

UC Santa Cruz

Oral History Collaborations

Title

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio Jr. interviewed by Toby Baylon and Nicholas Nasser

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7mt2z0rz>

Authors

Recio, Dioscoro, Jr.

Baylon, Toby

Nasser, Nicholas

Publication Date

2021-05-01

Supplemental Material

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7mt2z0rz#supplemental>

Data Availability

The data associated with this publication are in the supplemental files.

Dioscoro “Roy” Respino Recio Jr. interviewed by Toby Baylon and Nicholas Nasser

Speakers: Dioscoro “Roy” Respino Recio Jr., Toby Baylon, Nicholas Nasser

Date: May 1, 2021

Scope and Contents: In this interview recorded via Zoom, Dioscoro "Roy" Respino Recio Jr. speaks with Toby Baylon and Nicholas Nasser, two members of the Watsonville is in the Heart project team. Recio details his experience growing up in Watsonville in the late 1960s and 1970s. In particular, he discusses his experience growing up with a disability in a low-income, working class neighborhood of Watsonville known as Mesa Village. He also discusses his father's immigration history from the Philippines to the United States to pursue work as an agricultural laborer. Recio details his mother's experience as a mixed-race Filipina who grew up in an orphanage. He also details his work as a community organizer in San Francisco working for the Manilatown Heritage Foundation, San Francisco Veterans Equity Center, and the Displaced Airport Screener program. Recio explains how his trajectory led him to founding The Tobera Project and establishing the Watsonville is in the Heart research project with the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Nicholas Nasser 00:00

All right now, I'm going to turn on—

Roy Recio 00:02

Okay and anything you want to know before we start officially, like I should be prepared for or anything like that? Or it's all good?

Nicholas Nasser 00:10

Is there any questions that you looked over that you are not interested in answering?

Roy Recio 00:17

No. You guys, I'm free flowing. We can do this.

Nicholas Nasser 00:23

Okay, that sounds great. We had a brief introduction; I've had some time to talk to you and Toby and talk to everyone, so I kind of have a general information of your name and everything and kind of what you're doing now. But one thing I was really interested in—one thing we were really interested in—is kind of your relationship, your early childhood, and your relationship with the Watsonville community. So could you just say when you were born and where?

Roy Recio 00:53

Okay, so this is Dioscoro R. Recio Junior. Roy's my nickname; Dioscoro is Diosco-roy so I was always Roy, named after my father, Dioscoro Senior. And I was born and raised in Watsonville, California on the Central Coast to Dioscoro Recio Senior, of course, and my mother, Sally Ann Dalisay. I was raised on a labor camp on Beach Road and I was born there April 19th, 1968. So just, what, ten days ago or so was my birthday, so I'm still alive and kicking. I'm 53 now and still going strong. Hopefully I'll be here for another fifty-three years, we'll see. That's about me. So keep on going. Yes, sir.

Nicholas Nasser 01:42

Yeah, so we're just curious how was your early childhood? If you can remember, is there anything that stands out to you, kind of with your school? Can you just give us a kind of description of your background, what you would do in the morning, your routine?

Roy Recio 02:04

In growing up on the labor camp, we were raised there till I was like four. So the labor camp was basically where my Dad worked. He was a caretaker of land. He was mostly an irrigator for gentlemen and so therefore it was basically a shack practically with running water. And two bedrooms. My Dad, Mom, and Brother and myself were raised there And it was the middle of the fields basically, so we had very few neighbors—although people would come by and visit us. And this is one through four [years old] growing up, we were raised pretty much playing in the dirt. My brother and I, we had Matchbox and Hot Wheels. I remember my Mom, as a kid, she would see us playing outside, and she'd only see like the whites of our eyes because my brother and I got so dirty. She'd have to dust us off like a rug and shake us out before we got into the house. So we were always so dirty because it's in the fields. That was one thing I remember, her being stern as a kid with shaking us down before we got into the house to create a big mess. She didn't want that, of course, in the household. My Dad worked. My Mom stayed at home to raise my brother and I. That was pretty much one through four. And I was a young child then.

Roy Recio 03:24

And then personally about myself too: my mother, she has an eye condition. She's legally blind. And my brother wasn't, you know, he didn't have an eye condition—but I did. So that was part of my childhood, largely; is going through these surgeries of having cataracts as a kid, in addition to being poor, and being raised on the farm, or the ranch. Those were some of my situations that I had to grow up in, particularly in my young age. I had nine surgeries from like, one through five. We'd go to Stanford or San Francisco to have surgeries and then my Auntie Joanne, she'd also help out my Mom in raising me and make sure we got to our appointments and things like that. So being blind, being—well, I'm legally blind—being disabled, or being

impoverished and being brown and being raised on a labor camp for the first four years of my life has pretty much encompassed our existence.

Roy Recio 04:23

So my Dad would work ten, twelve hours a day doing irrigation in the fields, mostly. And my Mom will take care of us kids until there would be this history bus. Lyndon B. Johnson had this great society plan where he wanted to have an influx of low income housing building being built. So we applied for a housing project application through the urging of Rosing Tabasa, or Rosita Tabasa, urged my parents to apply for this low income housing—track housing—away from the labor camp and off Green Valley Road. So in 1972, we were able to buy a house, or put the money down, and get solidified for a low income housing project that costed, back in the day, \$19,000. So \$19,000 for a house in 1972 is like peanuts considering now. But since the labor camp from one through four, then I was able to go to kindergarten off Green Valley to Amesti [Elementary] School. And then, of course, that's where our family house is now. And I was able to be a student in elementary school—at Amesti School—that was my young age. Headstart and all that kind of stuff, too. But that's my early reflections of life: playing at the labor camp with Hot Wheels and Matchbox with my brother. And sometimes the owner's son would come join us too. He was a white guy, actually. So that was our first interaction with different people outside of our cousins and our family.

Nicholas Nasser 06:02

How did those struggles of being legally blind and growing up in those conditions—it seemed like you had a great support system and a good family around you that helped you—but how did your struggles affect you, let's say, going into school when you were a kid?

Roy Recio 06:19

Well, uhm, I don't know. Uhm, these are things that I think about but don't think about, you know? I would say that I have these big, Coke bottle glasses and so they were quite different. And people would always want to know: "Hey, this guy is kind of strange, what's going on with that guy? His eyes move around and he's got these big, huge glasses, what's going on with that guy?" But as far as kids go, it was like we're just kids—it didn't matter. We were all just the same, you know? But I remember my best friend, actually, in kindergarten his name was Tremell Abrams—the only black guy and plus he was our neighbor in Watsonville, at the Mesa Village housing complex or that area, the low income housing. So he was the only black guy—black kid—in school, him and his sister Shay, who was a little younger. But he and I were best friends growing up, and particularly in kindergarten. And I remember just me hanging out with him and some other kids too, my other good buddy, Lorenzo Barranco, a Mexican fellow. We tripped out, we saw a gold German who had totally beautiful blue eyes and beach, bleached blonde hair—beautiful young man, too. So it was kind of like this multicultural pot of

kids growing up who were in Watsonville. So usually in Watsonville, there's always a distinction between the growers and the pickers. Your parents were from the fields, they're picking strawberries, what have you; or they're the landowners who are the growers. So as kids, we didn't really know that—you know, we're kids. You only know too much. But then when you grew up, you see the differences once you mature and go through school and advance in age.

Nicholas Nasser 08:03

That's actually very interesting because, from describing Watsonville, you had these class distinctions that you brought up between these two groups. And growing up in kind of this multicultural friend group, how did that develop? Even going in later on to, let's say, your middle school, high school? And also, did you see Watsonville change at the same time at all?

Roy Recio 08:27

Oh, yeah. Watsonville back in the day was quite multicultural. There are Japanese folks and—Akira Masako was my good friend and Michael Kimoto. They were my good friends, too, growing up. And of course, our parents in the low income neighborhood, we all kind of grew up together. Our parents worked together in the canneries or in the fields. So we knew each other. So my older brother, my younger sister had other friends who were my friends, too, because they had older brothers and younger sisters or older sisters. Whatever the case may be, we kind of knew each other. We're kind of entwined because; number one, our parents work together and number two, we all kind of grew up together, and number three was that, "My sister knows your brother, my brother knows your sister" type of thing. We all were at each other's houses, for example, and we always had a lookout, so.

