Anastacio “Stosh” Asunción interviewed by Meleia Simon-Reynolds

Speakers: Anastacio “Stosh” Asunción; Meleia Simon-Reynolds

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Scope and Contents:
In this interview, originally recorded in-person, Anastacio “Stosh” Asunción speaks with Watsonville is in the Heart team member Meleia Simon-Reynolds. Stosh starts by telling the story of his father, Anastacio Polistico Asunción’s life in the Philippines, his migration to the United States through Hawai’i, and his involvement in both World Wars before eventually settling in Watsonville, California where he worked as a sharecropper for Reiter Berry Company. He discusses his father’s hobbies of gardening and fishing and remembers his mother, Paula Montelongo Asunción’s cooking. Stosh reflects on how growing up within a multiethnic community at a labor camp located on San Andreas Road impacted his early views on his parents’ interracial marriage. He describes how he explored his mixed-race identity in college at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He discusses reading Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart* and his experience writing an undergraduate research paper titled, “Watsonville’s Filipino Bachelor Community” in 1970. Stosh talks about his experience working in the strawberry fields as a child, and reflects on the long term effects agricultural pesticides had on his father and other workers. He also provides vivid details about cockfights that were held in the Pajaro Valley. Stosh ends the interview by reflecting on fond memories of spending time with his parents, including going fishing with his father and having picnics with his mother.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 00:03
Okay, this is Meleia Simon-Reynolds, I'm here with Anastacio Asunción and it is February 9, and we're here in Santa Cruz. Um, all right. So we'll get started. Now this is working. Yep, this is working. So would you mind first for the recording, saying both of your parents' names?

Anastacio Asunción 00:27
Okay. My father was Anastacio Polistico Asunción. My mother was Paula Montelongo Asunción. Montelongo is my mom's maiden name.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 00:39
Okay. And what was both of their birth dates? Or years?

Anastacio Asunción 00:47
My dad was born in 9– 1898. My mom was born probably in the early 1900s. I don't know specifically, you know, I'd have to go back and look at some but yeah, my mom was born in Texas, near San Antonio. And that's where she pretty much lived. And then I think she moved to what is now Big Spring, Texas at one time when she was younger. That's when she got married, had a family there. And for whatever reason. She divorced her first husband. His last name was Ramirez. She had five kids from that first marriage and she moved the kids to California to the East Bay Area. And I– she had a sister or

a cousin that lived in Hayward. And I think that's the connection coming into the East Bay. My dad was born in the Philippines. He spent–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 01:52
He was born in Bohol. Right?

Anastacio Asunción 01:53
Yeah, Bohol.

Anastacio Asunción 01:55
He spent some time—When he was younger, during the First World War, he joined the army under his brother's name, so that he– because he was underage. So he served in the First World War. After the First World War, because the Philippines was protorate, he was able to migrate to Hawai'i first, spent a certain number of years in Hawai'i. I don't know exactly how many. And then he migrated to the mainland, to California. And he worked in the Bay Area. Initially. He must have met my mom in the late– mid to late 40s after the Second World War in Irvington. Okay. And that's where they met. And more than likely they're working in the strawberry industry or the agriculture. And when I was born, in 1950, they were living in Morgan Hill at that time, but shortly thereafter, they moved to Watsonville. And my recollection, at that time is we were living on in a San Andreas labor camp for the Reiter Berry Company. And that's who my parents sharecropped for during that entire time.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 03:12
Yeah. All right. So I want to ask a couple more detailed questions about some of these things. Wondering, I know, this must have been– I mean, this is so long ago now, but how did you find out about your dad's early life? Did he tell you stories? Or did you–

Anastacio Asunción 03:33
Yeah. Kind of in conversation with my mom and my dad, you know, because as I got older, I got a little more curious about where he was from. And on rare occasions, he would talk about the Philippines that usually not too much. This is where the uncles, the bachelor Filipino guys, they would come over and then they would converse in their native language out in the backyard or somewhere on the porch or in the house. And because I don't speak the language. I didn't know what was going on.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 04:07
Yeah. So what what did he talk about when he talked about the Philippines?

Anastacio Asunción 04:12
He just talked about, you know, growing up how was very different than here, you know, I mean, I've never been to the Philippines. But you know, it sounded like, you know, it was a hard life for him. And that's probably one of the reasons he wanted to migrate to the United States, to earn money that he could send back to the Philippines to help his family. And a lot of these guys, the bachelors and my dad, more than likely initially thought they were going to raise some money and then go back. But turns out the majority of the bachelors never went back. Some of them did on occasions. We had a couple of

family friends where the guy went back, came back with a bride. But the bride was 20 to 30 years younger.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 05:02
Very typical experience. Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 05:04
So but a lot of the close family ones, like Brownie, Sabino, and a couple other guys, they never went back. And they never got married, whether to someone here or brought a bride from the Philippines.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 05:20
What– what did your dad's family do back in the Philippines?

Anastacio Asunción 05:25
I don't know, he never really kind of discussed that, you know. He was sort of private and in some sense that he didn't say a lot of things. And as a young kid, you know, it's totally over my head anyway. I'm not inquisitive enough to do that. And it's not until I really– till I got to college– that I started reading all this other stuff, that I started to ask him questions, and I got a little more information from him. That's how I found out that he had been in both World Wars. You know, so–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 06:06
Yeah, I mean, that's a fairly unique experience to be in both World War. Yeah. Do you– did he ever talk about his experience in World War I?

Anastacio Asunción 06:14
No, he– he would, you know, like, typical people of that generation, they didn't really like to talk about their war experiences.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 06:23
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 06:23
You know, it's typical, like, those books that about the greatest, quote, "Greatest Generation." Young guys that fought in the Second World War. In most cases, they don't like to talk about it. Because in many cases, it's something so tragic, horrific, that they just want to kind of put it somewhere, in some compartment in the back of their head and let it go.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 06:49
Yeah. Do you know where he served during World War One?

