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Bobby Mariano interviewed by Dr. Steven McKay

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Bobby Mariano interviewed by Dr. Steve McKay

Speakers: Bobby Mariano, Steve McKay

Date: January 10, 2022

Scope and Contents: In this interview, originally recorded via Zoom, Bobby Mariano speaks with Dr. Steve McKay, a member of the Watsonville is in the Heart team. Bobby describes his father, Marcelino “Bob” Mariano’s immigration and labor histories including his migration from the Philippines to Hawai’i then from Hawai’i to California and his lifelong work in agriculture first as a migrant laborer and eventually as a foreman. He also discusses his mother, Hazel Maxine Bickle, whose family immigrated to Watsonville from Oklahoma during the 1920s. Bobby discusses his parents’ interracial marriage as well as the other mixed-race families in Watsonville that he knew growing up. He also describes his father’s military service during World War II and his own experience enlisting in the Army during the 1960s. Bobby shares memories of going to cockfights with his father and his experiences in school. Throughout the interview, Bobby expresses that his parents shielded him from experiences of racism and economic hardship as well as his childhood perception of Watsonville as a multicultural community without racial or class divides. Additionally, Bobby discusses his parents and other families in Watsonville who overcame experiences of racism and poverty. In doing so, he articulates beliefs about Filipinos in Watsonville that align with the model minority narrative.

Steve McKay 00:00

And so we try to record it on several things because we want to make sure we get it right. So—and let me just read a little bit, it’s just the consent script so that we have it recorded. And so again, this is part of, you know, thank you for taking your time, for sharing your stories with Watsonville in the Heart Project oral history project. And basically, the idea of the project is really to uplift the stories of the Filipino families that have lived and worked in Watsonville, and the Pajaro Valley. And, you know, our ultimate goal is to document your story, preserve it, and someday share it, make it available so that others can learn about the Filipino history. And we also plan to make an art exhibit that will incorporate some of the oral histories. And so I’ll be sending you the sign consent form, but I just want to say, you know, this is completely voluntary on your part. There’s any part you want to, you know, if you want to pause, you want to stop, or you know, you don’t want us to record, let us know, all questions are you know, voluntary, it’s up to you. If you don’t be like answering, that’s fine. And then when we’re done, I’ll actually have a recording, and I’ll send it to you, which you could review and then let us know if there’s anything you decide like, oh, actually, you know, I said this, but I don’t want that in there. Let us know. And we could, you know, kind of scrub anything that you don’t want.

Bobby Mariano 01:30

I acknowledge certainly.

Steve McKay 01:32

Okay, so I just want to make sure that you know—

Bobby Mariano 01:34

Okay

Steve McKay 01:34

then with us recording it. Okay, so so I'll be sending you that consent form. So, um, so yeah, so really, you know, it's been a really fun project for me. I didn't grow up in in Watsonville and Pajaro Valley. I grew up—born in San Francisco, raised in the East Bay, but my parents are also mestizo too, a mix. And so it's been just just really fascinating and big to hear folks stories. So we're—I'm going to ask you, you know, some questions. The basic idea of the whole, you know, project is just to get an idea of your family's background, your own experiences growing up in Watsonville, and just to get a sense of the community, since we just really have no historical record of what it was. So so, that's kind of what the basic area is. And so I'll start with asking a little bit about your basic background, and then something asked you about your parents, and then ask you about growing up in Watsonville. And if anything, if you want to, you know, anything else you want to talk about [unintelligible] too. So, so just to start it just a good if we have your—can you just say your full name?

Bobby Mariano 02:51

My name is Bobby Joe Mariano.

Steve McKay 02:56

Okay, and do you have a—so, do you usually go by Bobby what nicknames did—

Bobby Mariano 03:02

I go by Bobby.

Steve McKay 03:03

Okay. Alright, and and and where and what year were you born?

Bobby Mariano 03:09

I was born in El Centro, California in 1944.

Steve McKay 03:13

Okay, alright and could you just say your parents, both your parents, full names?

Bobby Mariano 03:19

Well, my father's name was Marcelino [Unknown] Pagayo, and then—and my mother was Hazel Maxine Bickle. Now my mother was from Oklahoma. My father was from Camiling, Ilocos Norte. So that's, that's to answer your first question.

Steve McKay 03:42

Yeah, okay and so yeah, that's—I can tell in just your father's name there's a lot of stories—how long they become. So I'll start with your dad. So, your dad was was was born in Ilocos?

Bobby Mariano 03:59

Yes.

Steve McKay 04:00

And what year was he born?

Bobby Mariano 04:02

1910

Steve McKay 04:03

1910, okay and what were some of the stories that he had about growing up there before he he migrated?

Bobby Mariano 04:12

My father had a very a dire story to tell me and share with me in terms of his childhood. His family was very poor, and he was the oldest of three brothers, and I guess he had a very bad relationship with his father. Hence when he left the house at 15, to go a work a sugar plantation in the Big Island, he changed his name. He changed—he took his his mother's surname of Mariano [unknown] and and that's how more [unknown] became Bob Mariano. Westernised, if you will.

Steve McKay 05:00

Wow. So, he he left at 15.

Bobby Mariano 05:03

He left at, as I understand it, 15 yeah.

Steve McKay 05:06

Do you know if—did he know other people who were going on working in Hawai'i.

Bobby Mariano 05:13

I—he apparently knew someone who gave him the insight as to how to you know, get away, if you will. That was his out was to work in the in the sugar in Hawai'i. So maybe it was a cousin or a town mate as they would call each other, you know, townmates.

Steve McKay 05:32

Yeah, yeah. Wow and did he talk much about those early years in Hawai'i?

Bobby Mariano 05:37

He really did not. He did not, yeah. One of the things that I remember him saying was, they took him from the fields—he's a young boy because the cane was beating him up, I guess, and they made him the oil boy in the factory, you know, where they were processing the cane. So, he—to me that at that point, that was a positive, but that's about all I ever really heard. He didn't talk much other than it was very, very dire.

Steve McKay 06:08

Okay.

Steve McKay 06:09

And did he say much about, I mean, you said it was rough and changing his name clearly, you know, he chose that, but his time before he migrated, did he talk about his childhood, specific stories about his—

Bobby Mariano 06:22

You know, him and him and—he had some cousins that I came to meet. They became my godfather, my uncle George, they lived in lived in Stockton area and worked in grapes inland. How they would early on they—I guess his cousins had horses and they would run them in the in the in the surf. So, that was maybe the only positive happy stories I ever heard from him about his time in the islands, so.

Steve McKay 06:51

Oh, okay. So so when did he come to California?

Bobby Mariano 06:56

You know, I'm really not sure. I would say he met my mother in the 40s. So, I think that he went, I think he might, maybe in the 30s, he got to maybe in Los Angeles. As I think he told me he had he had learned how to be a short order cook in a little diner or whatever, and eventually, that became, he got drafted for World War Two, first Filipino infantry. And I mean, that's, that's as current as I can tell you in the early days, because I—he just really didn't have much to say about it. Other than times, were very hard for him and his brothers.

Steve McKay 07:26

Okay, and how many siblings did he have?

Bobby Mariano 07:51

Two others. There was there were three boys. He was the oldest.

Steve McKay 07:56

So, oh okay, so then he got—he came to California, he worked in a restaurant as a short order cook, and then it must have been 1942 that he got drafted.

Bobby Mariano 08:08

Yes. That's right. Sure.

Steve McKay 08:10

Yeah, yeah cause I think that's when the first Filipino regiment.

Bobby Mariano 08:15

Yeah, I've got pictures of that, of them. The most—the longest widest picture you've ever seen is, I've never seen a picture ever duplicated quite like this, but I've got that for anybody ever wanted to have a quick—have a look at that.

Steve McKay 08:30

Oh, okay. Yeah, that would be fantastic. So the other—so the two other grad students who they've been scanning photos, and so we might be in touch to try to get a high quality scan of that photo. That would be great.

Bobby Mariano 08:47

Mm hmm. That's that's doable.

Steve McKay 08:49

Fantastic. Okay. So, when he got drafted, where was he—Where was he stationed?

Bobby Mariano 08:56

Good question. Fort Ord, California, and my mom lived in Watsonville, California with her family, her mother and her father and who had migrated earlier in from Oklahoma. My mother's father had come from Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. So that's the mom's side of it. So, they and then they all migrated in from you know, the issues that they had in the in the late 29s. So, you know the—

Steve McKay 09:29

There yeah, that does—

Bobby Mariano 09:29

Dustbowl and, you know, no food and so the migration West was where a lot of people from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, that part of that part of the country that were affected, food wise, so they came west.