Roy Recio 09:19

I guess another thing too about being blind, I got picked on a lot. If it wasn't for the Sanchez sisters—so there's another Filipino family too who's mixed, like me—well, I'm mixed and I'll go into my Mom's history, too, in a little bit. But the Rojas family, Linda Rojas, married a gentleman named Albino Sanchez, and Albino was a Mexican fellow. They had three—well, they had more more kids—but three daughters: Sylvia, Rachel and Patricia. They were like big softball players, they're my brother's age or older than my brother. But they were always looking after us because my Mom and Miss Linda Sanchez were always good friends. So any kid who wanted to give me grief or push me aside or talk talk trash to me or whatever, these girls—Patricia, Rachel, and Sylvia—would corner them and show them the way or protect me basically. And there were times when they would just use their might and their strength to push other kids around, boys especially, to tell them, "Hey, don't touch him. Go leave him alone. Don't give him any grief, don't bully him" and so on. So the Sanchez sisters were my protection pretty much because, indeed, they were respected, they were strong. They were strong willed

and they were tough, so therefore, they also have their own history. But in this neighborhood, we all looked after one another predominantly. Well, they looked after me, especially. [laughs]

Nicholas Nasser 10:46

And what neighborhood is this? Is this what area of Watsonville?

Roy Recio 10:49

Yeah, Mesa Village towards the end of Green Valley across from Pinto Lake County Park.

Nicholas Nasser 10:54

Okay.

Toby Baylon 10:58

Yeah, I wanted to ask you, as you were progressing through school, I wanted to know: How were your teachers explaining your ethnic background to you guys in school?

Roy Recio 11:19

Well, I remember in kindergarten, Tremell Abrams, like I said—there was a video we watched and this is back in the '70s so the video was about inner racial relations. And the term they used was a—just trying to have a circumstance or situation where it was explaining what was going on. So it was, "A fight, a fight, a nigger, and a white," you know, and it was just like—for then—that was the common language people will use. Another term people used was to be called a "wetback" to describe Mexican immigrants, and so on. So all these negative terms, which were commonplace back then are not PC now, of course, that's not appropriate. But, uhm, that was hard to explain, particularly when you're young. You don't really know what's going on. And plus, you're jolly and happy and you want to just play outside and play baseball or play tag or go climb trees. Those are the things you want to do, basically. So in this framework of mind set, what we were trying to figure out, "That's Bill German, with the big blue eyes and beach, blonde hair. We don't look like him, nor do we look like Tremell Abrams." So we tried to figure out who we were. It was hard to understand all these things, but we knew that we were Filipino. Because, indeed, on the weekends, for example, our parents were entrenched in community work and community and going to events. So we knew that we belonged- to the Filipino community, because our parents are so involved in different lodge events, or dances, or social boxes, or luncheons, or barbecues, and things like that. So even though we were exposed to all these different cultures and people, we knew that we were Filipino just because our parents were so involved in the community.

Toby Baylon 13:06

I see. So, what did your parents and family tell you about the Philippines while you were growing up in Watsonville?

Roy Recio 13:17

Well, it was always a thing for me to—my Dad was always getting letters from the Philippines so he would always read the letters to us about his. Because my Dad was married in the Philippines at fifteen and then his mother—sorry, his wife—died while she was giving birth to the second daughter and therefore he had to figure out what the heck's going on. And through his parents, my Lolo Pedro and Lola Clara, they said, "You got to make some inroads to move yourself forward because, indeed, you've got two daughters to raise." And they made a pact with my Dad that they would look over the daughters: my Dad had a chance to go to America. So at that time, there were a lot of missionaries coming to America to talk about gold mountain and opportunity and just different jobs that were out there basically. So he was enticed to go with his countrymen, particularly from this one province: Aklan. And when you look at the immigration pattern, a lot of Filipinos either came from Ilocos Norte or Auckland in the Visayas. So my Dad is Visayan from Aklan. So he made a pact with my grandparents to come here. And indeed, he would send back money to raise the daughters who, one of whom is still alive, actually. And the other one just passed away a few years ago. So Basilica is still alive, she's like ninety-three now. Funny you asked, Toby, because from the Philippines—I just got a message saying, "Hey, look! Our side of the family who's in charge of the barrio fiesta, we need to have you send some money so we can buy a pig" and do this and that for the barrio fiesta, which is on May 31st. So we're going to send some money to help out. That's our obligation, basically. But my Dad has a very interesting story because of that urging and prompting and push-pull factor to go to America, because he was caught in a situation being a single father with two daughters to raise and his wife had just died. So he was a young man who came here at a young age to try and achieve the American dream.

Toby Baylon 15:27

Wow, that sounds very hard and just a very monumental challenge to overcome.

Roy Recio 15:35

Right and then like, because the Philippines is a third world country, he was raised in nipa huts and bamboo housing and rice fields and flooding and typhoons and things like that. And that was his family. But my Dad had a mother and a father and then he had ten brothers and sisters, too. So they were like a working crew. They had land and they cultivate the lands so my Dad really had skills in planting rice, propagating rice, and harvesting rice and different crops. So his background was agriculture and so that really laid the foundation for him to come here, knowing that he could work the lands. But he didn't really know what to expect in America. The missionaries talk about all the good things about America: prosperity, and great

weather, and opportunity, and you can have money in your pocket, whatever. But those were the perspectives from the white man who, you know, they can do all that. They weren't subject to working in the fields twelve hours a day or carrying irrigation pipes around or traveling up and down the coast. So they can have one perspective and one foresight to say, "Hey, you can be just like me," without sharing all the other information about how racist and how much stratification there was in the society of America at the time.

Toby Baylon 17:00

That's very interesting. That relationship with the missionaries, that sounds a lot like what my grandparents and parents had to deal with in the Philippines, too. And being told that America is this sort of "Promised Land" and where anyone can make that dream possible. And so, in connection with the missionaries, I wanted to ask you what the role that religion plays in your family, if any?

Roy Recio 17:33

Well, that's interesting, too, because I was just talking to Antoinette DeOcampo earlier today—and she's another gal you guys will maybe interview down the road—but we were talking about how, in her family, they're staunch on the Filipino American Catholic Society. And a lot of Filipinos, obviously, are Catholics so they would join these Catholic Societies. When you talk to other people part of the project, like Eva Monroe, she'll tell you that, "Hey, my mom was a leader in the Women's Catholic Society." And they had a Women's Filipino group only because the Catholic Society wouldn't allow Filipinos to join the regular group. So they had to have their own group and own group of ladies and own group of men. Now, they can come together as men and women, but they couldn't be matriculated or assimilated into the regular society. So they formed their own, basically.

Roy Recio 18:18

So with saying that, my Dad—I'd say that he wasn't religious. He was more like a gambler, going into the cockfight. Religion wasn't his thing, basically. I can tell you that. So, on my Dad's side, we weren't so much religious, but on my Mom's side we were. Mainly because my Mom was raised in the orphanage and she was under the care of Catholic nuns and priests. So she was raised with religion and she was staunch about her religion—until she came to a few milestones in her life that kind of maybe made her think twice. So my mother, she was taught catechism to my brother and myself and the kids in the neighborhood. So she was pretty staunch Catholic in growing up. Even though we wouldn't go to church a lot, we'd go once in a while, but we weren't there every Sunday, for example, like other folks. But we'd go there five, six times a year just to say our peace, basically. But I would say that we weren't highly religious, although we celebrated all the holidays, of course. We were more like casual religious folks.

Nicholas Nasser 19:30

That's super interesting, talking about a lot about identity. Growing up in Watsonville, how did your ties to the Philippines and your ties to religion almost interact with your idea of being an American? Or growing up in America, and growing up in Watsonville specifically, how did your identity sort of form? Who did you think you were?

Roy Recio 19:56

I think we were in sixth grade. Anthony Heredia asked us, "Who are you? What are you?" So, since my grandmother, she's from Kansas—she's a dustbowl settler who married my grandfather who was from Fresno, my migrant worker like my Dad—a manong. And so they got married in Fresno and she was white, he was Filipino. My Mom's three quarters Filipino, one quarter white. So my Mom's side, they have their own history because they were married interracially back in the day with my grandmother and my grandfather. So my Mom being half and then my grandfather being a labor contractor, they clashed. My grandmother and grandfather clashed a lot. And so they were kind of in a horrendous relationship, if you know what I mean. So they were declared unsuitable to take care of my mother, my aunts, and my uncle, basically. So therefore, they kind of lived a lot of their life in the orphanages and they were adoptees for the most part.