Anastacio Asunción 06:53
More likely served somewhere probably in the Pacific, because even though it was a World War, you know, it's mainly concentrated in in Europe. And then in the Second World War, I'm assuming the same thing, he– probably somewhere in the Pacific. He didn't really say what he actually did. But that he

served, because he was a member of this veterans group called the VFW. Veterans of Foreign War. And when he died, someone from the military, you know, typically gives the– the wife a flag. A folded flag. So–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 07:29
Yeah, yeah. So– So was he in the First or Second Filipino Regiment? Or was he not? Because I think if he was previously in World War One, it's possible. He may have not been in that regiment. But are you aware?

Anastacio Asunción 07:47
Yeah no, I'm not aware of what– what, um– what, you know, branch he– not branch, but unit he served in. And I've never really taken the time to look into that, because it's always– I found it very difficult to find information.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 08:05
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 08:05
You know,

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 08:06
Yeah. Yeah, there– I mean, there are some websites and things about World War II Filipino veterans, but and there's kind of some archives and information so you can find— But ,World War I, I mean, it'd be pretty difficult to track someone down in World War I. Yeah. Well, that's really unique. Yeah. So he– he served in World War I, and then he decided to go to Hawai‘i. Do you know if he went with anyone, any town mates or relatives?

Anastacio Asunción 08:40
No he never really said, but more than likely, I'm assuming that's what happened. He went with a group of friends. You know, some young guys got together and said, "Hey, let's go to Hawai‘i or to the United States." Because they're technically citizens of the United States, because at that time there, it's a protectorate of the United States. So basically, you know, another fancy word for saying it was a colony.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 09:07
Yeah. Yeah. When he went to Hawai‘i, was he working in the sugar plantation?

Anastacio Asunción 09:13
Yeah, more likely sugar or the pineapple plantations.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 09:16
Oh okay.

Anastacio Asunción 09:16
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 09:17
Did he ever talk about that at all?

Anastacio Asunción 09:20
No, not really. Like, again, he was pretty– he was a very humble man. Quiet. Not very boastful, I guess you would say, which is pretty typical. I think of the men of that particular generation.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 09:36
Yeah. Yeah. Keep to themselves.

Anastacio Asunción 09:39
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 09:40
Yeah. I mean, I'm sure it was also hard work too, really hard work.

Anastacio Asunción 09:46
Mhmm.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 09:46
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 09:48
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 09:49
So he stayed there, you think, maybe a few years?

Anastacio Asunción 09:53
Yeah, he stayed there a few years. And I'm trying to you– know, I'm trying to just kind of imagine– more likely stayed there a couple years. So the war ended in what? '44, '45. So he probably– shortly after the war, he probably migrated to the mainland.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:11
So he migrated to the mainland after World War II?

Anastacio Asunción 10:14
After World War II.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:15
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 10:15

See, I was born in 1950, my older sister was– is a year older than I am. So I'm saying she was born in '49. My other brother is maybe a year and a half to two years. So that makes it like '46, '47.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:32
Okay, mhmm, that he came to the US?

Anastacio Asunción 10:35
And then he met my mom, and you know, they had the first child.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:39
Right. So he may have been enlisted or even based in Hawai‘i during World War .

Anastacio Asunción 10:46
Right.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:46
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 10:47
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:47
Okay. Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 10:48
And that's probably more than likely why– because what I'm thinking is that after the Second World War, he probably kind of came to Hawai‘i, maybe went back to the Philippines, and then during the Second World War, he might have been somewhere around there. And then got discharged at the end of the war in– in the– in Hawai‘i, and then made the jump to the mainland.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 11:10
Right. Do you know why he may have wanted to come to the mainland?

Anastacio Asunción 11:14
I think just the work opportunities were probably better, the working conditions. And he probably knew some people that were already here, because there's– there was always a network of people. And that's why they came to a certain spot or a certain area because they knew someone or indirectly knew someone that lived there. And that's why they settled here. Because one of the guys I mentioned before in the photos, Joe Cabanban, had a younger brother named Sabino who also came to Watsonville and stayed in the area. And he was one of those, quote, "uncles" that would show up at the house off and on.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 11:53
Oh okay. Okay. So he came to the US and you said he, kind of, maybe went to East Bay first?

Anastacio Asunción 11:59
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:00
Okay. Met your mom around there. Were there other locations that he was migrating to for work?

Anastacio Asunción 12:07
I think for a while he might have been up in the Stockton area. Remember I showed you that bill of sale?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:13
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 12:14
And that was from a store he ran for a short time, but he didn't enjoy the indoor work for being outside. So he gave that up and went into the farming, you know, sharecropping.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:25
So that store was in Walnut Grove.

Anastacio Asunción 12:28
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:28
And that– that was a store he ran?

Anastacio Asunción 12:31
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:31
What was the store called?

Anastacio Asunción 12:32
Was like a dry goods store.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:34
It was called like Filipinos– ?

Anastacio Asunción 12:36
Philippine Market– I mean, I can go get the bill of sale. We– if you want to scan it too.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:41
Oh yeah, we can scan it later.

Anastacio Asunción 12:42
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:43
So he was running that dry goods store. He was kind of like, "eh".

Anastacio Asunción 12:47
Yeah, yeah, I don't really like this, you know, kind of– kind of work.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:52
Do you think he had met your mom already when he was running the store?

Anastacio Asunción 12:56
No, I think it was after he– he must have moved to the Irvington area, even though it's relatively close, you know, Walnut Grove in Irvington. But I'm pretty sure that he had already given up the store business.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 13:08
Okay. Moved there. So was he kind of mainly operating at farms around in California? Not necessarily migrating elsewhere?