Steve McKay 09:32

And so—

Bobby Mariano 09:38

The background of how my my parents side came to the west and a short version of how my—because I don't know much about how my father, you know, other than, you know, they had to be they had to be—I'm not sure what the word is—verified in the long and short of it before they could come to the States. Someone in the United States of their friends or family had to, you know, verify them or whatever you want to. Whatever the word I'm not, I'm not grasping at this point. Speak up for them.

Steve McKay 10:28

Oh, right. Yeah, and how did your mother's family end up in Watsonville? So they moved and—

Bobby Mariano 10:34

I'm not I'm not sure they I think they started in Stockton, and then they came to the to the to Watsonville, which is the extreme coasts, so.

Steve McKay 10:45

Yeah, yeah. Likely in agriculture do you think?

Bobby Mariano 10:48

Sure. Oh, sure. Oh, yeah. Oh, sure. My my grandmother, my aunt and my mom they all worked the canneries.

Steve McKay 10:56

Okay.

Bobby Mariano 10:57

That's it, because it was big, you know, it's still row crop is big in the Pajaro Valley, but it's no longer lettuce so much as it is strawberry. Right?

Steve McKay 11:09

Yeah. Yeah, and there used to be so much more canning and processing before it all moved—

Bobby Mariano 11:14

And there was so much more Iceberg lettuce. That was the crop, which has been replaced.

Steve McKay 11:23

Okay, and so do you know, did your parents tell you stories about how they met?

Bobby Mariano 11:28

Oh, yeah, my father and my mother met at Fort Ord on a Halloween night. Now, this is kind of, you know, it's touchy because, you know, in those days, you know, whites and Filipinos weren't, you know, that wasn't really something that was, you know, people weren't really excited about that, you know, what I'm saying? To put it lightly, so, so the long, and the short of that is, is that my parents ended up having to marry outside of California, because it was, it was not legal for Filipinos to marry. You know, in those times, so it's been an interesting world. I've I've I've been part of,

Steve McKay 12:14

Yeah, and I, you know, I, you know, again, myself, my grandfather was a contractor for the US [unintelligible], He was a plumber, and also went to the Philippines, so that's where he was stationed and met my grand—I think, you know, by US military bases and things like that. It's it's quite common, of course, but you're right it's not always accepted outside. Do you know, like, so so it was a Halloween party? Did—

Bobby Mariano 12:42

A Halloween party. Yes, and the reason that my mother was made aware of it at all, is that my my Aunt Alice, I guess, had had gone earlier, or had been familiar with or started to, you know, meet some Filipino young men. So, and they all had to be soldiers, right for the most parts, so—

Steve McKay 13:03

Right. And—

Bobby Mariano 13:04

There was a certain mystique or intrigue, I guess.

Steve McKay 13:09

Now, the first Filipino regiment, it was a segregated regiment.

Bobby Mariano 13:14

Yes, but all white officers.

Steve McKay 13:18

Okay. All white officers.

Steve McKay 13:22

And, yeah, and did your dad talk about serving with the first, you know, the First Filipino Infantry.

Bobby Mariano 13:23

Yeah.

Bobby Mariano 13:30

My father was sent—Oh, golly, I'm having a mental note here. Let's see, I gotta think about that. New Guinea.

Steve McKay 13:30

Oh, okay.

Bobby Mariano 13:34

So his regiment—his portion was sent to New Guinea and then in the tail end of the war, then that particular portion of the Filipinos were sent in to the Philippines back into the Philippines to to clean up and, and to take care of like, in my dad's regard, he had a lot of Japanese prisoners at that point. Didn't have a good time, I assure you, so.

Steve McKay 14:10

So, he was he had to guard the—

Bobby Mariano 14:12

His his his his mission was to—or portion of his responsibility was to get these Japanese prisoners to another part of the island. So it wasn't good for those particular prisoners because, you know, the local—the locals were, you know, the locals were not all that welcoming. So, yeah, I instantly turned and then then they—it was not pretty. I understand that was not good, so—

Steve McKay 14:45

Did your dad talk much about that?

Bobby Mariano 14:46

He would say suffice to say if there was 300 prisoners, not all 300 made it to the other islands. So the other part of the island so yeah, it was tough, tough duty. You know, the locals would attack them. They would attack them.

Steve McKay 15:03

Yeah, no, I can imagine having lived under the occu—under that.

Bobby Mariano 15:07

Yeah, I don't think we can even really truly imagine what that was about because it's instant. You know, you did this to us for so long instantly now, you know, if you've been around some of these manongs, they they they run hot, you know, hot.

Steve McKay 15:28

Yeah, and then to be charged with having to protect the Japanese prisoners must be also pretty—

Bobby Mariano 15:34

Well, and then you got —they're all they're all Pinoys. What do you think?

Steve McKay 15:37

Yeah, I get it. Yeah, I know, my dad telling me stories. He grew up in Manila during the occupation. You know, also similar, just very difficult times, and then yeah [unintelligible]. Wow. So, so w— your did your parents they met and between meeting and getting married, do you know about how much time that was?

Bobby Mariano 15:37

You know, I wouldn't think it was very long at all. So yeah, I'll show you a picture. If there's a way you can I can show you a picture. They they made a good looking couple. However, you know, as as not excited as my grandfather was, let me put it like that. He wasn't too excited about my dad, you know?

Steve McKay 16:23

Yeah. What did you hear about that? Were there stories about—

Bobby Mariano 16:26

Oh, well, just just that my grandfather was, you know, he's a Pennsylvania Dutch guy, you know, he's over six foot, and he had done really well at one point in the, in the oil fields in Oklahoma. And then along with everybody else, you know, it didn't it didn't end up that way, but, you know, he had had a certain amount of success and this just was not his idea of a son in law, you know. So, it wasn't—it wasn't, you know, there wasn't a big party, let's just say.

Steve McKay 17:02

Okay, but he didn't try to prevent the marriage or anything.

Bobby Mariano 17:06

No, no, no, no, no. That that didn't happen. No.

Steve McKay 17:11

Okay. So, so they had to get married in, in New Mexico, right?

Bobby Mariano 17:17

They got married in Arizona.

Steve McKay 17:19

Sorry, Arizona, Arizona. Do you know how they—who arranged that, how they were able to get there and things?

Bobby Mariano 17:26

He went with my—he went with my Uncle Johnny and my Aunt Alice. So, there was two couples that that made that trek. So, I don't know how that was a pre arranged I think that I think that via you know—it's like the coconut underground, you know, everybody understands how to—where they have to go how they have to do this to circumvent the scenario so.

Steve McKay 17:52

So they, you think they probably drove a private car.

Bobby Mariano 17:54

Oh, yeah, for sure. Oh, for sure. For sure. In those days, Filipinos really didn't—they couldn't own, they couldn't buy land in California, and most of them they couldn't have their women with so they lived in camps, as you learned. And it was it was—so that their priority was you know, to at the end of the workweek because they worked really hard, the end of the work week was to put on really nice very expensive clothing as best as they could afford and clean up their shoes and put a nice fedora on you know, and and go dancing. You know, there's that thing you know, there was there was very few forms of entertainment in those days except you know, gambling. Come on, It's Pinoys are gonna do what they do, you know?

Steve McKay 18:42

No, that's absolutely. So jus, yeah and did you get to know your your grandparents on the other side, your dads?

Bobby Mariano 18:56

I've never, sir, I've never seen a picture of them to this day. Never a picture. When my uncle's came from the Philippines to live with my parents there for a short time. I believe that was in the 80s I still didn't see any pictures. So, I couldn't—It's very strange to be—to this instant to be able to say I've never seen a picture of my my father's parents, very bizarre, but it is what it is.

Steve McKay 19:31

Yeah. Did your dad stay in touch with him by—

Bobby Mariano 19:34

Oh, no, no, no, no. My father didn't go back to his home. When he was in the islands with the but with the army. He didn't go back. I'm telling you, he had no intention, and to this—to the day he died he had no intention on returning. He never—he never instilled in me a desire to go back there. He said there was nothing he said, there's nothing there for me, I left, and he was he was serious. Yeah. So

Steve McKay 20:09

Yeah, no, I can understand that having a difficulty—if it's something made you leave at 15 you weren't necessarily—

Bobby Mariano 20:14

Oh, no, no, his father, I understand was just really, you know, borderline cruel. So so interestingly enough, he was just the opposite with me. I'm the only child, I was his only child, and that was never nothing like that, you know, but but that's from whence he came. That's what he experienced, so—

Steve McKay 20:36

You know that that's understandable. So, um, so after the war, then he comes back to Fort Ord or and to Watsonville.