Roy Recio 21:01

So my Mom had two sisters who were twins, Auntie Lana and Auntie Donna, who are quite beautiful being mestiza. So therefore, they were sought after by families because, "Those are two cute girls! I'll take care of them, yeah, bring them to my house!" So they were quite renowned to be precious and taken care of, basically. And my older Auntie Joanne was kind of a tough lady and she would kinda—I can't say she was cantankerous—but she had her own staunch way about her. She persevered and she was very resilient. But my Mom was still blind and disabled, and she kind of felt my Mom—no one wanted to adopt her. So she went through the whole—my mother's side. My mother, she went through the whole orphanage system without anyone really taking an interest or caring for her, except for the nuns. So therefore she felt abandoned from her parents and then she felt abandoned that nobody wanted to adopt her versus adopting my other aunts and so on. So that was her insecurity and it would compound in her own self expression or her own self worth as well. So that was part of her struggle: to maintain herself and keep upright

Nicholas Nasser 22:26

How did that affect you? How did you—how does that—

Roy Recio 22:31

It affected me a lot. My Dad was way older than my Mom; almost like forty years older than my Mom. So when I was a kid it'd be like, "Hey, Roy! Your—" and this is after YMCA basketball—"your grandpa's here to pick you up!" I'm like, "Oh no, no. That's my Dad. That's not my grandpa, that's my Dad." And then my Mom was very protective of me because when I was growing up I also had the blind cataracts and low vision. So I was always under special-ed care. Not that I was in special-ed classes, I was just the guy who needed extra prompting, extra reading, extra uplift, basically. So there'd be like a big van that would come into the school every Friday afternoon or whatever and I'd go get services. It was like those big vans. It looks like a hearing van. So when you're a kid, you go to this big van, they check your hearing. It's like a van. You sit like eight people in there and they check your hearing. You know, "Do you hear something for your right ear?" "Yeah, right ear, left ear." But I was there for services to help me with my reading. I'd have all these magnifiers and large prints and different things. So I was pretty smart actually growing up as a kid. I loved to write and that was something I liked to do. So it wasn't like my vision didn't hamper my intellect, basically, but just kind of slowed me down. So I couldn't read as fast or as long or as thorough as other people. It just took me a little extra time to read and grasp things and then see the chalkboard, like for geometry or whatever. It just took me a little extra time to figure things out.

Toby Baylon 24:05

How easy was it—or difficult was it—to get accessible health care for both you and for your Mom?

Roy Recio 24:15

Well, because we were disabled, we got SSI and Medi-Cal. Like I got these big glasses, right? I always had big glasses and it would take—if I needed new glasses, for example, it would take forever to get them because my Mom would say, "Oh they're making them at the prison. The prisoners are making it, it takes them a long time to make these glasses. So you got to make those glasses last." So when I was a kid, my glasses would have tape; tape on the middle, tape on the edge, tape on the—they're all pieced together with glue and whatever else. So by the time the new glasses came in, that's how I had to endure it, or deal with that, basically. But that was one thing that I remember, observing the glasses thing was one thing. But as far as health care goes, we always had health care. We'd go to the clinic, we wouldn't go to the doctor or the hospital, we'd always just go to the clinic. And if there was a small ailment, for example, there was a Filipino man who would always look after everybody. He was a doctor, but not certified American style as being a doctor, and his name was Gene Robaronta. And he would come if someone had a bad back or a sore shoulder or had a cough or whatever. He would treat small things, but if someone had a broken leg, of course, you'd go to the hospital, for example.

Nicholas Nasser 25:42

Moving forward a little bit kind of after, what kind of career did you pursue? How much education did you get? Did you choose to go to college, did you not? Did you not have an opportunity? And what was your kind of motivation: what did you really want to do after your secondary school?

Roy Recio 26:02

I'm going to go back a little bit. So I remember Anthony Heredia, he was a Mexican kid, pretty affluent Mexican kid in sixth grade. He asked me and he asked Philip Valenzuela, "What do you guys, man? Are you guys Mexican? What are you?" And I was kind of confused, I didn't know what to say and I was just like, "Well, I'm Hawaiian." And that always stuck with me. Like, "Why couldn't you tell Anthony Heredia at twelve years old that you're Filipino?" And then Philip Valenzuela, who was half Filipino and half Mexican, he was kind of perplexed too, "Oh, my mom's Filipino, my dad's Mexican." And so I remember he asked us this question and we were totally stumped. Because someone had, for the first time, asked you or questioned you like, "Who are you?" And I [laugh] remember that time all so well. So that was one thing I wanted to bring back to your question, Toby.

Roy Recio 26:55

But moving forward in education, like I said, I was always pretty smart. Not super-duper smart, but enough to be smart enough to get a 3.0 in high school—which is pretty good [laughs] for me. So that was good enough for the CSU system, the Cal State system. So anyways, in high school, I was always good at writing. I was the guy who wrote in the high school newspaper. So each time the newspaper would come out, like once a month or so, I would always have like five or six stories in the newspaper because I was just so hungry for it. I had a zest and zeal for writing and I liked being a journalist. And I liked that idea of being in the mix, so that always interested me. Plus when I was a kid, my Dad and Mom, they always read the newspapers to us. So we were laying down on the couch after dinner, they'd pull out the newspapers and start reading us stories in the papers. We'd just sit back and listen to it, basically. So that sparked an interest in me in maybe having a journalism career, for example. So that was always something that I gravitated towards, was writing. Telling stories, hearing stories, and also just curiosity: what's going on around me, what's going on in the world, what's going on in my community. So that was a big part of my high school days, developing an interest in journalism.

Roy Recio 28:20

But for the most part, I liked to hang out with my friends. I had low self esteem. I didn't know where I fit in. I had these big glasses, it was hard to meet ladies. I remember going to the dances—high school dances—and having a heck of a time trying to muster up the gumption to

ask a girl to dance. Back in the day, my buddies—Mike Murray especially—we'd go up [laughs] we'd go the high school dance. Before we stopped at the dance: "Hey, Dad, let's go to 7-11! Buy us a six pack," you know. So me and Michael went to the high school dances; already juiced up, three beers each. Muster the gumption up to ask a girl to dance. But, of course, we'd put Hubba Bubba in our mouth or Bubble Yum. And our VP—vice principal was Mr. Maury Schekman—and Maury Schekman knew us pretty well. But [laughs] we'd always be like, "Hey, Maury! [imitates chewing gum] How you doing, Maury? We're here for the dance!" Sit in the corner for the next three hours trying to ask her to dance. So compounded with my glasses, my vision, our poverty, growing up in poverty and just being low income, there were a lot of things that were going on in my life. But indeed, amongst that cloud of dust was an interest in joining and wanting to be involved with journalism.

Toby Baylon 29:40

I really relate to your experience of being a kid and trying to hide your Filipino identity. Like you, as a kid, I kind of had the same deal with my elementary school because it was very racially diverse. When people would ask me what I was, I don't know why, but I felt like compulsive—like I had to say something else. And that's not something I really started unlearning until like ten years ago. And so I wanted to ask you, in kind of the vein of experiencing insecurities, how did you manage to overcome some of these as you developed?

Roy Recio 30:30

Well, it took a lot of soul searching, Toby. Part of it too was, as a kid, we were inundated with the "Brady Bunch" and all these shows growing up about basically—"Eight is Enough"—all these white families and how the ideal American dream and how society should be. And how our family should be; stability with cars, and food on the table, and loads of food in the closets, what have you. Nice clothes, and—we just didn't have that and of course, as a kid, you want that. And part of that conundrum was trying to figure out where do I fit in and who am I? You always ask that question as a kid, as a young man, like, "What the hell am I doing on this face of the Earth? Where do I fit in? I'm not that person or that person. I don't look like her or him." Those are the things as you grow up, you try to figure out an answer. And those are questions, Toby, that are lifelong questions. [laughs] So it's just something that you have to come into your own about. Understanding yourself first and foremost, and looking at the world differently. So changing your perspective and your environment also helps to understand that.