Anastacio Asunción 13:19
No, then it's pretty much from my understanding. It's it was pretty much Northern California. The Central Coast area, right?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 13:29
He wasn't necessarily going to like Alaska or Arizona like the other manong did?

Anastacio Asunción 13:36
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 13:36
Okay. Okay. So you were mentioning that they they met in Irvington, probably in the fields, and then moved to Watson– Morgan Hill in the fort— late 40s,

Anastacio Asunción 13:50
Late 40s.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 13:51
Then from there, moved to Watsonville?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 13:54

Okay, I want to pause there on your dad and go to your mom a little bit. And I know you said she was born in Texas. Do you know anything about her family? Like what they did?

Anastacio Asunción 14:07
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 14:08
No, not really. I mean, there was a town outside of San Antonio that I went to San Antonio when I was, you know, maybe 20, maybe 30 years ago. And I went to look up where she was born, where she grew up. And it's just a little hole in the wall town near San Antonio. And then, for whatever reason, they moved to Big Spring, Texas, which is a little further west. And that's where she settled. And I think that's where she got married and had, originally had the kids.

Anastacio Asunción 14:25
Right. And your mom's Mexican American. Do you know anything about like how her ancestors came to be in that location?

Anastacio Asunción 14:54
No. Yeah, I mean, again, she never really kind of divulged that. And the weird the weird, strange thing is when I was in— I was already teaching. And I was financially well off enough that I offered to take her back to Texas to go visit either the town in San Antonio or to go to Big Spring. She said "Nah I don't want to go back". She had no desire to go back to Texas.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 15:19
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 15:20
So for whatever reason, you know, my mom was kind of funny in that way. She was very focused and in some way very strong-headed about, you know, "I don't want to do this, so I'm not going to do it".

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 15:33
Right. She moved past that.

Anastacio Asunción 15:35
Yeah, she's gone beyond that. Don't want to look back.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 15:39
Okay. And so she was also doing agricultural labor–

Anastacio Asunción 15:43
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 15:44
–Like your dad, taking care of her– all her kids–

Anastacio Asunción 15:47
Right.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 15:47
–From her previous marriage.

Anastacio Asunción 15:48
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 15:49
Okay. Do you know anything? Like, how did you ever hear any stories like specifically about how they met or it was just kind of they met in the field–

Anastacio Asunción 15:57
They met— yeah. Yeah. So and I think the reason, from what I gathered, the reason she got a divorce from her first husband. I think he was abusive. I don't know, necessarily to her, but maybe to the kids. And so that upset her. And so she just grabbed the kids and boom. Moved. Moved to California to be near a cousin that lived in Hayward or a sister that lived in Hayward.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 16:24
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 16:25
Yeah. So that's what brought her to California.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 16:28
Did—did your dad kind of like adopt the other kids?

Anastacio Asunción 16:33
Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 16:35
Yeah, when they got married. Okay. And so you mentioned that they probably got married around '46 or '47-ish. Yeah. I know that that is a time where a lot of like mixed-race couples were facing some discrimination. Even laws that said–

Anastacio Asunción 16:54
Right.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 16:54
Do you know where they got married?

Anastacio Asunción 16:56

No, I don't. I'm assuming it was in that Irvington area.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 17:00
Okay. Okay. Yeah. Did you ever hear even, or kind of notice, even maybe when you were a little older, them kind of facing any challenges of being an interracial couple?

Anastacio Asunción 17:11
No, not really, because most of the people they interacted with were ethnic minorities. And we did, we did have a few Caucasian friends. But overall, the majority of the people were involved in agriculture. So more than likely, when we lived in the labor camps, we had Hispanic friends, we had Japanese friends, some Filipino friends that would come to the house. So yeah, but not a lot of, quote, "Caucasian people". I mean, there were a couple people that the family knew when we were in Watsonville, there was an old retired CHP guy that lived in Watsonville. There was a guy that lived out on the east side of Watsonville toward, if you're familiar with the east side of Watsonville, off of Amesti Road, that guy had a farm there, or ranch. And on occasions, we would go out to the ranch, slaughter a pig or a cow and then split the– split the carcass. So we always had a freezer. So if we got a quarter, a half of the cow or pig, then my mom would cut it all up and then "pssst" go in the freezer. And so we didn't have to go to the market to buy meat.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 17:12
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 17:50
You know, we always had, on the farm, animals. We had rabbits. We had—not a lot of chickens, but every now and then we– my dad would buy a goat, we'd slaughter a goat.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 18:48
And this was a farm in Watsonville?

Anastacio Asunción 18:53
No, the ranch– the guy with the ranch lived out on the east side. And then we– in the labor camp, we have a certain amount of space where we could grow stuff, you know. You know, have a small vegetable garden, but we'd have animals too.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 19:07
Okay. Yeah. What kinds of things did they grow in the garden?

Anastacio Asunción 19:11
You know, typical, you know, carrots, corn, string beans, stuff like that. Even after my dad retired, when we lived on Buena Vista. So, when we moved to Buena Vista I was probably in junior high, eighth, seventh-eighth grade. So, my dad had already been in the hospital and behind this was a lot that was probably a double size lot. And Brownie bought the lot. And then he let my dad grow vegetables. So you had corn. He had ap– some apple trees, some carrots, string beans and stuff like that. So we always had fresh produce.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 19:56
Yeah, yeah. And so it was your dad who was kind of the big gardener right? Did your mom garden too?

Anastacio Asunción 20:02
Yeah, my mom would garden. But my dad, that was kind of what he did, because my mom was still working as a domestic. But my dad was, quote, "retired" because, you know, physically he was already getting, you know, older and not able to do the heavy, heavy work. So he would garden. And that's how he'd pass his time.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 20:19
I see. I see. Do you remember like any particular crops that he was really fond of growing all the time?

