of, too.

**Steve McKay** 1:34:54

Would you mind if I take a picture with you and these photos?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:34:57

Oh no, not at all.

**Steve McKay** 1:34:59

These are lovely. I'm going to just move over here just because of the light.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:35:04

I can move this one, maybe I'll put it back in the frame.

**Steve McKay** 1:35:26

It's so funny, I have a picture of my mom with her driver's driver's, exactly!

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:35:33

Yeah! I didn't want to lose it. And so I thought, "Well, if I put it in here, then everybody can see it."

**Steve McKay** 1:35:43

Yeah, I think it was because we do have all those expired driver's license.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:35:46

Right, right. [laughs]

**Steve McKay** 1:35:50

My siblings and I had various different pictures and photos, so that's great.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:35:57

Let me just grab all the pictures.

**Steve McKay** 1:36:02

I'm just gonna move over here.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:36:04

Oh, okay.

**Steve McKay** 1:36:13

I do have an another camera just because my phone camera is pretty good, but this one's a little nicer.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:36:19

Okay, a real camera.

**Steve McKay** 1:36:21

If it's okay.

**Mar Florendo Perry** 1:36:22

Yeah, of course.

**Steve McKay** 1:36:27

I think for me being on the project, it's just so lovely to get this kind of documentation. It just reminds me of how important it is for everyone to maintain it. And it's such a unique history in Watsonville, the Pajaro Valley. [mic feedback] I didn't have much anything about Philippine history growing up here. And then as I went to school and different things, I started to get more about Asian American history. And then the Watsonville Riot actually comes up, but there's very little documentation.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:37:12

Yes, I didn't even know about that. Like, I knew that it was very difficult and that there was—Filipinos weren't accepted because of the anti marriage laws. But I didn't know about the race riots until this project, when it started coming to light and all these articles were put on the



Remembering Watsonville page. And that's all thanks to Roy that we're aware of this because I really didn't know. My father never talked about it.

**Steve McKay** 1:37:48

Did you ever get a sense when you're growing up that there was much animosity towards Filipinos?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:37:52

No, no, not at all. My Dad was just such a peaceful person. And there were so many different ethnicities in Watsonville. Like, we had friends who were— our neighbors who were Yugoslavian—we had friends who were Japanese, Italian. Everybody just got along. It wasn't as—now everything is so divisive. It's crazy. We didn't grow up with any of that. Maybe Watsonville was just a big mix of people that worked really hard and got along. We went to everybody's different festivals; like we'd go to the Obon Festival for Japanese food, we would go to the Sons of Italy for spaghetti and meatballs. Like even help my friends and her family make the meatballs. It was just kind of fun

**Steve McKay** 1:39:05

And just in your own family too just being Mexipino.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:39:08

Yeah!

**Steve McKay** 1:39:09

So there was your family and your cousin, were there other families that you also knew, that weren't directly related, but also mixed?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:39:20

I don't remember their names. But my Dad had a lot of friends and so they would come over and say hello and they'd bring their kids and we would sometimes go visit them. They had friends and my aunt and uncle had friends in Seaside, and I think they were half Japanese half Filipino because I remember going to this house with sushi everywhere. It was so amazing. Yeah, but we had other Filipino friends. The Seraficas, they had like nine or 10 kids. They lived over by Pinto Lake. Their family always had the traditional lumpia, pancit. They weren't Mexican, they were Filipino, both parents, and they always had a ton of food.

**Steve McKay** 1:40:17

We've been doing some of these interviews and there are some full Filipino families. But was it typical in that family, for example, that the parents knew each other from the Philippines or did they meet here?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:40:27

I think they met here. Yeah and I think a lot of our parents, whether Mexican or Filipino, knew each other from work. I think the cannaries were a big draw for women. Like, I have friends whose moms came from Seaside. They were African American, because that's mostly who lived in Seaside at the time, and they would come—their moms would come—to work at Watsonville Canning. And I think a lot of the Fort Ord wives would come to work in the canneries. They were like five canneries in Watsonville when I was growing up, and so there was a lot of work for a lot of people. In fact, there's a special section of the AG History Project that talks about canneries in Watsonville. So I think there's a lot of camaraderie just built from working and people getting to know each other at work and making each other their compadres, you know, big Catholic community. So maybe that was what brought everybody together; because almost everybody was either Catholic or Buddhist. Presbyterian, too. Yeah. Yeah, I think there are a lot of commonalities. I think the families just were here mostly from other countries. Mostly first generation to work and that's how that's what they all had in common.

**Steve McKay** 1:40:59

Hard work.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:41:49

Yeah.

**Steve McKay** 1:41:49

I think it's that immigrant. mindset.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:42:12

Yes.

**Steve McKay** 1:42:13

And recognition of others who do that too, right?

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:42:16

Yeah. I remember I loved when it rained because that meant my Dad couldn't go to work and I'd get a ride to school. He always was the first person in line to pick me up. Like if it was raining, I knew that if I went outside, my Dad would be the first car there. [laughs]

**Steve McKay** 1:42:40

That's so sweet.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:42:41

And I guess when I got older, my sister said he would do the same thing for her kids. Because they lived on East Lake and there's a big dip in the road and their driveway would get flooded. So the kids couldn't even get across the street to get to the bus. And so my Dad would always go to school, pick up the kids, bring them home. So I love the sound of windshield wipers because it reminds me of being in the car with my Dad.

**Steve McKay** 1:43:16

Aww, that's really sweet.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:43:20

Yeah, he was a hard worker. My Mom was, too.

**Steve McKay** 1:43:28

Well, Marry, thank you so much.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:43:30

Oh, you're welcome! I've been talking your ear off—oh, gosh, over two hours!

**Steve McKay** 1:43:35

That's okay. It's great to try to capture and it's lovely to hear your stories.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:43:43

Well, I'm happy we're not filming this because it's just a little bittersweet. Kind of heartwarming, you know, but still it's like, "Oh, gosh, we missed them."

**Steve McKay** 1:43:56

Yeah, yeah.

**Mary Florendo Perry** 1:43:57

Well, you know, you've lost your mom.

**Steve McKay** 1:44:01

But it's honoring them.

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:44:02**

Yeah. So your Dad is still living, then?

**Steve McKay 1:44:06**

Yeah, he's ninety. He still lives in the house that we grew up in.

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:44:10**

Oh, that's so great. Yeah.

**Steve McKay 1:44:12**

And I have three siblings. I'm the youngest.

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:44:16**

Yeah, me too.

**Steve McKay 1:44:17**

So the version of Princess is me because I was the youngest. So they always teased me like, you know, "You always got away with everything!"

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:44:28**

They were tired by the time we came along.

**Steve McKay 1:44:30**

[laughs] Exactly, exactly.

**Mary Florendo Perry 1:44:31**

So yeah. So my husband is the oldest and I'm the youngest, so we get along just fine. Let me go grab my kids and have them say hello because I know they've been trying to be quiet.