Bobby Mariano 20:49

No, mom and my mom and her mother and dad had bought a home that was actually two residences, if you will. And so my mom had—and dad had the front house, and then my grandparents lived in the back. And and that's how it was for a long time, and my father worked in the fields because that there was no other opportunity.

Steve McKay 21:15

Sure. So is that—do you remember the address of that house?

Bobby Mariano 21:21

Sure. It was 60 Lincoln Street Watsonville. California.

Steve McKay 21:24

Ah, okay. Is it still there?

Bobby Mariano 21:27

Oh, sure. 95076. Oh, Sure.

Steve McKay 21:32

Thats wonderful, yeah.

Bobby Mariano 21:34

You can't froget from whence you come.

Steve McKay 21:36

Yeah, that's right. So, is that—did you grow up part of the time there? Or you knew your grandparents from there or?

Bobby Mariano 21:43

No, I grew up there for the most part until my parents bought a private home of their own, a brand new home.

Steve McKay 21:50

Okay.

Bobby Mariano 21:52

Which, you know, if you think about it, you know, you have peoples from different backgrounds, obviously, certainly not wealthy, but they were actually able to buy a brand—their own brand new home. That's the American dream, man.

Steve McKay 22:06

Absolutely. It is. Yeah,

Bobby Mariano 22:08

Think about that. I mean, I've got a nice home, but I didn't buy it new is almost new, but my dad, third grade education, he still bested me.

Steve McKay 22:08

Wow, that is quite a story, that that's amazing. So, um, so yeah, so while your dad was way your your, your mom and her and your grandparents had bought this place?

Bobby Mariano 22:30

Uh huh. That's right.

Steve McKay 22:32

And what did your mom do for work?

Bobby Mariano 22:34

She worked in the canneries.

Steve McKay 22:35

Alright, that's right.

Bobby Mariano 22:36

Early on, and then then in her later years, she worked in in a restaurant there in Watsonville. She loves older people. She loved the old people, and my father said, I don't know why you want to do that job. That's, you know, and my mother said, I love the old people, and they loved her. And so it's not it's certainly wasn't the most, you know, high end job, but it was a—she she did it well, she was well thought of.

Steve McKay 23:05

Yeah, well, yeah, that that—No, I'm sure she also heard a lot of stories then from the people that she cared for, and things.

Bobby Mariano 23:14

Yeah, yeah. Then my father would travel, we would travel, you know, a harvest. You know, from here to, to El Centro, into Arizona, into around Phoenix. That's all Iceberg lettuce, you know, that was generally the product.

Steve McKay 23:36

And so, what kind of work was he actually doing? You know—

Bobby Mariano 23:40

He he went from being a dry packer and—which is loading. And then in those days, they were 50—I would say they were probably 50 pound cases, and they would manually pick them up and throw them up on a flatbed. So there were, you know, people that cut, there were those that packed and so, you know, Filipinos, you know, they're not big people. Filipinos are typically not big people, but he had, he had soft balls for biceps and was just, he had guns. I mean, he was really, he had worked really hard, but then he eventually ran his own crew, and so he became the boss, if you will, the foreman of the harvest for the most part.

Steve McKay 24:25

Okay.

Bobby Mariano 24:25

We even went into the Arizona desert and harvested cantaloupes at one season. So, okay, you know, whatever, whatever, you know, just to keep everybody working so.

Steve McKay 24:38

Right, and [unintelligible]. Was he his crew, mainly all Filipino?

Bobby Mariano 24:44

Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

Steve McKay 24:48

And, and how was he able to do that move from kind of just, you know, packing worker to labor boss.

Bobby Mariano 24:55

I would say like anybody else, you know, he earned his way, you know, he was he learned he learned his way he was pretty respectful, but he certainly knew how to play hardball. So you never wanted to go there. So most people had a good idea what that was about because it was never about—he was was a very sweet person, but dangerous.

Steve McKay 25:25

How so?

Bobby Mariano 25:27

Because—just dangerous. It's all just dangerous.

Steve McKay 25:32

Okay and—

Bobby Mariano 25:33

And always armed.

Steve McKay 25:36

Okay. Wow. Okay. Did he talk about that as having to deal with interactions with other workers? Was it with—

Bobby Mariano 25:45

No, no, no, no, he wasn't—he didn't have he didn't have physical issues like that with his inner workings. He just was a man that was always armed. Once he came back from the army. He was always armed.

Steve McKay 25:57

Mm hmm.

Bobby Mariano 25:58

That's, that's just the way it was. You know, was something it it didn't—It was something.

Steve McKay 26:10

Okay. Yeah, I can imagine. So, yeah, so what I mean, what did he tell you about kind of his kind of working life again, the—

Bobby Mariano 26:23

In those days, you know, they had camps. That's how that all—they had cooks, they had a whole system. You know, they had cooks that went and purchased, and the bosses funded everything, you know, I mean, it was a it's an enterprise, because you got to you've got a whole crew of men that, you know, you have to feed them, you have to house them, you know, so that was a that was big business. There was local Pinoys that had property and they would, you know, create their own camps. You know, they were in Moss Landing and everywhere. A lot of it up the Pacific coast up toward Davenport that's, you know, there's a lot of Filipinos working up there. Brussel sprouts and things like that harvest, so.

Steve McKay 27:11

Right. So they—they so there's Pinoy workers, but also you're saying the crew bosses and others who helped organized the work, we're also Pinoy?

Bobby Mariano 27:20

Oh, yeah. Oh, for the most part. Sure. Yeah.

Steve McKay 27:23

Okay. Did that [unintelligible]—

Bobby Mariano 27:26

A friend of mine from Salinas, Barja—B, O, R, J, A—his his dad, that's what he did contracted, you know? So yeah, they it was all it was all an enterprise, if you will.

Steve McKay 27:39

Sure. Yeah. No, that's a lot to organize, and, like, to bring in a crop, you need a lot of people, you need a lot of, you know, organization and everything.

Bobby Mariano 27:48

Yeah, like they would rent a huge, you know, portion of a hotel in Phoenix. You know, because you got to house them, right. So, so someone has to put all that together.

Steve McKay 28:01

Okay, but your dad did—he was mainly organizing the work crews and in the field.

Bobby Mariano 28:06

Yeah, he would have his own crew, and then he was responsible for the harvest.

Steve McKay 28:10

So in his crew, did they—were they people he already knew no, or what, who made up—

Bobby Mariano 28:17

All town mates there is you'll find, the more you dig, you'll find that, you know, Ilocanos has had an in tendency to hang there, and Visayans over here, and you know what I'm saying?

Steve McKay 28:32

Yeah.

Bobby Mariano 28:32

So it was, you know, it was just, I mean, it certainly was not splintered, but it—but it was, you know, there were factions, let's say.

Steve McKay 28:44

Yeah, that's interesting, because your dad didn't really like, you know, connections back with the Ilocos, but you say he, his crew and the most of these people, were Ilokano speakers and Ilocanos.

Bobby Mariano 28:56

Well, he spoke he spoke most of them dialects plus, so he was pretty fluent in Spanish and spoke a little Japanese. So so yeah, he's, you know, he was for a third grade educated guy, he he he had a capacity to learn, so.

Bobby Mariano 29:14

Yeah, and he would have to if he's, you know, dealing with Japanese growers and, you know, Mexican laborers, Pinoys from different areas and stuff like that.

Bobby Mariano 29:24

Yeah. Well, the owners of the companies that he worked for he retired from Crosetti, which was a big company in Watsonville. A family in Watsonville. Interestingly enough, I went to school, you know, with their children. So, it was an interesting, dynamic. You know, there wasn't—there was racially, there was no racially charged issues in those days. It was like we were we should—or where we would have hoped to evolve today as we have not, but in those days it was just, you know, it was, it was a wonderful place to grow up with a what a varied bunch of folks, very ethnically so varied between, you know, between the Asian and the Oriental and the Yugoslavian, which is an interesting dynamic in the Italian in Watsonville, and it's just had the Okies and the Texans. And you know, it it's just, it was a very, they learned how to coalesce and live together, and it was a wonderful place to grow up. So I'm sorry for the children today that have to deal with this racial bias, if you will, because it was, it was brilliant of our community that we never really truly knew anything about a prejudice or anything about a lack there of or lesser than it was never. It was never part of our dynamic growing up, it was never a conversation. Isn't that interesting?