Anastacio Asunción 20:27
He always liked to grow corn. And he would—I mean, you got to realize this lot is pretty good size. It's probably from this part of the house, almost in the middle of the street, so he could grow multi-rows. So he'd maybe plant four or five rows of corn, wait a couple weeks and plant a few more. Had rows of tomatoes, carrots and other stuff. So he would be you know, a very diverse kind of crop. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 20:58
Did he ever grow any like, you know, like Filipino? Or like Asian vegetables at all?

Anastacio Asunción 21:04
Not really. I mean, but then again, I would not know what that was, you know. I mean, he grew squash, zucchini squash, some stuff. And sometimes he'd grow pumpkins. And we're a couple of rare occasions, he tried to grow watermelon, but I don't think the climate was hot enough.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 21:22
Yeah, yeah. It's probably not hot enough in Watsonville.

Anastacio Asunción 21:25
So, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 21:26
Hmm, do you remember anything that he or your mom would cook using the foods from the garden?

Anastacio Asunción 21:32
My mom did most of the cooking, even though my Dad cooked on occasion. So my mom made a bunch of dishes from scratch with whatever, whatever we had. I mean, we might have to go to the market to buy either chicken, sometimes pork. And this was later on when I was already in my teens, so we're no longer on the farm or in a labor camp. And then I would go fishing with my dad, or he would go clamming and I'd be go fishing. So we use some of that stuff. Or like Brownie would bring us those chickens in a bag. [laughter]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 22:10
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 22:11
So you know, that kind of stuff. And so she made a lot of Mexican food. The kids always loved that when she made tortillas, and she would make flour tortillas. You know, I think a lot of people make corn tortillas. But for whatever it may be, it's because she's from west Texas, she made flour tortillas. And so we were— as kids, we were always excited that she was making tortillas because she would have this big bowl next to the stove. And as she finished them, she'd throw them in the bowl, and then, you know. But we would come in and grab a tortilla, get some butter and put it on it. And that was a snack. So in– in many cases, she had to make twice as many tortillas. Because the kids would come through and grab one or two.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 22:54
They'd be all gone by the time–

Anastacio Asunción 22:56
Yeah, she only made let's say a dozen or two dozen, that wouldn't be enough to feed the family, for whatever reason. And so, you know, she was probably, a really, I mean, she was a really good cook, as far as I'm concerned because she could make almost anything from scratch. You know, and, you know, you're giving a couple different vegetables and stuff and make something, meat. And she could bake. She would make these things called empanadas. And– but she would use squash or pumpkin, which is not a very common thing that I've found from you know, trying to find stuff like that. Most of them are fruit or meat. And then she would also make these I think they're called bunuelos, which is basically a tortilla but it's it's, it's, it's about this big, the dough slice, and you cut a slice in the middle and you fold it and so it's like a bowtie and then you fried in oil. And then you drop it in a bag with cinnamon and sugar, shake it up. And that was usually done at Christmas time.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 24:00
Oh, that sounds so good.

Anastacio Asunción 24:01
And then on occasion, she would make tamales but it would be like a two-day event because she would get the meat, prep the meat, cook the meat. Sometimes, if she was able to get a cow's head and put the cow's head and then pick the meat out of the, out of the head. And that was part of the tamale or whatever and then she would have her own spices and stuff to mix it in. And then you know it'd be like a production line. Someone getting the corn husk out, someone slopping the masa on it, and then someone doing the meat, and then someone else would be rolling it up and sticking it in a pot ready to be– because when you make tamales, in most cases, you're making four to five dozen.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 24:44
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 24:44

Because it's a labor intensive thing and you just don't you just can't do it. You know, if you and I were having dinner we just couldn't make you know, five or six tamales it would be— Yeah, it'd be a waste of time. You know, because the amount you know, and she would buy the masa. But then she would do her own little spin on what you put into it, you know, flavor it with spices and stuff.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 25:05
Yeah. And did– what did your dad cook when he cooked?

Anastacio Asunción 25:09
He cooked a couple of Filipino dishes. That's where I learned how to make adobo, just watching him. And then he did some fish dishes. But some of the stuff was a little too– I don't know. What's the word? A little too strange for me as a young kid. Yeah. He had this stuff called bagoong. Which is, is that smelly fish stuff he would buy–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 25:35
Shrimp paste.

Anastacio Asunción 25:35
Yeah, we'd buy that. Or when we slaughtered an animal, they would save the blood and make this blood dish using– using the either pig or goat or cow blood with meat. And I just– I just couldn't stomach it.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 25:51
It's a little bit much.

Anastacio Asunción 25:52
Yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 25:53
Yeah. It's a– it's– it's an intense one. [laughter]

Anastacio Asunción 25:57
Yeah, so I just passed on that one. But I did like when he would go to the market, he would buy these little fish. Their are probably about that big. And he would– he had a– this wire grate. He would put a bunch on, heat 'em over the flame. And we would eat those as snacks or we had these strips of cuttlefish– excuse me– that he would heat up and it would soften it up so it'd be a little more able to chew. And then he was also a good– good barbecuer. He would make this– this marinade or mixture of vinegar, soy sauce, some spices, and garlic. And so if we were going to barbecue something, he would marinate that in– in that liquid mixture for a couple hours or so. And then we could save it because it had the vinegar wouldn't go bad. And you just stick it in a vessel and stick it on the refrigerator. And I still do that to this day when I'm– when I'm barbecuing something– every once in a while I'll make that– that concoction.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 27:05

Nice. That sounds good.

Anastacio Asunción 27:07
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 27:08
What did he do with– or what did you all do with the fish and clams that you would gather?