Roy Recio 31:45

In Watsonville, for example, it's a very tight knit, small community. Which is also very divided when you get into the nooks and crannies and all the idiosyncrasies and dynamics of the community. It's a small community, but yet, it's really divided. Like I said, the overlapping thing is the growers versus the pickers. You're on one side of the fence, or you're on the other side

of the fence, basically. And the term "knowing your place." Knowing your place that you don't belong here, you're not allowed there, or you're not accepted here or there—that's something that we've kind of grew up with. Tippy toeing around certain things because we just didn't know where we fit in. So not empowered with knowing yourself and then all these other factors coming down on your shoulders, is quite daunting, quite compounding, and it's just a challenge to grow up. And those are the things that we all face. Growing up is trying to look yourself in the mirror and feeling comfortable yourself, feeling content. When you wake up in the morning: "Hey, do I like myself? Hey, Do I look good? Hey, how do I feel? How can I tackle the world, or my responsibilities, today versus yesterday and even into tomorrow? What are my goals for myself today, this week, next month, next year?" You know, those are the things that you'll build upon and build upon and constantly build upon.

Toby Baylon 33:07

Wow, that's great advice. Thank you, honestly.

Roy Recio 33:10

Well, you know, having a beer once in a while or a glass of wine, Toby, doesn't hurt either.
[laughs]

Nicholas Nasser 33:24

It's pretty interesting to have that insight that you have and especially in relation to your community growing up. And that's something that—I'm from New York City, so I'm coming from a completely different world. And if I could ask kind of just a more general question: How did your—What did your community look like? You talk about these big divides between all these people and your friends around, when you just got up and walked around, what did you observe looking around in Watsonville, in your neighborhood?

Roy Recio 34:06

So I would say there's two different communities we had. My everyday community was our neighborhood: Mesa Village. Next to it is a low income, people of color community. Whether you worked in the canneries, whether you worked in the fields, whether you drove a truck to deliver the goods to the different places; that's what people did mostly in the community. So it was very much of a working class community. We're all on the same page, basically. So that was a beautiful thing because the kids that I grew up with I still have—they're all part of my wedding party when I got married. We're all intertwined. When someone's mom is ailing, we go to their side. When someone needs some help, or they need some advice with their mortgage or whatever, we're always there to help each other out. So therefore, we're all on the same level, basically all have the same experiences.

Roy Recio 35:00

So the other community though, too, was the weekend community—which I'd say that is the Filipino community. And it was a very insular community. Like I said, our parents, they were part of a group and part of an era that was pushed aside and wasn't allowed to be mainstreamed into the Rotary Club, into city softball leagues, into church societies, or whatever. They just were not allowed to participate basically. So they formed their own groupings and their own settings and their own formations of societal clubs. So with that was a fraternal lodge, or it was a women's group, or a Bible study group, or whatever—fishing buddies going out fishing. They did it amongst themselves, basically. So as kids, we grew up with that: going to dances and social boxes, and cockfights and lechon roastings, and—I'm not saying bar mitzvahs, but [laughs]—christenings and things like that, birthday parties. We all saw each other on the weekends basically. So as a child growing up in America, you want to play Little League, you want to go see the world, you want to date a white girl, whatever. Whatever, you know? You just wanted to go do that.

Roy Recio 36:20

And so we were assimilated as youngsters growing up. Having more opportunity, having them pave the way for us to excel and succeed. There were different options for us than our parents had. So because of the struggles and sacrifices and resiliency of the manong generation—for example, my Dad and my uncles and my aunties era—they just couldn't do much, you know? So for us going off and doing our thing, seeing the world, traveling, eating exotic foods or whatever, having different experiences outside of the farm and the fieldwork—is something that they dreamed of for us to do. Of course, they'd want us to be there with them. But then, as being an American, you want to see the Grand Canyon, you want to see New York City, you want to go to Hawaii. You want to travel around the world, you want to go to Holland, or wherever you want to go to. Those are the things that were afforded to me because I didn't have to stay back and be subject to some of the boxes that they fit into before. So that's one thing that in the weekend committee—going back to that—that's pretty much all gone. Because all of us kids who are descendants of the manong generation have scattered about to achieve our goals and our aspirations and our careers, for example. And that's one thing that we are remissed about; is that once we left, we left that era and that era faded. We cannot come back to that. We can't come back to the dances and the bands and the music and the cockfights and the roasting of the pigs and the celebrations and the Christmas parties. We just cannot come back to that because we're all in different spaces and times of our life.

Nicholas Nasser 38:20

Do you notice a difference in your friends, your personal friends, and the communities with people of different ethnicities, and these Filipino institutions that you're speaking about—did they kind of overlap sometimes? Did you—what did you observe?

Roy Recio 38:41

I'd say my friends now, a lot of my friends are Mexican American Chicanos. And one thing we—I can't say we argue about—but we talk about is the UFW. So we all know as Filipinos that Larry Itliong, Philip Vera Cruz, Ben Grimes, Crispin Salvez, and all the beautiful brothers that helped develop and forward the farm worker movement. Whether it be from Hanford, to Salinas, to Stockton, to Delano; it was the Filipinos who really set the tone and laid down the groundwork and foundation and were the driving force behind the farm worker movement. So now we see Larry Itliong trying to gain momentum as far as being recognized and acknowledged as a labor leader. But yet, Cesar Chavez gets all the acclaim and recognition. And it was really Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz who started the farm worker movement, and then Dolores and Cesar came on board later. But I can't say that they co-opted the movement, but it was really information that was not highlighted or recognized or even validated that it was the Filipinos who lead that movement. So amongst my friends—my personal friends—they know that because we're from the farms, we know the history basically. And they're proud of Cesar Chavez too, you know. I understand that they have a lot to be proud of, and I'm proud of Cesar Chavez, too. But the thing is that, when you're going to tell the story, you always need to tell the truth. And that's something, that as a parent, I tell my daughter the same thing. My wife instills these characteristics in us, of course. Indeed, that's the truth, and so therefore, no one's going to tell that truth except for us. So there's a movement in the Filipino community, not just in Watsonville, but throughout the states that we want to tell and highlight the story of Larry Itliong. So that's one thing we talk about amongst my friends; about what is the real story and what is the truth about the UFW? And so I can tell my friends this, but as far as other people in the broader community, they know but they don't want to acknowledge that it wasn't just Cesar and Dolores. There was a whole history before them.

Toby Baylon 40:59

Yeah, of course. American history is riddled with minimizing the voices and experiences and impacts that people of color have made. And so in this preserving history any way you can and also in comparison to your friends that have moved on from Watsonville, is that a big influence on you for staying in Watsonville?

Roy Recio 41:29

Well, right now I don't live in Watsonville. I just go back there a lot because my sister, my brother are there—my brother's in Santa Cruz, actually. But we're still tight even after—like I said, the project got off the ground because my Mom died in 2018. I really wanted to do something for her and my parents and all of my aunties and uncles to really acknowledge their existence, their struggles, their sacrifices, and their resiliency, and also their perseverance in

dealing with everything that happened in Watsonville from growing up. That really doesn't get talked about. So I go to Watsonville a lot because, one thing, it's beautiful weather. I'll tell you this, the whole landscape of Watsonville—say what you will about Watsonville, it's just beautiful there. As far as just the aesthetics, the environment, the vibe—I really dig it, of course. It's my home, but I still love going back there. So, for me, going to college was a big thing and that really shaped me to expand myself. And I wanted to do something for Watsonville, too, but really—in having a college experience, Nick and Toby—my college experience, my fortune, doesn't mean anything until and unless my education is shared with the community that I represent. So this is kind of like my way of giving back and leading the way to show that I'm giving my thanks to the my ancestors in this project. So that's my, connection to my community. Even though I don't live there, I still have it. As you know, I hate to say it, but Watsonville is in the heart. [laughs]

Nicholas Nasser 43:11

I've only spent a very brief amount of time in Watsonville. And I don't really know the geography of Watsonville right now. I don't really know the different neighborhoods and especially what kind of different classes and different ethnicities historically lived in there. And I was just gonna ask, to kind of carve out a timeline: after you went to college, did you come back to Watsonville and stay for a while? What was your intention? Did you leave after? Did you want to get out? What did you want to do?