Steve McKay 31:05

It is, I mean, really [unintelligible].

Steve McKay 31:08

Mm hmm.

Bobby Mariano 31:08

They with such a little education, because they had very little at some were educated, but the most of the guys were just, basically just get me out of here. Right? So for the little that they were formally educated, how they, how they proposed to protect their offspring is amazing because we never grew up with any racial bias, nor did we have any racial—we never felt any disparity. I mean, the it showed itself. I mean, I've dealt with that. But my point is, is that in my generation, we didn't grow up with an attitude that we felt that we had been pressed down or suppressed, if you will. And we were the we were the little guy, and whoever else was, despite their color was the bad guy we ever had, that. There was never it was never part of the it was never even it was never part of the conversation.

Bobby Mariano 31:29

When I think about that, that's because you know, about Fermin Tobera, and you know, about peoples that have been killed innocently, and beaten and so on and so forth. Well, I would venture to say that in that time, that my father was probably armed before we went to the army. And that I'm just about bet that, but he said that the whole concept of have a harmonious upbringing and never knowing that you were really poor. Never knowing that, you know. I

mean, you know, we fished Palm Beach, Sunset Beach, and Watsonville we fish, you know, for dinner, you know, we were there to gather, you know, still nothing like, you know, surf perch, you know, just fry whole, my God, our sinigang. I mean, come on.

Steve McKay 31:50

I love sinigang.

Bobby Mariano 33:17

There you go. I mean, we were raised, you know, we were raised all the offspring, and I can think of the names and I can see the kids faces that I still am in contact with some of them. You know, I'm pretty old. We've lost a lot of them. So it was good. We had we had we had a great time growing up.

Steve McKay 33:41

Yeah, when did a lot of other—I always marvel at that to just how many different kinds of people in Watsonville, and you know, just a lot of different waves and groups. And then, you know, again, partly because there were so many—They were all men who came over. So were there a lot of mixed families then, White Filipino families?

Bobby Mariano 34:05

Yes. Both Yes. I think of several white women that were involved with Filipino men and and there were there were a Japanese women, mostly Hispanic, mostly Mexican women. If you think about it, they were the closest thing to pinay, they were brown, right? I mean, not just ethically but economically they were more inclined to be in, in in each other's area, if you will. And in an interesting thing, and you might have to monitor this. But there was a time where Hispanic men—Mexican men really weren't crazy about Filipino men. Because there was there was a time where Hispanic men were more macho and overbearing and in comes you know, you know, another little brown guy that's all dressed, hanging, you know, smiling, ready to, you know, whatever and, and Pinoys won often, you know, the women in that regards. So, on my street, on Lincoln Street, there was one white lady married to a Chinese fellow and he was an older Chinese man. There were Filipinos to Filipinos, Filipinos and whites, Chinese to Chinese makes Mexicans and and a whiter—White family or two.

Steve McKay 35:40

Mm Hmm

Bobby Mariano 35:41

So it was quite a good mix?

Steve McKay 35:45

Yeah, I mean, it's pretty amazing given like you're saying kind of the politics of the time and other places that it wasn't even legally legal for them to marry. You know, yet your block you can just you know, tick off all those families.

Bobby Mariano 35:59

Never there was there ever a conversation about poor me.

Steve McKay 36:04

Yeah.

Bobby Mariano 36:05

Why are you doing this to me? Why does this happen to little me? I'm, you know, so I've never bought into poor me know, if someone wants to say, well, you know, this particular ethnicity or that, I don't want to hear no, stand up, get up, you know, row your own boat, you know, haul your own water. That's how I was taught. And that's how it is. Yeah.

Steve McKay 36:29

Well, it's just such an interesting like, there. It was mixed to that degree that there were so many mixed families blended families

Bobby Mariano 36:36

And we had fun for no money. You know what, you know what a picnic was, you know what that term means?

Steve McKay 36:44

I think so, but please explain.

Bobby Mariano 36:45

Well, when when—So, for the most part. A picnic was a cockfight.

Steve McKay 36:52

Okay, okay.

Bobby Mariano 36:53

It was big time. fun for kids because we could be playing together like you know, in the sand dunes, if you will, or, or up in mountain up in Mount Madonna. You would never think that there'd be a cockfight, you know, but and then you know, you could buy you know, there would always be BBQ chicken always be, you know, some lumpia, always something you know, that just delicacies you know what I'm saying? And you just you just look for the suman, you know,

you ladies would make just such incredible. You know, you—so you look forward to that and you go play and, you know, you hope that your dad would make some money.

Steve McKay 37:43

[unintelligible] I think we you know,

Bobby Mariano 37:47

That in the 50s Let me tell you something, the Pinoys around Watsonville, Salinas, they would fly some of these guys to Nebraska, Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma. They flew a little Filipino out of out of Watsonville named Tommy Tabio, they would fly him because he was a knife maker and they wanted him to tie the knife. You know, so they would, they would they would? They would have huge events. I mean, they would come up with belt buckle events, literally belt buckle events. I can remember. Tommy, I helped him with a car buying scenario. And he says, I want you to have something. He says what do you want Bobby? He said, I want you want—Do you want a knife a knife, I said I said do you want some little side money? I said no. I'll take your handmade knife. So he gave me a beautiful scabbard. And the straps and the string and three handmade long knives I that I have two have to this day, I loaned one to another mestizo kid and a [unknown] guy, he lost it so or he sold it. I don't know. I don't know. Anyway, I won't tell you who he is. But but I you know, but that was that was big fun for us big fun.

Bobby Mariano 38:02

Okay, and so and so he he actually was a knife maker, and then he would, and they would—

Bobby Mariano 39:23

Fly him to go tie at these big events. And these's a white guys. And these are white guys that are big into these fightings, money guys.

Steve McKay 39:34

Right. And so he would come and he was the expert tire and knife me.

Bobby Mariano 39:39

Oh, yeah.

Steve McKay 39:41

Wow.

Bobby Mariano 39:42

Absolutely.

Steve McKay 39:43

And so that was kind of for your family—and for the kids—that was kind of a regular weekend activity?

Bobby Mariano 39:50

That was a very big activity that happens very often. It's everywhere.

Steve McKay 39:58

[unintelligible] Could you just like, You know, walk me through one d—one particular one that you remember what was the day like when it was Picnic Day? And you know, what did you look forward to? What what are the sights and smells of that?

Bobby Mariano 40:12

I can I can remember seeing my father inside the ring holding his rooster, you know, that which was by the way was my rooster. Because I had a, I had my rooster was named Blackie. He was a three time winner. I remember that specifically. Because when he dropped, you know, when it's time to let them go, he released his bird. But I looked forward to the food and the kids that you would, you know, all the kids that you would, that you grew up with, they're going to be there, you know, for the most part because even if they're dad didn't participate, you know, it was a social event, you know, for the women too. So—

Steve McKay 40:56

And so did it was there a whole you know, like beforehand the food before the cockfights was a during the—

Bobby Mariano 41:03

Food was all during every day, all through the day. They're cooking, they're cooking, they're cooking, you know, big pot of rice, you know, a nice half chicken, you know, grilled just right, you know, they're mopping it in between, you know, they put in this sauce in this, but oh my goodness. Oh, yeah, but the I looked forward to that.

Steve McKay 41:28

Mm hmm. Did you help with either the cooking or the cockfight?

Bobby Mariano 41:31

Oh, no, no, no, no. No, none of that. They did—The kids had nothing to do with that. You just know that when it was when your rooster was fighting, so.

Steve McKay 41:42

Uh huh.

Bobby Mariano 41:42

You would watch.

Steve McKay 41:44

Okay.

Bobby Mariano 41:44

it is a brutal sport. It's brutal bro. It's a brutal sport.

Steve McKay 41:49

When I was in the Philippines, they you know, still have it. And so my cousin's took me to a cockfighting ring in, in Manila. And, and, yeah, and it's, it's brutal. And there, it's, you know, it's institutionalized. So it's a whole arena and everything like that. So—

Bobby Mariano 42:08

Sure.

Steve McKay 42:09

And so, yeah, you saw the whole thing with the knives and everything. How did it how did you feel when your rooster was actually fighting? Were you scared for your rooster, for Blackie? Or were you excited?