Anastacio Asunción 27:13
He would make like a soup. And the fish we would fry or grill. So we would go to the beach, we'd probably catch perch. And then um, I think I told you that when we went to Moss Landing, my dad and one of his friends– whoever we went with– I would stay fishing and they would go when it was low tide. Because when it is low tide, the water recedes quite a bit so they could go out there and there would be maybe a 30– 40 yard dry spot where they could dig for these clams, these geoduck clams. And you could see 'em across the road. They'd have their bucket and they'd be all these different holes looking for the clams and they'd come home, you know, with quite a few.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 28:01
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 28:02
And then he'd make some kind of concoction with the – with the clams. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 28:08
Do you still fish?

Anastacio Asunción 28:10
Yeah, I still fish. I still fish every now and then I'll go down to the ocean. And then I have a nephew that I go fishing up in the Sierras. I go trout fishing or river, you know, freshwater fishing. And then I– my– unfortunately my nephew moved to Idaho about five years ago. So I've gone up to there a couple of times to go fishing with him. But that was one of the people I– after I retired I reconnected with my nephew because he had a landscaping business, but we would– God for probably 10 years after I started helping him out, at least once or twice a year we'd go into the Sierras on a backpacking trip. Go fishing. And we would take stuff there just in case but invariably, we always were– were catching trout. So what I would do is– and I've learned this from my mom and dad is– I would barbecue like a Tri Tip or skirt steak, freeze it the night before, and then– when– the next day, we would drive up and I'd hike– we'd hike in and then we would have something ready for dinner. So by the time we got there the food had somewhat defrosted you know, and I wouldn't take camping food, you know, like dry stuff and reconstitute it. I would– and my nephew thought I was nuts– the first couple times that I would take tortillas, I'd cut up green onions. I'd bring some chorizo, I'd even bring some spam. And so– and eggs– and so we would have that for breakfast for dinner. You know, I would do something on the campstove.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 29:49
That sounds like my kind of camping.

Anastacio Asunción 29:52
Yeah. I mean, you know, I mean– when I was in college, I'd do camping and we'd eat that dry good stuff, but that was horrible.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 29:58
It's not that good.

Anastacio Asunción 29:59
No. So, you know, and I would take a small cooler, you know, the Tri Tip was probably this big, the skirt steak this big. And then the other stuff, you know, and I take ups– I'd take some bacon, and everything would be frozen. So by the time we got there, the next day, it would would have thawed and it wouldn't go bad. And we're only there for two to three nights. You know, but a lot of times we would– because we would catch trout– We would have trout for dinner or trout for lunch. And then we would take– sometimes I would pre cook the rice, other times, I would simply take a couple packs of rice-a-roni, cook it on the campstove, and that's what we had. Something– I don't know how healthy it was, but sometimes it was pretty simple. And it tastes good when you're out there in the woods.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 30:50
Yeah, that sounds great. Um, I wanted to go back a little bit. And I wanted to ask you about your parents and their marriage. I'm curious, you said that there were a lot of like different people from different ethnic groups that you are all around. Do you know if your mom had any relatives or friends that also married Filipino manong?

Anastacio Asunción 31:18
The guy, Joe Cababan, married one of my mom's nieces or cousins. Okay. So her name was Judy. And they had a family. There was another– he lived in the city. And he worked, I think, for a hotel. And there was a cousin or niece or something of my mom's that married that Filipino man. And her name was Pauline. And then those are probably the only couples that I can recall off-hand. Some of the other people my mom– that– that knew my mom or my mom knew, more likely married Hispanic men.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 32:07
Did you and your siblings ever, um, like use the term Mexipino?

Anastacio Asunción 32:15
No.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 32:16
No. Have you heard it before?

Anastacio Asunción 32:18
No, actually, no–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 32:19

No!

Anastacio Asunción 32:20
No.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 32:20
Oh, wow. It's kind of a common term that I hear a lot of people from the Watsonville community using.

Anastacio Asunción 32:26
Okay.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 32:27
Um, there's a lot of people who had Mexican moms and Filipino dads around and a lot of them will kind of be like, oh, yeah, we're Mexipino.

Anastacio Asunción 32:36
Hm. Yeah, that's the– this is the first time I've heard that phrase. Usually, it was either I'm Mexican or I'm Filipino. And I mean, you know, sometimes it became, because I'm of a mixed race couple, it became far too complicated, try to explain to some of these people, uh, that whole dynamic, right. So because of what I look like, most people simply took me for Hispanic. But when I go to Hawai'i, I run across a lot of people with this– that either know someone, or is related to someone that has the same last name, Asunción. And then some people– and Asunción is more likely the Hispanic pronunciation. Growing up, a lot of people simply– I'm going to say, Americanized it, and just said Asunción. So, you know, for the longest time up until I got to college, it was pretty much Asunción. And then, because I got– I don't know, maybe more aware, I just think it sounded better–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 32:37
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 32:43
And my– my mom and dad in their conversations, when, I guess, when my dad did something my mom wasn't too happy with, she would say "Asunción" rather than "Tony". And very rarely did she call my dad Anastacio. He's usually Tony. And most of the other people in the community would know him as Tony,

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 34:08
As Tony, I see.

Anastacio Asunción 34:09
Yeah. Yeah so it wasn't really until I got to college that I started to distinguish that I was from two different cultures. You know, and as a young farm kid, I didn't know the difference.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 34:24
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 34:24
You know,

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 34:25
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 34:26
You know, you know, and growing up in the Watsonville area, and also in Rio Del Mar. I think the majority of the people I came into contact with were Caucasian.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 34:36
Mmm, okay.