Roy Recio 43:46

It's kind of interesting for me personally. I always wanted to see the world and, being blind, I couldn't drive so therefore I wanted to go and see the world. So I had a chance to go to this camp. It was a camp in Napa called Enchanted Hills Camp. And I went there my high school—my college summers, actually—every college summer I'd go to camp in Napa. It's a camp for blind kids and I was a camp counselor for two or three years. And the camp showed independence for blind kids. And I could see, I could function, I could do my thing; I just couldn't drive. So the camp has ropes all around the camp so kids can read Braille: "Hey, this is where you go to the horses. Hey, this is where you go to the pool. Hey, this is the hiking trail. Hey, this is where your cabin is." So they could go out there and be free and easy and just be who they wanted to be without having to rely on anybody else, basically. So the camp was really beautiful, they kind of got burned down during the fires in Napa a few years ago, but now it's up and at 'em so it's a beautiful place.

Roy Recio 44:43

So at that camp, though, I had met a lot of international folks from England, from Holland, from Germany, and just around the world—you know, Scotland. So they kind of expanded my mind, actually. Learning experiences from them, learning their culture. Talking to them, becoming

really good friends with them, and we're still friends today. But Watsonville, like I said, is a small area. Twenty miles by twenty miles or whatever. But the world is 25,000 miles in circumference. And so therefore, I always wanted to expand my mind in horizons. And coming from Watsonville, in this small little enclave of Mesa Village, feeling downtrodden and insecure about myself, I really had a chance to expand my mind and open my heart and soul to different things in the world. And meeting all these other beautiful people who were all there to help out these blind kids, it was really quite an eye opening experience. Particularly when I brought the English fellows and the other camp counselors home to my house, they just loved it. Here we're just very poor people sleeping on the floor and then my other friends they had low riders. We had barbecues and drinking beers and all this and that—and they just loved it! And, of course, these are things that we take for granted, growing up in Watsonville. But it was a cultural exchange per se and it was just awesome. And that experience really opened my mind and heart and soul to wanting to travel and see more things. So therefore, that opened up my sense of adventure and say, "Hey, you know what? I can feel secure about myself and that can really find my footing and I don't have to worry about stuff because I feel like I have a thirst and a hunger to see more about the world than just in Watsonville."

Nicholas Nasser 46:32

And how have you seen Watsonville change?

Roy Recio 46:35

Well, like I said, when I was a kid it was very multicultural. A lot of the kids there they all—Watsonville is a very academically sound institution, prior to the Jarvis plan in Prop 19—or Prop 13, sorry. So therefore, a lot of the kids actually went to college. They went to Stanford and Cal and a few of them went to UCSC, UCLA. They really propagated a lot of young scholars there. And it was a strong community as far as pushing academics. So that was always a beautiful thing. But now though, predominantly I think it's a lot of Latinos are moving in. Or have moved in; they live there. And it's still a very much of an agricultural based economy there. And there's just the divide. I can tell you, it's changed quite a bit, like we were just there. A few weeks ago, we stayed at a hotel. And I opened my hotel window, like it's Santa Cruz, there's homeless folks out there. There's an encampment across the way. You know, "Top of the morning to you!" and the guy was pushing a shopping cart down down the road a bit, but he was far from the hotel, but things have just changed. And that's just society; society has changed as well. But as far as the aesthetics, like I said, and the environment is a beautiful place. It's a struggling agricultural town. There's a divide between the rich and the poor still. It seems like the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer. But that's just the American society as we live in it today.

Toby Baylon 48:08

Right. Going back to this sense of adventure that you fostered in yourself, have you ever been to the Philippines?

Roy Recio 48:16

Oh, yeah, a few times. And I have a picture, we were there when—the last time we were there was right before my Dad's oldest sister had passed away. So Josephine and Basilica are my Dad's two daughters he left behind when he left for America. So the one daughter, Basilica, is still alive and she's actually like ninety-three right now—maybe ninety-four, actually. So those two daughters have families and I'm close to those families. So when I was a kid, I went to the Philippines twice with my Dad and then twice on my own. I just went with my wife and my daughter actually, recently—or, a few years ago. We were supposed to go again this summer but then COVID struck, of course, and we're still waiting to see about them opening up things. But it's it's topsy turvy, as you all know. But definitely I had been there, I know there, I was there for a long time at one stint—I was there for like six months. So that was part of my sense of adventure. I also taught English in Japan, too, and I lived in Colorado in Boulder. I lived in Little Rock, Arkansas before, too and I just like to travel. I like to go to baseball parks. I talked to Nick about seeing different ballgames and ballparks and eating different foods, too. It's always, expanding your horizons is always part of living life.

Nicholas Nasser 49:40

How about that hotdog spot in Watsonville?

Roy Recio 49:45

It's an institution. I'll tell you, the next place you got to go to is called Freedom Bakery. And they have adream cake that's to die for. A dream cake at Freedom Bakery is a must do in Watsonville.

Nicholas Nasser 49:58

I was gonna ask, speaking about just some general stuff, what kind of music did you like in Watsonville when you were a kid? What kind of food did you eat?

Roy Recio 50:09

I remember one time, I can tell you this one story: it was after the '89 earthquake. Los Lobos and Santana came to play at the high school to do a fundraiser because downtown Watsonville had been destroyed, much like downtown Santa Cruz was destroyed as well. So if you guys are into Clint Eastwood, for example, you can always watch *Sudden Impact* with Clint Eastwood because a lot of the scenery is the old downtown Santa Cruz on the Mall. And you can see what the earthquake was like—well, what Santa Cruz was like before the earthquake struck. So anyways, this concert was really cool because it brought in everyone from the

county. So farmworkers are there to see Los Lobos and Santana but other folks: hippies from the Boulder Creek, and servers from 26th Street, and Capitola, wherever—we're all there to support the cause. And even if you didn't like the music, you're there to pitch in twenty bucks to buy a ticket just to support the cause because it was going to go to support downtown Watsonville's revitalization, downtown Santa Cruz's revitalization. This big concert brought in a lot of people. So it was the first time I'd seen in front of me a hippie brother passing a joint to a farm worker brother. [laughs] It was quite a beautiful sight to see, you know? And of course it went around the circle, too, but—hey, that's some other story. But yeah, totally, it was a good time to live and be. And that gave me a sense of just how beautiful the community is.

Toby Baylon 51:39

That sounds more like what the American Dream should be, you know? All these different people coming together.

Roy Recio 51:45

Yeah, it's easier said than done, though. That's why this project—for the Tobera Project,—it sparked a lot of interest, not just for the Filipino community which is what it's grounded in. But the Japanese folks, the Portuguese folks, the Slavic folks; they're all interested in doing something similar to their community so they can chronicle and document their stories. Because, once again, this is just American history. It's Pajaro Valley history. It's Santa Cruz County history that needs to be documented from our own mouth. And that's one cool thing about this project is this is a history you're not going to find in books or videos or documentaries. This is the story straight from our household. Whether it be in our closet, from our artifacts and stuff, or our photo albums that are held underneath the coffee table, or even things that we just forgot about whether it be tools from our backyard sheds or whatever; these are artifacts and important artifacts and important history that needs to come out of our household and be shared with the broader society.

Nicholas Nasser 52:56

I just started getting into oral history. It was like the past couple months I've really just started to understand its implications and how important it really is. And your goal with the Tobera Project—and I feel like our goal too for this whole entire—is to kind of just capture, like you were saying, this kind of culture that isn't necessarily in textbooks. That necessarily isn't recorded in other maybe physical ways, besides physical as in academia ways. And just speaking of that, you started this project because of the death of your mother and you wanted to kind of store everything together and I was gonna ask—I'm trying to think of the right words to say, but—have you been thinking about this for a long time prior, before you started it?

Roy Recio 54:03

Oh, totally. Totally. So you should know that after college I was a reporter for the Philippine News in San Francisco. And then I went to Colorado, went and traveled across country. I went and lived in Japan, I taught English there. Then I went to the Philippines and then came back to San Francisco. And my roommate, Julie—she's a Malaysian gal—she said, "Roy, you're really interested in Filipino stuff. Why don't you take some classes at San Francisco State? They have an Asian American Studies Department. Here's a brochure, why don't you go sign up for a class?" So I said, "Okay, cool. I can handle a Thursday night—four to seven, seven to ten, whatever it was, six to nine. So I took one class and then I was like, "Shoot, man, this is really cool!" Because at Humboldt State, where I went to school at, they didn't ever have anything like that. That was one thing that I was kind of remiss at that Humboldt State—it being quite, cool, Humboldt State—but they never had any Asian American studies classes or anything like that to really pull me in and prompt me and propel me to understand myself really.