Bobby Mariano 42:22

Well, you you know you're gonna root for your own your own chicken, you know? That's like, it's like. Yeah, I mean, it's exciting. You know, that we lost birds too, you know, and my grandma I can remember. She lived in the back house. She my, my black rooster. She had to stitch him twice, you know? But he, she would. It's just crazy. She would take a big bunch of Vaseline and clean the wound, smear it with Vaseline, and sew it with regular needle and thread. This is like oh my God, and that bird would live to fight again. So—

Steve McKay 43:00

Wow. That is wow. Wow. And so when those kinds of days you kids just kind of ran around and just played and—

Bobby Mariano 43:10

We were in extremes cause they—it was remote. You know, you're—and and and Pinoys would pay off the local sheriffs because they were corrupt, come on, they were corrupt. I mean, the chief of police here I won't tell you his name, but the chief of police, you know, they had all on Union Street on Watsonville it was all business ladies so so he ran that program so it was a corrupt—so anyway, little town so you had to just play the game, I guess. So they they would

pay off the local sheriff's or whoever they needed to and sometimes it didn't work you know, they'd get raided. You know, everyone got flying and running scared. I was never part of that. I'd never we never got that I can remember ever had to run inducted any of that stuff, but it happened. happened.

Steve McKay 44:10

Yeah. That's—

Bobby Mariano 44:11

And and then the if there were birthdays or christenings or whatever the event, you know, they like to gather and dance and they did a lot of that at the—right there in the center of American Legion. They did a lot of that.

Steve McKay 44:30

So there was a pretty big organization, right? I mean, formal membership organizations.

Bobby Mariano 44:36

Oh, yeah, there's the—there was all different types of lodges. There was the Dimas-Alang, Legionarios del Trabajo, and there was a Masonic portion of it also. So there was all these different little—and then there was a there was the you know the—a whole building off of Freedom Boulevard that was dedicated to the Filipino community, they bought the land they built, built it. And so there was they had their own Filipino community, they had their own floats on the f—on the July 4. You know, my dad was, was the was the president once or twice and, and their pictures are there in, in the hall. So it was quite a community, quite a community. But the but the amazing part of it to this instance is how, with so little education, they managed to not bring their hard times and make it a negative for us children. We were never affected how maybe other people's might be, we could have been, but they chose to just shield that or protect us from that it's amazing job that they did.

Steve McKay 46:05

Yeah, yeah. You never know—when you're a kid is just your kid, right? You don't think about all those things that you know, trouble or other than that you're just out playing and, and doing those kinds of stuff.

Bobby Mariano 46:15

Right.

Steve McKay 46:16

I was curious, did your mom learn how to make Filipino food? Or you know, like, how was your mom's interaction with the Filipino community?

Bobby Mariano 46:25

My mom belong to the the the the women's portion of the Filipino community. So for a long time, so cook wise, my mother was not a good cook. My father was the cook. So she really didn't cook much Filipino at all—Filipino food. So my father made such good pork adobo that at the fairgrounds, In September, the Filipino community had their own little private booth. And he would sell pork adobo and steamed rice, bowl of rice and laugh. I can remember him saying can you believe this boy? Because you remember, he had gone through this prejudice and my father-in-law wasn't thrilled and all the things, but he says, Can you believe—he'd show me the line of you know, mostly, you know, white folks really. He says, Look their—they gotta pay XYZ for my pork adobo. Can you believe it? One time several decades earlier, you know, they might have hated on him, you know what I'm saying?

Steve McKay 47:45

Yeah.

Bobby Mariano 47:46

But once again, that that, whatever hard times the elders must have endured. They never put that on us. And I think that that was just a phenomenon. If you think about it, it's phenomenal.

Steve McKay 48:04

Yeah, no—

Steve McKay 48:05

Yeah. Yeah. No, that's—

Bobby Mariano 48:05

[unintelligible] learned people see, they weren't learned, sophisticated, educated, but they were very smart.

Bobby Mariano 48:18

Humble. Always humble. [unintelligible]

Steve McKay 48:22

That's so I, [unintelligible] So can you talk a little bit more about your childhood and, you know, things like that. We talked a lot about your parents and so, so. So where like, was the first house that you remember growing up in.

Bobby Mariano 48:41

60 Lincoln Street.

Steve McKay 48:42

Okay. Uh huh.

Bobby Mariano 48:43

60 Lincoln Street, but I was privy to a private education. I went to a Catholic grammar school. Ages one, I mean, grades one through eight. My parents, you know, were common laborers, but they were able to put me through a private school and I graduated from a private Catholic high school that is now defunct, but that was there in Watsonville. So you got a pretty basic solid, you know, education if you will by the nuns. I mean they made sure that you figured it out.

Steve McKay 49:25

Where did your parents—were they regular churchgoers and that why they sent you to Catholic—

Bobby Mariano 49:31

Interesting thing my father was, was a Catholic. So I was baptized Catholic and confirmed Catholic. My mother was a Christian. Neither went to church that I can remember. I can remember my my dad would pray that his chicken would win, you know But, you know, it's it's pretty real. And then if I, you know, want to baptized or went to my confirmation my parents were there, but not avid—certainly not regular at all church goers. But God was always in our house. I mean, so we're a Christian family

Steve McKay 50:25

Why do you think they sent you to Catholic school?

Bobby Mariano 50:29

They did, because in retrospect, I think that it made them feel really good that they, they neither neither one of them my mother didn't graduate high school, and neither one of them had a education that was worth discussing. Because it wasn't certainly not brag about I might have a third grade education, you know, no, I, I got through my sophomore year. Well, no, that's typically stuff they don't brag about. So the idea that, that they could do a manual type labor work yet put me in a private school. I think it was an ego thing. It got—to be honest with you. I think it was that. But I think that they really knew that I was pretty spoiled. And I needed all the discipline they could could possibly, you know, put on me. I mean, I needed every bit, I got kicked out of the school in the eighth grade. Okay, so when I took it to the max, okay. There's no point in asking me what I did, because I'm not going to tell you. But you know, it got me kicked out and that's that, I guess it's still a little embarrassing, but—

Steve McKay 51:52

I mean, we all do things like that. So—have colorful childhoods or whatever, but are there other so the other students before you got kicked out in your elementary school, also kind of similar background as you?

Bobby Mariano 52:06

Oh yeah a lot, a lot. A lot of a lot of Filipino kids went to that school. Like I'm telling you, man, it was, you know, I think that it had to do with just, you know, feeling good about where you were, you know, as a parent being able to do something that wasn't able to be done for you for them.

Steve McKay 52:28

Sure, yeah. Yeah, I think it really is an immigrant story of, you know, kind of—

Bobby Mariano 52:33

This absolute mindset is exactly what it is. Everyone said to my father, this is a [unintelligible], I'm an only child. So everyone said to my father, you're ruining that boy, you're spoiling him. So in 1962, my father's work in the fields, but I drove a brand new Thunderbird, right before that, 1961 He bought me a 1960 Impala, and it was way too fast. So it had in those days, they call that a factory load, which was three two barrel carburetors, racing cam, solid lifters, positraction four speed on the floor, and you know, drive too fast and too radical. And he said, You're gonna kill yourself. So I bought me a new Thunderbird. I never worked. I never—He wouldn't let me have a paper route. He wouldn't let me do anything like that. He said, You know, you don't need to do that. He says, and everybody, and I got everything. I mean, I had nice clothes. It was it was just brilliant. Spoiled rotten. Yet, the irony is that here's the interesting, irony always comes back to get you. So the very peers, my dad and mother's peers. You're ruining that boy. Their children never did a thing for them. I'm telling you, not a thing. I came back from the army. I had a little over \$2,000 that I'd been managed to bundle. And I think my my parents needed a little help. So I just gave him all my money, and gave him all my money. I don't know. I guess I'm spacing on that one's— Wow.

Steve McKay 54:23

Well, no, I mean, your parents are generous and loving like that. You mean—

Bobby Mariano 54:28

You took too long. Also, the point was, I'm sorry. So So I came back gave him all my money. And, and never did not always look out for him. And my, my father's [unknown], if you will, their kids never did anything for you know, until the day they die they were draining them. I mean, they were you know, you know, my, I throw my dad \$100 bill and he just say, Well—I just say you know, you probably need a new bowling ball or something, you know, you know, I mean We had, you know, we had a we had a, he got a good payback, let's just put it like that, for all

of the gloom and doom that he was being I was gonna ruin me. And I probably was a real piece of work, but all worked out. Okay.

Steve McKay 55:16

Now that's, that's, uh, yeah, that's Wow.