Anastacio Asunción 34:37
So in some ways that kind of set me up differently than some of the other people who lived in Watsonville. And that's, I think, partly because my mom and dad both me– both wanted us, the kids, to assimilate faster. And that's why I don't think we were ever taught the language or I was never taught, you know, my dad's dialect of Visayan or my mom really teaching me Spanish. I mean, I– I can pick it up. I mean, I can– I can listen to something, I can kind of get the inference but, you know, I have no– if someone spoke Filipino to me whether it be Visayan, Tagalog, or Ilokano, I would have no clue. You might as well be speaking Chinese to me.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 35:20
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 35:21
You know.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 35:22
Yeah. So when you got to college, were you kind of like feeling– how did you kind of like explore your different sides of your identity and kind of come to terms with it?

Anastacio Asunción 35:34
Well, I think because—this was the first time going to UC Santa Cruz that I– I was at that time—In 1969, a Chinese woman came down to Watsonville High– she must have looked at the transcripts and said, "okay, these kids had the potential to go to UC". And– and I was one of the kids she picked. And so when I got to UC Santa Cruz, I ran across a lot of different ethnic groups. You know, and a lot actually a lot of people coming up from Southern California to Santa Cruz. You know, I had a lot of friends that came from West LA, or LA in general. I had some friends, I had this one Filipino friend that I– we hung out for a long time. He was from Gilroy. His dad was Filipino, his mom was Mexican, but his dad worked, I guess on a merchant marine or something– ship. So he was gone quite a bit. Yeah. And his mom had a business or something in Morgan Hill. You know, and then, you know, I ran across different Hispanic groups. And then I got into UC Santa Cruz through a program called EOP,

Educational Opportunity Program, right. So they selected a bunch of us. And then a group of us came early, it was kind of like an early orientation. So there was maybe 15, or 20 of us, we went into one of the dorms- da da da- did a bunch of stuff. And that's where I got to see a lot of different people. And it was probably one of the first times I had really kind of extended interaction with any kind of African American person, or Native American person. Up until that time, most of my interaction was either with Hispanics or Japanese Americans, some Chinese that we had in Watsonville. But yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 37:30
Yeah. Did you ever, when you were at UC Santa Cruz, kind of like get wind of any of the, like, ethnic studies protesting and like stuff that folks were doing about claiming identity? And–

Anastacio Asunción 37:46
Yeah, I mean, that's kind of– kind of what led to this [refer's to his research paper titled "Watsonville's Filipino Bachelor Community"]. You know, originally I was, you know– in Cowell, you had to take this quote "Western Civ" class.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 37:57
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 37:57
So we had this big lecture hall, and it was required for all freshmen to take this Western Civ class. And then we could pick whatever else we wanted, you know, we and we carried– I forget how many units– and I think by the end of my first year, I started to kind of look at some of these other things. You know, and that's why I kind of– I forget when I wrote the paper, but it was probably '70 or '71.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 38:23
1970.

Anastacio Asunción 38:24
Okay, so that was—that would have been my second year.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 38:27
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 38:27
So my sophomore year. So yeah, so then I started to do other things. And for a while I studied Chinese history, ancient Chinese history. And, in fact, I even took two quarters of Chinese but I was horrible at it. So there was a woman. Her name was Ching-Yi Doherty, who taught Mandarin. And she was living on campus, and I think she– she was affiliated with Merrill. So we would go up to Merrill, or I would go to Merrill, and sit through this class. Most of the kids in the class were Chinese, or a couple Caucasian, and then me. And the funny thing is, since I'm left-handed, that's a no-no in Chinese. Because all the characters, you can tell if the person right-handed or left- handed, and she could tell I was left-handed just how I drew the characters. And we had to have– I ended up having several shoeboxes full of characters, because I would make these little cards with the Chinese character on the front and on the

backside of translation or the– or the Chinese phrase. And we would have to learn and I think we went three or four days a week, and we would have to learn roughly 15 to 20 characters a day. So that's a big load. And I'm not I'm not a very good linguist, so I really struggled and she actually said, "Oh, I don't think you're gonna make it so you better drop out". But that was okay.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 39:59
So you took the Asian American Studies class, and then you were able to do this research paper. We're going kind of towards the end, I'm going to circle back to your childhood after we talk about this. But I'm wondering, like, what made you interested in doing this research on the Filipino bachelor community in Watsonville, that, you know–

Anastacio Asunción 40:27
I had read that book by Bulosan, America is in the Heart. And there was that one section about Watsonville and that kind of clicked. And it's an– I don't know– and I know some of these people, you know, um, you know, and they– you know, the– the whole thing– taxi dancer thing, and all these other things, and the labor riots and stuff like that. So I said, "Oh!", you know, and I'd never seen anything about these people.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 40:58
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 41:00
So yeah. So that was probably what did it. It's kind of interesting that now that I know that I did it my sophomore year– you know, it was just kind of something I just wanted to do.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 41:14
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 41:15
It was probably the beginning of my awakening of my whole ethnic identity.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 41:23
How so?

Anastacio Asunción 41:24
Well, I mean, I started looking at stuff differently. You know, I went to those– several of those Vietnam War protest marches in San Francisco. A bunch of my friends were into different Ethnic Studies stuff. You know, I had a very diverse group of people. I mean, I had Caucasians, Asian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino people that I interacted with, Hispanic people that I interacted with. So that whole thing was kind of like eye opening for me in terms of my ethnic identity.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 42:02
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 42:03
So I took a– you know, I took a totally different approach than what I had done as a, you know, kid from a farming town in Watsonville. Yeah, not knowing too much. Because, you know, if you look at– look at the history that is taught in high school, or even middle school, it's very generic and bits and pieces about ethnic contributions. So this is all new to me. I mean, it has opened up a whole new world to me in terms of my interests and stuff. And I've always been a reader for whatever reason. So, you know, going through high school—I don't know. I mean, even though I don't look it, but I was– I was pretty much of a bookworm in some cases, even though I had this other side of me, that was kind of wild. But I kind of compartmentalized it– that– and I think that's why– even though going, you know, going through school, I always did pretty good. You know, but I didn't really work at it. I was probably a B to B+ student where if I had worked at it, I could have been easily an A student, but I was like "Nah, life is too short, enjoy myself" right. So I wasn't as driven, I think, until I got to college, and then all these other things kind of opened up for me.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 43:35
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 43:36
You know, different outlets hold different perspectives by interacting with different people on campus. Even some of the professor's– I was– I was kind of shocked in some ways. At that time, two of the biggest names on campus were Paige Smith and John Dizikes. Smith was the Provost of Cowell and Dizikes, was, he turned out to be my advisor, my first couple years. And then there was a Black professor called J. Herman Blake that was my advisor for a short time, and uh, kind of just opened up a whole new world.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 44:20
Yeah, um, so about the paper that you wrote. Could you talk a little bit about kind of what it was like to do that research in your community, but it was not necessarily spaces that you had participated in growing up? Like what was that experience like?