Roy Recio 55:12

So I started taking these classes and I started getting involved in community work. And so I met these beautiful people in San Francisco, in the San Francisco Filipino community. I kind of got involved with activism and community organizing, and I was really proud that I did a lot of work there. I did a super duper amount of work in San Francisco: from community organizing, to helping rebuild the International Hotel in the Manila Town center, to starting the San Francisco Filipino Veterans Equity Center for World War II—veteran's recognition and equal recognition for their services. Did a lot to try and support the SOMA Filipino community, land use issues, affordable housing issues, help get the Victoria Manalo Draves Park off the ground, as well as the new Bessie Carmichael school. I just did a lot of things. I was totally involved with politics, and community organizing, and the San Francisco Democratic Party, and the Filipino American Democratic Club, and all these different groups. I was thinking to myself, after doing all this work for fifteen years in San Francisco, "I need to do something for Watsonville."

Roy Recio 56:22

I'm from Watsonville, I always tell people I'm from Watsonville. People know I'm from Watsonville—talk about my Dad, you know? But I felt like, what the hell am I doing? It's great to empower the San Francisco community and help them out and get them stabilized and meet some great people like manongs, Al Robles and Bill Sorro, and Neil De Guzman and Estella Habal. Beautiful, beautiful people—Luis Antonio and Lourdes Tancinco. But what am I doing for my hometown? What am I doing for my community? My community is Watsonville no matter where I'm going to be. I felt my Mom being passed away, and then all the other generational people who I know from the manong generation; we just had to do something for our parents. Since my Dad was way older than my Mom, other folks in the project are like seventies, eighties, late sixties. And I myself, I'm fifty-three—because, like I said, my Dad was

way older than my Mom—I felt like I had the gumption and I wanted to organize a project to honor our parents and preserve their history. So with that said, all my experience and understanding from how to organize and get things done and having a track record to get it done and strategizing, organizing, and plotting things out for this project. It's been methodical. This started two years ago or so. But really, it's been in my mind for a long time to do something like this. I just needed to have the platform to do it. And also the capacity and wherewithal, my own personal space, to try and get this off the ground.

Toby Baylon 58:10

In terms of your parents influencing you, in terms of creating this project and also just wanting to honor them in their resiliency, in what ways have your parents influenced your own parenting?

Roy Recio 58:30

My Dad would say—Toby—he would say, "Hard work can solve many problems". So instead of bitching and moaning about what needs to be done or saying, "Hey, we don't have the resources. Hey, what's going to happen next?"—it's about grinding. Digging deep within yourself to persevere. I think that if my Dad could endure what he endured in Watsonville in the early years when he came and then working like a dog and getting paid peanuts and after a hard day's work of being undignified when you walk down the street after your twelve hour shift. People saying, "Hey, go home monkey." Then he's busting his ass in the fields for peanuts and he's making the white man rich, basically. If he can do something like that, then I can do something like this. My Mom, in her own capacity, she's struggling to stand on her own two feet because she's so insecure about her situation being blind and abandoned and then having to deal with her parents who were not stable themselves. If she can endure and ordeal that, I can do this project. So it's my pleasure and my honor to do the project in their memory and also in their graces as well.

Nicholas Nasser 59:52

Is there anything else you would like to bring up, especially about your life or anything that you think is important? I know you have the question sheet and everything.

Roy Recio 1:00:03

Well, let me talk about my Mom a little bit. She has a manuscript, too. And she always would write. She'd type—she didn't have the coordination because she couldn't see nor did she want to take typing classes—but she'd just peck, peck, peck [typing imitation], and she has this huge manuscript about her life. She has a very fascinating life, so does my Auntie Joanne. My Mom's sister, Auntie Joanne, has a very fascinating life, too. It talks about growing up in the orphanage, being abandoned, and then also talks about her being molested by the priests. Her

enduring some of the things she did as being blind, and so on. My grandmother was quite, quite, quite unscrupulous too. She did a lot of things to my twin nieces that were not cool. So therefore, there's a lot of dysfunction on that side of the family. So she would always want us kids to do better for ourselves. I felt like my Mom always wanted to hold me back.

Roy Recio 1:01:06

She wanted to hold me back: "Roy! Where are you going to now?" "Mom, I'm gonna go back to Colorado." "What the hell are you gonna do there? I go, "Well, Mama, I need to go find that out." "Why don't you just stay here?"—because she needed me to help out. But I felt like my life was out there and I need to go find myself out there. Even though she was always scared that I would fall off the cliff, or get ran over, or whatever; that was just her psyche. She just didn't want anything bad to happen to me because she didn't know how life was outside of Watsonville. And so she felt comfort in Watsonville, even though it was impoverished. We had a lot of love, though, but yet she didn't have much adventure to seek life outside of that. You know, at least go stretch out and see what the heck's out there over the mountain, through the woods. She just wanted that comfortability, knowing she has her own niche that's comfortable for her because of her circumstances. So therefore, she held me back in a certain kind of way.

Roy Recio 1:02:13

But, in the big picture, she's also very supportive of me because I would come back and tell her stories about my travels. And of course, she'd think I'm crazy and nuts and off my rocker, but I think she really enjoyed hearing the stories I had to tell her. I shared my life with her. And she'd always, at the end, she'd always tell me that she was very proud of me. That's something that I cherish. That my Mom was very proud of me even though we weren't always on the same page. One thing about being a kid and growing up to be a man or a young man or an adult is: you need to learn how to be a friend of your parents. Not just their kid. So it's a friendship you mature with, with your parents. And of course, they have to be open minded and open hearted to treat you as their friend too and not just: "Hey, Nick, get that Diet Coke in the refrigerator for me. Change that channel." It's not like that. It's more like you're enjoying their company and they're enjoying your company, but you're also sharing your life story and your life experiences with them. And that's a beautiful thing to embrace being friends with your parents and maturing that friendship into something that's more than just a mother-father, mother-son, or father-son, or father-daughter experience.

Toby Baylon 1:03:34

Wow, that's really beautiful. You honestly said it perfectly because that's kind of been something I've been experiencing since COVID. Being stuck for a year with my parents in my childhood home, kind of learning to create that friend relationship, and how that kind of opened the way to just more love and support. And—

Roy Recio 1:04:02

It's not easy, man. It's not gonna happen overnight, Toby. Be prepared.

Toby Baylon 1:04:07

Oh, yeah, definitely not. It's a lot of unlearning from both sides, I think.

Roy Recio 1:04:15

Right. And society is changing too. That's part of the thing, is that it's not the same that when they grew up. Their experiences are not going to hold true to your experiences and society has changed. Where women have more opportunity, for example. And my Mom, in her lifetime, they didn't have much opportunity.

Nicholas Nasser 1:04:47

Toby's a year older than me and I'm barely twenty-one, and it's really good to hear your take on it. We don't really get this kind of description and this kind of relationship,

Toby Baylon 1:05:04

It's like what I was saying, it's really good advice.

Nicholas Nasser 1:05:07

Great advice and in this context.

Roy Recio 1:05:09

Well gentlemen—when you're old enough—we'll have a beer sometime, okay? [laughs]

Toby Baylon 1:05:17

So going back to your mom, it must have meant a lot to you to hear how proud she was of you. Did it take a while for her to express herself in that way?

Roy Recio 1:05:33

She was always proud of me. I think what it has to do with, Toby, is control. Your parents want to control you and that's the thing that she had to let go of the reins of. This is the thing: the savior is that my brother and my sister are still back in Watsonville, at least they were close to my parents still. So I had the ability to travel and do my thing and be branching out, because my sister and my brother were stayed stayed back. So therefore, I always have great appreciation for them. Because it wasn't easy. My Mom, she could—I can't say she can't stand on her own two feet—but she always needed someone there because of the abandonment issues she had. So therefore, she holds to my sister very tightly. Now, she holds to me very

tightly, too. But she just had to be holding this to my brother and my sister, and I've kind of feel like that held them back. But I had to break those chains, personally. I had to make my own decisions. And I love my brother and sister for letting me do that, even though it's kind of a covert way of living that I was able to do these kinds of things. But yet I understand, I was only able to do these things because my brother and my sister stayed back in Watsonville.