Bobby Mariano 55:20

Because the, the immigrant portion of that is is that you know you'd use that term earlier you know, there's a certain mindset to being an immigrant and and give my father said he can have what I never got. And that was and that that was the that was the that was the that was the way it was. Yeah. So

Steve McKay 55:41

Did he—Tell, like obviously that car, both cars, meant a lot to you and to him. Was that just something you guys shared? Or was it your you know, kind of passion and he decided—

Bobby Mariano 55:52

Yuo have to understand something, in the certain time frames in these Filipinos that came here. They didn't really care about owning most of the boys didn't care about owning anything other than nice clothes and a nice car. So that—the idea of growing a business didn't occur to most of them—to some, and they obviously flourished and and did better than everybody else, but the mindset was, you know, a nice car. My father would have never bought a house. If it weren't for my mother. We would never have a home. Oh, no, just as soon as a new car. That was his deal. You know, it may it made him feel good. And he like nice stuff. Well, whatever rang his bell was how that's what happened.

Steve McKay 56:48

Did he did he drive a nice car when you're growing up?

Bobby Mariano 56:51

Always drove a nice car. Sure always. Sure. He always did. Yeah, of course.

Steve McKay 57:00

Do you remember what kind of cars he had? Or what he had?

Bobby Mariano 57:02

He had Rivas you know. I mean, I've had Corvettes. He'd drive my vette, he'd drive my—I had his I had a cad—a convertible. He had privy to that. Anything, it didn't matter. It was all nice cars, man. He had to have a nice car.

Steve McKay 57:22

And nice clothes. They dressed really nice.

Bobby Mariano 57:25

Sure, for certain, for sure. Yeah, but still very humble. Very humble. Yeah.

Steve McKay 57:32

And what—why was that just partly because they've worked so hard during the week that that that they wanted outward kind of reminders of kind of that? Or, you know—

Bobby Mariano 57:44

That's hard to say. That's hard to say, man, I don't know what provoked any of that mindset. You know, I just know that. I've heard my mother say more than once, if, if I hadn't put my foot down, you know, we'd had another new new car and no home, you know? No. So however, that mindset got him to where it was just maybe it just made him feel really good to be riding in nothing but style. So—

Steve McKay 58:19

Well [unintelligible]

Bobby Mariano 58:23

He drove my vette in the Filipino for, you know, our version—Filipino community. He was the president. I think at the time he's driving my my little vette in, you know, you know, is hitting the throttle and come on.

Steve McKay 58:38

He would drive it in the big parade.

Bobby Mariano 58:41

Yeah, yeah. Yea, fun things to remember.

Steve McKay 58:47

Yeah. That is that is fun. Yeah, were you involved in the kind of parade stuff as well and—

Bobby Mariano 58:53

No, to be honest with you, I didn't get involved in the Filipino community there in Watsonville, at all. And the reason I didn't is there was a time and it was a short time, but there was a time and it wasn't when my father was president, that there was some real issues in the local community. The issue being that there were those that just come over from the islands that were pretty fresh, and those that had made this their community and their home, and some of

the ideas and how to go about doing things weren't gelling really well with the older faction. So, there was a lot of there was a lot of inner—there was some turmoil going on. And I purposely stayed away from that because I I don't,— don't want to hear that, you know, don't say anything. So, I might cause some more trouble than not, so better to just stay away, then that's what I opted to do. And then when they would have nice feast or something, you know, go get some pancit or things that I don't know, cook every day, you know. That's about the only time I would go around. Always, certainly more than welcome, and I knew everybody, but—

Steve McKay 1:00:15

That's, like, between the newcomer cause that's, like post 65 when the more people—

Bobby Mariano 1:00:25

We're talking about post 75, you know, or 1980 even.

Bobby Mariano 1:00:32

You know, yeah, there was issues that were going on, there was actually a one physical, one physical scenario and where my cousin got his leg hurt, with a with an outbreak. So, once again, there's that settled itself, and it resolved itself, but it was the old day, you know, basically, and the old, the old school against the new thought, you know.

Steve McKay 1:00:32

Mm Hmm.

Steve McKay 1:01:02

W—was it over kind of the organization's or what what—

Bobby Mariano 1:01:05

Yeah, basically about how to go about growing, you know, the the the community, and I can't really get into it, because I'm not—I wasn't really that privy to what was really going on, because I specifically tried to stay away. Be—stay ignorant of it, and I did pretty good. I just, I just knew, you know—

Steve McKay 1:01:32

[unintelligible] something between the families that had been there a long time.

Bobby Mariano 1:01:36

Yeah, and the newcomers. And so I don't you know, I just did don't say anything about my father don't, but I don't want to hear anything like that. So yeah, my father had a funny thing. He says, If it hits my ear wrong, you know, and then you found another side of him that you didn't like, so I didn't want it to hit my ear, so, at all. So, all in all it's been—it's been the

transition it evolved. And then I'm sure that it's going well, I I knew about a party for an older lady a week or so ago. I specifically didn't go because of COVID and all this stuff, but I just you know, might as well stay away.

Steve McKay 1:02:30

Yeah, no, be safe and things. Absolutely. Yeah. Okay, well, maybe if it's okay. Just a little more, you know, we talked a little bit about your school and stuff like that, and fill in. So, besides picnics and stuff, what kind of, you know, what were you, what was Watsonville like? So did you—at what point did you move from that—the first house? Were you there? When did your parents buy the house?

Bobby Mariano 1:02:57

In—lets see around 1958, 1959 something like that we had our own place, out in the, in the country, if you will.

Steve McKay 1:03:11

Okay, and what was that? What was the address there?

Bobby Mariano 1:03:15

55 Meredith Way.

Steve McKay 1:03:17

Okay.

Bobby Mariano 1:03:18

55 Meredith way is out in the Lake View district out by St. Francis School in the that the foot of Mount Madonna, if you will.

Steve McKay 1:03:33

And that was your mom's influencing, we need a house.

Bobby Mariano 1:03:37

Believe me if that's the only reason we ever got a home. Absolutely, of our own, I mean, we shared like I said with my grandparents. Yeah.

Steve McKay 1:03:45

Yeah. That's—did your grandparents stay at the other house?

Bobby Mariano 1:03:50

Until they both passed. Yeah.

Steve McKay 1:03:54

And so growing up, it was just—cuz your only child, it was just you and your parents at the new place.

Bobby Mariano 1:04:00

My parents and then my parents are such wonderful people. There was another mestizo kid who his mom wasn't around, and his dad was having some difficulty keeping him. And so my parents raised him and kept him in school with me for for years. We both went to private high school. I mean, private, private, elementary school, Catholic school. And my parents, you know, like I said, they weren't making big money. They figured it out. So, and then then we they looked after another one of my dad's friends, children, last couple of years of high school for me. So, they were always kind of just looking out for everybody.

Steve McKay 1:04:50

Yeah, that's incredibly generous for them.

Bobby Mariano 1:04:54

Absolutely. Yeah.

Steve McKay 1:04:57

You grew up with kind of—sort of sibling's or, you know—

Bobby Mariano 1:05:01

He wanted to—I was just rotten you know, they just tried to get me as assimilated and as social as possible, you know, because they created a they knew they had a problem so I'm certainly didn't fight them i mean i i love the attention and I was just ruined. So yeah, they tried to socialize me as best they can, you know inevitably and eventually it worked out they they were right.

Steve McKay 1:05:29

That's great and so by then your dad was still working as a labor boss through this whole—

Bobby Mariano 1:05:33

How old was my dad, he was probably 68 or 70 maybe, when he retired from Crosetti.

Steve McKay 1:05:43

Oh, when he was at Corsetti he didn't he didn't have to move around nearly as much he was—

Bobby Mariano 1:05:50

No no, no towards the end. No, no that going, going to El Centro, Brawley, Yuma all those places he didn't have to do that, but he was a local operation for the most part.

Steve McKay 1:06:06

Well, Corsetti, it was a really big operation.

Bobby Mariano 1:06:08

A pretty big operation. Yeah.

Steve McKay 1:06:12

Did you ever go with him to work? Did you or did he keep you away from all that?