Anastacio Asunción 44:40
It was actually fascinating because I had a couple leads and probably one of my biggest leads was going to the restaurant–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 44:52
Mhm, Philippine Gardens.

Anastacio Asunción 44:53
–Philippine Gardens. And I kind of had uh, a peripheral view of that particular world through interacting with my quote, "uncles" and how they lived. And then from that book, America is in the Heart, and then it just kind of just snowballed, you know. Going to the restaurant, I saw these people, you know, and I could identify with them, because some of these people would– would have been my dad's friends. Then going to the labor camps, I kind of had that experience. So I knew what that was like. But– but then to see the bachelors living by themselves, you know, in almost substandard conditions. So, you

know, and it just– so, and I had a camera, so I just started taking some pictures I thought would be appropriate, you know, like the front of the restaurant, inside the restaurant, men sitting around and stuff like that. So that was just kind of just, in some ways, just winging it. No– no real plan, per se. I was just putting all this information together. Then afterwards, when I sat down and wrote the paper, I kind of sifted through all this stuff and said, "Okay, this is appropriate". You know, and I kind of interjected some personal experiences, but also some historical and research things. I went to the– went to the Watsonville Pajaronian or the public library and did the microfiche thing, went through the newspapers and looked for stuff. And it kind of became a real world.

Anastacio Asunción 46:02
Right. Can you describe a little bit about like, what the inside of Philippine Gardens was like when you were there doing your research?

Anastacio Asunción 46:53
Yeah. The first day I walked in, everyone kind of turned and looked at me. It's like, if you know, in these movies, you see a stranger walk into a bar or saloon, and everyone kind of stops and looks. And I just kind of walked around, you know, and I'm– I probably had long hair at that time, and a goatee, and a mustache maybe. Typical, quote, "college student". So I just kind of sauntered up to the counter and I talked to this woman behind the counter, who happened to be Ms. Tabasa. And I kind of explained what I was doing. And she said, "Oh, no, no, no, no", you know, and then she kind of pointed to the different people and the guys are sitting around at tables, eating something, I don't know what. And then there was a back room where she says, "You can go in but don't take any pictures unless they give you permission". And I just kind of went and poked my head in and kind of watched what they were doing. They were playing cards. I don't know what kind of card game could have been gambling because Filipinos are notorious for gambling. And that was it, you know, and then I made some other contacts while being in the restaurant. And that's how I got to that labor camp off of San Andreas. And I knew of some other places where they would be hanging out. So yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 48:12
Yeah. Um, so the– the labor camp off San Andreas that you were at was close to but not the same one where you were living as a child?

Anastacio Asunción 48:23
No, no. And this one was strictly for a Filipino bachelors. Okay. That's all that lived there. There were no– there were no single family homes or homes for families. It was like a barracks with apartments and stuff that these men would stay at, because more likely they were set up there by the grower who they work for. So yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 48:50
Was this still Reiter Berries at the time? Or was it–

Anastacio Asunción 48:55
It was a totally different– more likely, I think they were either– could have been in strawberries, but more likely lettuce.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 49:02
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 49:02
Or some other row crop like broccoli or brussel sprouts. Okay. So a lot of times at this stage, these guys are probably in their late 50s, early 60s at that time when I'm there, more than likely they're not doing heavy physical labor. So maybe they're doing irrigation or tractor work. And that's probably what they were physically able to do at that time. Because you know, they're already in their– if you think about it, 50s or 60s, leading such a hard life–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 49:32
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 49:33
It's very taxing.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 49:35
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 49:36
So that's why I'm not a farmer. [laughter]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 49:37
Yeah, I can see that. I mean, they must have been– they probably were in their 50s at least.

Anastacio Asunción 49:46
Yeah. Well, I mean, if we look at the picture–

Anastacio Asunción 50:00
This picture, like I figured it's probably somewhere in the 60s, 70s. My dad's already in his late 60s.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 50:08
Right. And there were–

Anastacio Asunción 50:09
And he's probably already in his late 60s. And he will, I think, was still kind of working part time, not real heavy, right? My dad, by the time he was probably in his early 60s, had developed spots on his lungs. And initially, they thought it was tuberculosis. So he was in a Veterans Hospital in Livermore for about a year and a half. And it turns out, it was an infection from the pesticides in the fields. Because I have numerous occasions where we're out in the fields, either picking or weeding or something, and all sudden this crop duster comes blowing in. And we're given no warning that this thing is going to be dropping stuff on us.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 50:50
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 50:51
So that's more than likely where you know– and nowadays, you're a lot more careful with using chemicals. Whereas then it's— anything went.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 50:59
Yeah. Did you know of other people who had diseases from pesticides?