Nicholas Nasser 1:06:55

It's in the heart. I was just going to ask more about that, how is your family? How does your life kind of contrast with your family that has chosen to stay in Watsonville?

Roy Recio 1:07:12

Well, I can say that I was able to go to college, for example. That was the biggest thing. I can't see there's a difference between people who don't go to college or do go to college, but from my dynamic and my experience is that we just have different perceptions and views of the world and different things that we are important to us. So therefore, that's how my perception is, but still at the core we love each other. Their goals or their priorities aren't necessarily my priorities. As far as outside the family nuclear structure and just our love for one another, but they have different things that are important to them that may not be important to me and vice versa. But I think that we still maintain a civility and appreciation for each other because, indeed, we're cut from the same cloth. No matter what, we're still in the same family. So that's one thing that we embrace. And plus, all the blessings we've had in life we share with one another. So therefore, we see each other a lot, and we still can get along. Just like any brothers and sisters though, too. You bicker, you disagree, you jab at one another once in a while, or my sister asking me for money too often. [laughs] These are kind of the things that you have to deal with.

Toby Baylon 1:08:35

It's just part of life. Yeah, I wanted to ask if—obviously, this project must mean a lot to your siblings—are they helping in any way?

Roy Recio 1:08:50

Yeah, they are. The thing is, they help us as their capacity allows them to. So for me, I'm a bit crazy. I'm out there, I'm going 100 miles an hour. But they're going fifteen miles an hour. And that's all they're doing: they're just pointed in the right direction. They're supporting the project but as far as like pedal to the metal, that's me. But that's kind of like—I'm a little crazy, in a loving and gentle way, though. So therefore, it's all good. But as far as our parents go, respecting our parents and appreciating our parents: that's the bottom line. We're here to do our uncles and aunties right by doing this project and making sure that they're recognized and appreciated and also loved and honored and their stories are preserved. That's the beautiful

thing; that we're all we're all pulling on the same rope. For example, even my brothers, my sisters, my cousins, and also our Filipino community members; we're all in this together. I'm just the guy who's the front man [laughs] who's providing the platform or link to bridge this gap. But definitely I'm bringing people together and I want to let them shine. You're inspired by my stories or you have a share a laugh or shed a tear or whatever you need to do—but the other stories amongst the other people in the group are just so beautiful, so wonderful, so inspiring. They're so down to earth and they're just fun. I can tell you, doing these interviews is kind of like reading a book, a book you've been waiting for for a long time. It's just great to hear all these stories. Particularly when you dig deeper into it you'll say: "Damn, that's impressive," or "Hey, that's pretty cool, I never thought about it that way," or "I've never heard that experience before." So it's kind of opening up a treasure of stories that are going to fulfill your heart and your mind and your soul.

Nicholas Nasser 1:10:56

Wow, it's amazing that you've been able to really focus on this. And as far as this project, is this what you do full time? Is this a side job, or what?

Roy Recio 1:11:11

This is a labor of love. This is all volunteer work, man. I got a nine to five job working for the federal government. And I can't say I derive much joy and pleasure from my job, but it helps me pay the bills and keep our family afloat. With my wife, of course, and it pays the bills, like I said. But as far as doing something that you really super-duper want to do in your life; this project is it. It's just beautiful and it's fun. It's not like it's about the money or anything like that. It's just not. It's just about doing the right thing. So many times in life you think, "Well, I could have did this, I could have did that. Why didn't I do that? What's happening? It's too late." But it's never too late, man. It's never too late to do the right thing, and this is about doing the right thing. Particularly, like I said, because I'm quote-unquote "college educated"—which is very minimal—this is what I have to do. This is my obligation. This is why I'm on the earth a little bit, to do this work. It's so much joy, it's so much pleasure. There's so much pride, there's so much community spirit. It's definitely worth my while. This is something that keeps me going. It enlightens me and inspires me, and I just want to share it with everybody. And once again, I'm just one story. There's a bunch of stories out there too that are well worth your while to give a damn about.

Nicholas Nasser 1:12:45

Well, I mean, I was thinking I would love to do another interview. I'm sure Toby and I agree.

Roy Recio 1:12:54

Cold drinks next time, too.

Nicholas Nasser 1:12:58

Is there anything else you wanted to touch on? Or Toby?

Toby Baylon 1:13:01

Yeah, we don't want to take too much of your time.

Roy Recio 1:13:03

Oh, no, I'm with you. I just want to say that my grandmother—the dustbowl settler from Kansas—and my grandfather, they got married in Fresno. And it was very tumultuous times there for Filipinos and white people to get together. And you should know that the ratio was like thirty to one. There was only one Filipino woman to 30 Filipino men so the ability to get married was very, very impossible. Because of these things called antimiscegenation laws, Filipinos could not marry. And that indeed, because of the riots in 1930, that was basically the indicator or the spark that caused the fervor and injustice. These Filipino men who were working like dogs in the field come to these taxi dances. And they'd dance with white women—kind of like a ballroom style. But they would work a dollar a day and pay ten cents a dance. So they'd dance with these ladies for ten cents and they'd bring in these showgirls—or whoever they were; late town girls—to dance with these Filipino men. And the white men didn't like that Filipino men were dancing with their girls, basically. So that sparked a lot of dissension in the community which led to these riots that were up and down the coast.

Roy Recio 1:14:21

The Watsonville race riots—anti-Filipino race riots—were renowned because Fermin Tobera died. So he died because they had these white mobs chasing down Filipinos throughout the Pajaro Valley. And of course, they had these other issues in San Jose, San Francisco, Exeter, Salinas, Stockton—where white mobs would chase down Filipinos because these Filipino young men want to go meet the ladies. That's what you do. But there were no ladies to meet except for white girls who would come to these taxi dances because that was their job. It was during the Depression era too where there were very few jobs to be had. And the jobs that were to be had were back breaking, ten-twelve hour a day jobs in the fields. They had very little white people who wanted to do that kind of work. That's why they brought in the Filipinos, predominantly to be a secondary labor force.

Roy Recio 1:15:14

So because of the compounding conditions of the Depression and the racial tensions that were spread by William Randolph Hearst through The Chronicle about "Asian Peril"—yellow fever and tuberculosis that these Asian folks; Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos were bringing to the US and society. Spreading this propaganda that Filipinos are ostracized by the dominant society

because they were deemed having yellow fever, but having money in their pocket. So if you're having money in your pocket, being able to buy a Macintosh suit and a fedora hat and look nice on the weekends and suave and dapper with the ladies, and you're dancing with someone's daughter or someone's niece, that's not going to sit too well within the dominant society. And therefore a lot of tension was raised because of that environment where prejudice, discrimination, and racism was persistent—particularly to these Filipino men. So they were basically subject to all this discrimination and violence because of that tension that escalated during the Watsonville riots. And this riot and sentiment was not just in Watsonville but was up and down the coast, and therefore, a lot of Filipinos were on the butt end of all that violence as well. When my grandfather and grandmother would walk down the street for example, in Salinas or wherever, she could not walk at his side. She had to walk like ten paces behind him to show that she wasn't together with him. Because if they walked side by side, they'd be struck with criticism and stones. A lot of conjecture by the dominant society, for example. So there was a lot of tension at that time.

Toby Baylon 1:17:05

Right, right. And yeah, you were saying earlier about how back then Watsonville was essentially segregated in terms of who can do what. Was it to the extent of that prior to the riots? Or was it mainly afterwards?

Roy Recio 1:17:26

Well, in the course of history, it was the Chinese immigrants who came first and then Japanese and Filipinos. So anti-Asian sentiment was quite prevalent in that era. And they only brought in Asians as sojourners; they were supposed to be there, do the job that no one wants to do, and go back home. But it just didn't work out that way. So therefore, they were there and they were not allowed to go to certain areas of town. If they died, they had to be in certain cemeteries. They couldn't buy houses, they couldn't own land, they couldn't vote. They couldn't marry outside their own race. So there were a lot of restrictions that were placed upon them. And the terminology people would use is called "white privilege". You know, like: "It's bullshit! You're telling me I have white privilege!" But when you can't vote, you can't marry, you can't buy land—that's pretty much white privilege to me.