Bobby Mariano 1:06:17

For the most part, he took me. He took me into the fields in the summer when we harvested cantaloupes and it was it was really a very, very tedious job. And I was really young and pretty strong. So it was I was doing just fine the first day until the until the owner showed up. There was three brothers that own this business called the arena brothers out of Salinas. And he saw he says, Bob, is that your? Is that Bobby on that truck? And he said, Get him off. You're gonna kill him out here. Yeah, he's trying to teach me the value of \$1. So I was I think I made 50 cents an hour. And he says, put him in the shed on the ice trucks, meaning when the trucks come in from the fields, you throw huge blocks of ice in the water, make sure there's water because dehydration you know, and then because it's really hot, man, it's 10, always 100 plus. Always. And this uh, you got salt tablets that you got to make sure that's there and ice water. Then I got a 25 cent an hour bump just knowing the boss right. So I just got to sit waiting for the trucks to cut the ice, chip the ice, put it in it, boom. I made more money all the time. My father really didn't. He didn't. He wasn't big on me working doing anything. said you know—

Steve McKay 1:08:00

I'm working just so you don't have to.

Steve McKay 1:08:01

I'm taking care of it. You're covered for right now enjoy it. Boy, was he right.

Steve McKay 1:08:12

Okay, so so then your your schooling, you went to Catholic school through the eighth grade—

Bobby Mariano 1:08:22

Actually, I graduated out of a Catholic High School.

Steve McKay 1:08:25

Oh, okay.

Bobby Mariano 1:08:26

I went to a year of junior college and I said this isn't me. I joined the Army.

Steve McKay 1:08:32

Okay, what year was that?

Bobby Mariano 1:08:34

66. 63 to 66

Steve McKay 1:08:36

Wow. Okay, and and and what was that like? Where—was that the first time I had you spent time outside of Watsonville much before that?

Bobby Mariano 1:08:48

No, no, no, I went right—I went right to I went to Fort Ord ironically, I did my my basic at Fort Ord, and I ended up in Texas for my advanced training and then I went to Germany for the better part of two and a half years. Did well in the army. Turned down a really nice opportunity and just if I were to re-enlist, but I opted to not and I played music as a living until I was in my 30s as a musician.

Steve McKay 1:09:28

What did you play?

Bobby Mariano 1:09:30

As a drummer.

Steve McKay 1:09:31

Oh, okay.

Bobby Mariano 1:09:32

So that's, that's that's what I did as a as a as a teenager and and got to be a decent pretty decent little drummer and then that's what I ended up doing was playing until I was in my early 30s.

Steve McKay 1:09:48

Okay, how did you start—when did you start drumming and how did you get into—

Bobby Mariano 1:09:53

I decided that I was just drawn to it and my parents bought me a beautiful set of Slingerland drums with no drum lesson nothing. Zildjian cymbals the best of everything, taught myself how to play. Played with guys that ended up in Steely Dan and the Doobie Brothers. Corny Bumpus has since past, Corny Bumpus, out of Santa Cruz ended up playing initially with Steve—the Doobie Brothers and then passed on a gig on his way home from Steely Dan gigs. Traveled and recorded with them, but I played a lot of good guys and until I couldn't afford to do that any longer. So some people make it, most don't.

Steve McKay 1:10:47

Had you hope—where you trying to—

Bobby Mariano 1:10:50

I was, you know, I was I was supporting a family. I might be on the road for four or five months at a time, but but I mean, I've paid my bills, so.

Steve McKay 1:11:04

That's great, and what kind of so mainly rock music or what were you playing?

Bobby Mariano 1:11:10

Yeah, well, a lot of r&b, a lot of blues, a lot of funk, you know, so pretty pretty pretty varied. Then I—then I started doing mostly a lot of vocal work. So, I'm still doing that right as we speak. I just worked for this Friday, the seventh at the Ahoy Hotel in Santa Clara.

Steve McKay 1:11:39

Oh, okay and in your own band, or what were you?

Bobby Mariano 1:11:42

It was a it was our first outing as a duo. I got a keyboard player that sings, plays left handed bass, we use a drum machine, i'm playing a percussion instrument, Electronic Wave drama, they call it you know, basically computer, and sang, so.

Steve McKay 1:12:10

That's great. I didn't realize.

Bobby Mariano 1:12:13

Yeah, I mean, I mean, I'm retired. I was in automobile motorhome business for years and years. So, but I, I've managed to dabble and stay playing and singing all these years.

Steve McKay 1:12:27

That's fantastic. Yeah, were you playing with people in Watsonville and Santa Cruz when you started?

Bobby Mariano 1:12:34

Geez, when I started, there were some country boys out in Prunedale that started banging around and then I—in those days, there wasn't a lot of bands, you know, then I mean, in Santa Cruz, there was a relatively popular local group in those days named Snail that actually had got some traction, mostly a local attraction, but they were in the garage when I was playing five nights a week in Santa Cruz. They were just banging you know, their heads against the wall, and I was—that was what I was told. I was playing five nights a week for a year at a time in Santa Cruz. That's what we did. We played clubs, you know.

Steve McKay 1:13:19

What clubs in Santa Cruz, what were they?

Bobby Mariano 1:13:21

They're gone. The interlude was one of the fun—most fun venues in Santa Cruz County. Was on Pacific Avenue when Pacific Avenue was a two way traffic, now It's a one way one way street and we would play five nights a week from 9:30 to 1:30. Can you imagine that, five nights a week. It was a it was a it was a magical time because it was prior to all the homeless issues, all the drug addiction, all the mental things that are happening in our county as we speak. It was a time when at quarter to two in the morning—It was really close to the old St. George Hotel, which is still there—you could just step outside and on Pacific Avenue and no one would ever think about it asking you for or hassling you or certainly nothing. I mean, it was a it was a golden era in those days. Another Club was the Colonial Inn, which is across the street from Denny's on Ocean Avenue. It's now a real estate firm. It was a an eatery, an Italian restaurant, at one time, a Italian restaurant and a really very popular bar dance venue. We're there, you know, five nights a week for over a year at a time. So, the irony is is that you if you don't do that, as the young come up, they're the ones become the popular is that goes. Now most of them, they don't even know the old man. So that that's cool, too. They, every once in a while they bump into me and say, who are you? [unintelligible]

Steve McKay 1:13:27

So when you came back from the army, you came back to Watsonville to live to? Why did you come back to Watsonville?

Bobby Mariano 1:15:27

It's home I didn't have any other idea. I'm still the only child, you know, come back and and helped my folks out with some money and and then I went on and, you know, proceeded to get married and divorced and things like that happen. Life happens.

Steve McKay 1:15:48

Yeah, sure. Sure and so you always—so you always lived in the Santa Cruz county and state?

Bobby Mariano 1:15:55

Yes, for the most part.

Steve McKay 1:15:58

Yeah. That's that's that's that's great. Um, let's see, well, um, you know, other things, so how for you, kind of, has the Filipino community you said you've been part of it some did your family stay close with some families? Or, you know, you said your dad was—

Bobby Mariano 1:16:23

Oh, sure. They my father stayed—they would go and still play cards that, you know, at the community, you know, this still became a gathering place, they put [unintelligible] in the back there. So oh, yeah, they until they, you know, they just died. Everybody dies, you know, they just passed all our friends on a lot of the children's that they were thinking that was gonna do such a great job for those kids are gone. You know, so, there's been a lot of there's been a lot of fruition, if you will.

Steve McKay 1:17:01

Yeah, so a lot of families after that moved out of the area, right, they just didn't stay?

Bobby Mariano 1:17:06

Honestly, they didn't.

Steve McKay 1:17:08

Oh, okay.

Bobby Mariano 1:17:09

In fact, you know, names that come to mind. You know, Phil Roxas is still there in Watsonville. I mean, there's so many, you know, local kids that they're still pretty close.

Steve McKay 1:17:24

And you still see them at some of these—

Bobby Mariano 1:17:27

Little events here and there. Mostly, this whole you know, this whole Watsonville

Steve McKay 1:17:39

In the heart, yeah.

Bobby Mariano 1:17:40

Yeah, In the heart, the attention, you know, that that's fairly fairly fresh, but no, we've always stayed pretty close. Pretty close.

Steve McKay 1:17:52

Yeah. That's great. I mean, it's, I know, it's not easy with people going and then you know, I think—

Bobby Mariano 1:17:58

Yeah, yeah. I mean, then, you know, I'm 77. So, you know, Phil was 78, Phil Roxas. So there's, you know, that he's lost his brother and, you know, a lot of us are no longer here.

Steve McKay 1:18:14

Yeah, I'm supposed to—I met I met Phil a couple times, and I think I'm gonna line up to interview him as well. So that should be—do you know him from school or just—

Bobby Mariano 1:18:25

I know him from forever.

Steve McKay 1:18:27

Uh huh.

Bobby Mariano 1:18:27

I knew his daddy. His daddy, they—we were neighbors. They were the next street over.