Roy Recio 1:18:22

So, only after they endured this timeframe, that 1934 Tydings McDuffie act really closed the immigration faucet so that no Filipinos—very few Filipinos—were allowed to come in. And then in 1942 when the war broke out, World War II, Filipinos volunteered. It's important to know that Filipinos volunteered to join the first and second Filipino Regiments. They trained at Fort Ord, which is now CUSMB or Cal State University Monterey Bay—which is Fort Ord, which was an army base before. These Filipino regiments trained and were pulled out of the fields to

participate in the war where they fought in the Far East. And when they fought, they were joined into these regiments called the First and Second Filipino Regiments. They couldn't join the regular regiments because they were Filipinos so they had to form their own. And they went and fought and proved their honor and will and worth. Then only after the war ended, they become citizens. From being nationals to becoming citizens and were afforded more rights because of their valor and their Service to America.

Nicholas Nasser 1:19:41

Actually going back to that, I have a little side story that directly relates to your kind of experience. My girlfriend and her family they're from Stockton, and she's half Filipino and half Mexican. And I spent a good amount of time with her Filipino side. Her great aunt, her father was a white man, and her mother was a Filipina woman. And they grew up in Fresno probably in, I want to say, probably like the 40s or 50s. They actually have access to a bunch of these Filipino club books, a lot of pictures, and a lot of stories. And it just kind of shows the implications of this project; because it can expand to these families. I feel like there's kind of a commonality, like you were talking about before, especially relating to the race riots with what happened all up the Central Valley and along the coast. And it's just really contextualizes.

Roy Recio 1:20:45

You should know that these lodge books could be the Grand Oriente or Dimas-alang or Legionaires de Trabajo. They form these fraternal lodges because that was a way of protecting themselves. They had these lodges, they had these certain groups. They would travel in groups; they couldn't travel alone, for example. If they were traveling migrant workers going from Felton to Oxnard to Lompoc to Stockton to wherever—Watsonville, Salinas. They would have these lodges and they'd go from one lodge to the other. A town mate or a lodge member would say, "Hey, Johnny's coming into town. He's going to stay with us. We have an extra room, we'll make room on the couch," or whatever. They would protect themselves because, indeed, if they traveled alone, they'd be subject to these potential prejudices and violences that were waiting in the wings for them. Particularly after that era of the late 20s, 30s, and early 40s, that was a very horrendous time for Filipinos. But your girlfriend, definitely. You know, this is just the Watsonville story. But these Filipinos, because they travel throughout these towns, they knew each other. They worked together in the fields during the asparagus season in Stockton or they picked apples and oranges in early March.

Nicholas Nasser 1:22:13

I told her about you and she was like, "Oh, maybe I know him."

Roy Recio 1:22:19

Show her the calendar. She'll see some familiar things.

Toby Baylon 1:22:25

Yeah honestly this whole project in a way reminds me of a virtual version of that sort of community policing and watching out for each other that took place in Watsonville amongst the Filipino community. Kind of in the same retrospective sense, I wanted to ask you: how are you and your family dealing with the recent surge in Asian hate crimes? Like what sort of feelings or memories is that bringing up for you and your family?

Roy Recio 1:23:07

You know, it's trippy. It's trippy, Toby, because I'm mixed. Like if you look at me, I don't look Filipino. My wife thinks I look Indian, like from India. I don't pass for being Filipino. Even when I was doing my hardcore organizing work in the San Francisco Bay area, people would go: "Who are you? Are you Filipino?" So it really hasn't affected me personally, but every time I see something happened—like I was reading about a gal catching the Caltrain in downtown San Jose to go to Stanford, she was a nurse and she got harassed and pulled by the hair and kicked and then a lot of folks came to her rescue. But because she was Asian and she got kicked, I felt like I felt that kick too. I felt that pull, even though I don't have any hair. I felt like that pull of the hair—I just felt it. And every time I see an elder being abused or ridiculed or even punched and pushed down, spit on, whatever; I feel that, too. Because that could be my auntie, it could be my Dad, it could be your dad, or whoever. I just feel it. As far as me being scrutinized or in the line of fire or being attacked, I have not experienced that myself. But I do not doubt it's out there. It just sinks my heart that someone would be so cruel to hurt someone, particularly an elder or even a woman. It just doesn't make sense to me.

Toby Baylon 1:24:34

Right. Yeah, it gives me the same sort of feelings and reactions. It feels so personal to me and also to my parents. It makes me think it could be them or it could also be my grandparents when they first came here, too. But yeah, I just wanted to check in with you and see how you're doing.

Roy Recio 1:24:59

Right. I know in Santa Cruz—so Amanda [Gamban], she read and she participated in a vigil. And for a woman, you know we're all men here—we just don't know. We just don't know how much women get harassed. Whether they're waiting for the bus and some car cruises buy and yells some crap. Or someone grabs a gal and she's riding a bus, or whatever. Shopping—we just don't know. Or even an old lady, a manong walking down the street, and someone eyeing her to see what does she have, "let's look at her purse". They're doing surveillance of her to see if she could be a proper candidate for me to attack or something like that. We just don't

know that feeling. And that's something that we don't understand completely, but then we understand it because it could happen to us too.

Toby Baylon 1:25:53

That's part of the benefit of a project like this: increasing solidarity. I've only been on this project for a few months but just since that time I've seen so many new people join, like Nick included. And so seeing this kind of push for solidarity, even across racial lines because not everyone in this project is Filipino. Seeing the collective importance, for me personally, it does give a sense of faith and empowerment in our situation and our situation going forward.

Roy Recio 1:26:33

I think part of it too, Toby, is like, "Who the hell are you? You're brown skinned person. You don't belong, you're not American. You're not blue-eyed, blond haired." And knowing that you come from a place, you have roots. Your ancestors have roots, you've been here for a hundred years—that gives people some ground to stand on. Saying, "Hey, screw you! We're here, we've been here." That's what part of the Tobera project is about. Fermin Tobera is just who was the martyr of the race riots. But he was killed because Filipinos weren't supposed to be here. Like, "You're supposed to leave and go home. Do that back breaking work and get the heck out of here. We don't want you here." But for the project and the Watsonville Filipino community, we've been here now for three, four, five generations. We're here whether you like it or not—but more importantly, we're thriving and we're going to tell our fucking stories. And for those people who said that or had that sentiment for Filipinos to get the heck out, we're just saying, "Hey, fuck you, man. We're here, whether you like it or not. We're part of the American fabric, we're part of our local history, we're part of American history. And we're going to be here thriving and surviving; not just for three, four, or five generations, but for six, seven, eight, nine, and ten generations," and so on. So that's part of the impetus, or the foundation of this project, is to say—hate to say it, but—"Fuck you. We're going to be here and we're here. Deal with it." We weren't supposed to be here, but we're here. And we're part of the American society, part of the American fabric, and we're going to keep on being a part of American society and fabric and be strong, true, Americans; just like anybody else.

Toby Baylon 1:28:23

Hell yeah. And that is a testament to Filipino resiliency.

Roy Recio 1:28:28

Yes, sir.

Toby Baylon 1:28:30

Yeah, I think that's a good place to wrap up for tonight.

Roy Recio 1:28:35

Okay. Nick, do you have anything else that you wanted to add?

Nicholas Nasser 1:28:39

I mean, maybe we could do—I would love to do another interview.

Toby Baylon 1:28:44

Maybe near the end of our interview cycle?

Nicholas Nasser 1:28:48

Yeah.

Toby Baylon 1:28:48

So like, we speak with more people.

Roy Recio 1:28:51

Right and then more folks on the project too. Because there's a lot of stories—I can tell you about about the project and how it came together and certain dynamics and nuances of the project too, because it's kind of fun too. But as far as scratching the surface, getting to know me, and hearing about a little bit my family story; I appreciate you guys taking the time. And I look forward to—

Nicholas Nasser 1:29:14

It was fun. Thank you and just great.

Roy Recio 1:29:16

Hey, cool. Alright fellas, you guys take care of yourselves. You have a good night, okay?

Toby Baylon 1:29:22

Take care!

Roy Recio 1:29:23

Signing off.