Bobby Mariano 1:18:36

There was a whole enclave that was just, you know, it was just like, when I went to Kauai was like old home week. You know, I just looked around at all these brown faces and this smile and you know, I'm thinking this is—and, you know, and the food is very similar huh, so.

Steve McKay 1:18:36

Oh, okay.

Steve McKay 1:18:54

Yeah, well, there's so many Filipinos in Hawai'i. Yeah, even at Costco when I went, there's a little St—local section that you could find longganisa, you know, all these kind of things.

Bobby Mariano 1:19:09

Exactly.

Steve McKay 1:19:10

Yeah, that was that was really nice. Yeah, hopefully I get to talk to Phil. So he was part of the group in that—in your neighborhood.

Bobby Mariano 1:19:18

Oh, yes. He was on Coolidge Street, was one street over.

Steve McKay 1:19:22

Okay. So the kids all hung out then when they're—

Bobby Mariano 1:19:25

Oh, yeah we go—we all grew up played together went to school together.

Steve McKay 1:19:30

Yeah. I've heard that from a number of folks, you know, just the in the neighborhood the kids just, kind of, all running around and, you know, especially around Riverside and that area.

Bobby Mariano 1:19:42

Yeah, which was bridge Bridge Street.

Steve McKay 1:19:45

Yeah, that you were saying, and that is just just where people happen to live or the parents know each other and that's why they all—

Bobby Mariano 1:19:52

I just think that that was that was probably the area that was the most affordable. Like I said, there weren't you know, it wasn't it was the it was the working class neighborhoods that we grew up in. We were working class, you know, we didn't know, you know, we didn't really know there were different classes. You know, but you, you know how that evolves, you come to find—you hear terms like, you hear one of the kids that goes to private school with you, well, we went to Tahoe. I'm thinking where's Tahoe, you know, because the idea of young mestizo skiing was come on, man that, you don't even think about that kind of stuff, right? That's not part of your reality. It's just not. It's like, there was only one pinoy that I knew that played tennis, you know, that wasn't part of our reality. You know, that was kind of like, I don't know any Filipinos that played golf. They played with the roosters, you know, they could afford these things. You know, it's an it's an Estrada. It's an economic strada thing, you know?

Bobby Mariano 1:21:13

How much does it cost you to go to the beach? You couldn't afford a boat? I made sure I bought more than one boat when I was older because I always thought how cool that would be. And yes, it's cool. It's very cool. To bring your own salmon, you know. So yeah, very cool. No, fish the beach, it cost nothing. It was another playground.

Steve McKay 1:21:30

And fishing right? Fishing was a big thing.

Steve McKay 1:21:35

It was a big family affair. Everyone would go and—

Bobby Mariano 1:21:42

No, no, not necessarily. My mom wasn't big to go, you know, get her feet much in the sand, but a lot of a lot of Pinoys and then as I grew up, I fish by myself often. You know, I found that that solitude that you've some might enjoy in that regard. You can certainly find old Pinoys still throwing out there

Steve McKay 1:22:08

Yeah. Still, out—

Bobby Mariano 1:22:12

Those old Pinoys are now me. Old mestizos It's kind of fun how that evolved.

Steve McKay 1:22:19

Yeah. Yeah, no, that is interesting. Well, so yeah, we've covered a lot of ground, but were there other, like, I don't know, stories that you like, particularly stand out that you, you know, really want to make sure are kind of—

Bobby Mariano 1:22:38

Well, the main thing that I want to share, and I think I have is, is that despite whatever prejudices, despite whatever hardships, despite whatever, tough times, economically, our community, the Filipino community, was able to keep its head, you know, Filipinos didn't create trouble, they don't cause—they were very respectful. You know, we're pretty conservative, if you will, really, in general. I think that the takeaway should be that came up people that were hard pressed, really needed to to to get a leg up, if you will and despite prejudices and despite rioting, maybe a little rioting and then some whatever, you know, bad things, they never brought an attitude and a poor me and why did this have to happen? They were never the victim. That's what I want of all things to share that very proud, very happy go lucky, very easy to smile, very low maintenance people, man, you know, very proud. So it's a yeah, I'm proud of them. That's the that should be the takeaway.

Steve McKay 1:24:16

Yeah. Yeah. Well, it's it's it's an amazing opportunity for me to get to hear, you know, people talk about their community, especially really, it it was, and is, and one that just hasn't been recorded. And so—

Bobby Mariano 1:24:35

It was magical. It was a very magical time. It'll never come again, but the takeaway, like I said, is little people with maybe a bone to pick but no victim mentality, and no hard feelings. Very honorable. So, however however small people in terms of for the world would look at us a huge presence, that—of honor and fun. So there it is.

Steve McKay 1:25:19

Absolutely. Okay. Well, this is, you know, it's been, it's been really fun. I've really enjoyed it—your story, it's fantastic. And, and if there's anything that occurs to you after that you want to talk about or we could, you know, do that, you know, another time, but I will send you by email, a copy of the, the consent form, and then there's just a background info sheet with just some information, a lot of it you shared with me, but if you could just fill that out that you get the archive, right. So the idea, again, is this will all—the recording and the transcript, and then it would live in the digital archive, so that people who wanted to do research or, you know, even family that want these stories would be able to get it. And then yeah, if there are objects or things that you want to share are like photos for the archive, and even objects so we could photograph objects that you might have, that we could then you know, preserve that way, anything like that, we can set up a time where we can come with a scanner and some photo equipment to your house

Bobby Mariano 1:26:40

The Watsonville library has many of my own artifacts, though.

Steve McKay 1:26:45

Oh, okay.

Bobby Mariano 1:26:46

My father's World War Two dress uniform, and so

Steve McKay 1:26:50

Fantastic. Okay. Yeah. So, and I know, the grad students who are part of that, will—we're cataloguing some of that as well. So, we might be in touch to make sure we get the right materials and things like that.

Bobby Mariano 1:27:05

Okay.

Steve McKay 1:27:06

And I actually remember meeting you at freedom and one of the first times they did the collection, and you brought those knives.

Bobby Mariano 1:27:15

That's right.

Steve McKay 1:27:16

Those are amazing. So and I know they couldn't display them, right, because they wouldn't allow it or something like that, but it would it be—we would love to have that as part of the archive in terms of just a photo of them.

Bobby Mariano 1:27:30

You know, I'm might just if there was a place to donate them, you know, they're really artwork.

Steve McKay 1:27:38

Yeah, I remember seeing them and did exactly—

Bobby Mariano 1:27:41

[unintelligible of how sharp they are. It's—they're—It's amazing. Their—

Steve McKay 1:27:49

Well we'll, again, I don't know, when we do have our big exhibit will be probably in two years, at the MAH, I don't know if they have the same, you know, kind of restrictions on what can be displayed, but that might be something I mean, I think it was—

Bobby Mariano 1:28:08

Such a ridiculous that they wouldn't let you show that because it's it's kind of like, it's kind of like a you know, there's certain weaponry, you know, that that are just Pinoy, you know, butterfly knives, you know.

Steve McKay 1:28:23

That's right. That's—

Bobby Mariano 1:28:24

How—I've got it, you know?

Steve McKay 1:28:26

Yeah.

Bobby Mariano 1:28:26

You know, I mean, this is from the islands. This should be seen, you know.

Steve McKay 1:28:33

Yeah, yeah. So, anyway, we'll—I have to find out, that's a little [unintelligible]. Maybe we can just photograph them first to be part of the digital collection. And then, you know, we'll see about actually displaying them might be a possibility.

Bobby Mariano 1:28:48

Well, whatever, whatever is legal.

Steve McKay 1:28:53

That's right. Okay, bye. Well, it was really a pleasure to talk and—

Bobby Mariano 1:28:59

My pleasure.

Steve McKay 1:29:00

Well, we'll see you at the next meeting and you know, I'll find you over by the pancit and the sinigang.

Bobby Mariano 1:29:05

You sure will. Thank you very much.

Steve McKay 1:29:09

And anytime you want to get in touch with me, you know, let me know. Anything about the project you want to know about or you know—

Bobby Mariano 1:29:16

Nice. Well, thank you for your your great energy, my brother. Thank you.

Steve McKay 1:29:21

Okay. All right and and we'll be in touch again in about scanning photos if you had [unintelligible] photos.

Bobby Mariano 1:29:27

Okay.

Steve McKay 1:29:28

Okay.

Bobby Mariano 1:29:29

Got it.

Steve McKay 1:29:29

Okay, Bobby—

Bobby Mariano 1:29:31

Aloha.

Steve McKay 1:29:32

Aloha.