Anastacio Asunción 51:05
Yeah, I mean, there were other people that we– I didn't know it at the time, but more than likely you could trace back to the pesticide use, you know, it was probably in the late 50s, early 60s when they stopped using DDT. But that was a common pesticide used at the time. And who knows what the guy was dropping in the plane. I mean, we were fascinated. This guy in this biplane comes blowing in. And he's about maybe 10 feet from the ground, right? And you'd have to navigate between telephone poles. So if there was a telephone pole here, and the field is right here, you'd have to go basically like this.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 51:42
Oh, my gosh.

Anastacio Asunción 51:43
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 51:43
And you guys were just children out there working in the fields.

Anastacio Asunción 51:47
Yeah. Yeah. And we just ducked down in the in the row, you know, and this guy– and he wouldn't necessarily dust us, we might be here and he's going there. But it's like, from here to the other side of the street.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 51:58
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 51:59
So you get all that blow over. You know, and then we just have to– after these, we just go back to work not knowing that we should stay out of the field for a little bit.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 52:07
Yeah. So your dad had kind of retired after?

Anastacio Asunción 52:12
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 52:12
But there were a lot of other manong and folks who were working up until–

Anastacio Asunción 52:17
Yeah, I would say they probably worked until they were in their mid to late 60s.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 52:22
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 52:23
And then once they could not work any more than they were kind of– they were probably surviving or barely surviving on their Social Security.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 52:31
Mhm. What was it like for you to like, go back to that labor camp and interact with the old timers there?

Anastacio Asunción 52:39
It was kind of a– it was a new experience because that, you know, as a young kid, even though I lived in a labor camp, I didn't really realize it, you know, that it was, quote, a "labor camp". I just figured, okay, this is where we live. We're all farmers. And that was it. And so I wasn't necessarily exposed to that thing where the– where the manongs lived in these labor camps or housing. I think I told you earlier, that camp on San Andreas, it was a multi camp because there were homes for sharecroppers but also there were some barracks for the braceros, because the bracero program I think, ended in the mid– mid to late 50s. And so they were still bringing in braceros at that time. And I remember, as a young kid, we would contract with a couple of braceros to help pick, but most of the time, because most farmers that are– were sharecropping, had maybe four to five acres to tend to. But– and that's probably one of the reasons you had large families, you know, five or six kids in the family, because they would help with the labor, but then sometimes with the picking you needed, you know, adults, whereas kids are just screwing off.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 53:53
Right. You– so you– your family, they were sharecroppers and other families, so they would sometimes get the braceros in the area. Would they ever get any of the Filipino men in the area to come work?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 54:05
Oh, yeah. Mhm.

Anastacio Asunción 54:05
No, not usually. Every once in a while some of the guys did– one of the guys was a family friend, Trini, he was a picker. And he was actually really fast for a man that was probably in his– at that time, maybe in his 50s. And a lot of times it was, um– it was piecework. So you didn't get paid by the hour. You got paid by how many crates you picked.

Anastacio Asunción 54:06
So we had these punch cards. And it's how fast you can pick. And in most cases– you've seen those little carts with the wheel on the front and the crate?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 54:34
They're wooden carts?

Anastacio Asunción 54:36
They're– they were either wooden and later on they became metal.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 54:42
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 54:43
But– and you could fit a crate on there– sometimes you would– some people would put one crate this way and another crate on the top so that as you're going along, you could kind of fill both crates at the same time.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 54:58
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 54:59
And then, you know, you can make pretty decent money, you might get 50 cents a crate.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 55:08
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 55:08
So back in the 50s and 60s, 50 cents a crate is not bad and it's not great. I mean, I think my first job, I probably got paid a buck and a half an hour. So– but for a kid, I remember working one summer, I worked all summer to save enough money to buy a 10 speed bike. So that 10 speed bike probably cost 100 something dollars. And that was one of the new things back then. And that was probably in high school. And– and I used– I used my money. I would give some of my money to my mom for whatever, you know. But, you know.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 55:50
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 55:51
I could make spending money.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 55:53
So I'm gonna kind of start circling back here. But– so when you were working as a kid, were you primarily working with your families in the strawberries? Or did you work in other crops?

Anastacio Asunción 56:08
Well, it's two stages. Up until the time my dad got sick– so that would have been probably mid to early 60s. So let's say it's '65. So from about the age of five till then, I'm doing a variety of things in the fields. As I got older, let's say by the time I got to 10 or 12, I'm picking.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 56:34
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 56:35
So other things that I'd do would have been weeding. I'd be clipping runners. So in strawberries, they have these of- shoots that they call runners. And so you got to clip them because otherwise they're going to take away from the production of the plant. So that would be one of my jobs, or I'd helped my dad irrigate. And so at this time, we had flumes. So wooden flumes and we'd have these corks. So as the road filled up– so one of us would have to be at the flume and the other one would have to be down at the far end of the row. And then we kind of give a signal, and so either me, or my brother, or my dad would put the cork in and tap it in so the water wouldn't, you know, flood the field, and we'd keep rolling– going across. So a lot of times we did that in the late afternoon, after we'd been picking, so we need to irrigate the field. So that it would take probably two to three days for the field to dry out to go back in. So you had like a three to four day cycle. By the time you you started plot A and three to four days later, you can come back to plot A because it's already been dried and the berries have produced.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 57:44
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 57:44
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 57:45
Okay, so this is kind of like, you're like five to around like 10 years old doing these things? With your siblings too?

Anastacio Asunción 57:52
Right. Yeah. And when I'm really young, my job is maybe just put baskets in the crates, right. So we'd get this, you know, stacks of 10. And what we want to do is, and we get a big box of baskets, those plastic baskets, and you'd have to put all the baskets in the thing and then stack it over here. So when the picker came back from the field and drops off his crate, he'd pick up the empty one and go back out. So they wouldn't have to necessarily do that. So that would be quote "my job" because I'm a little kid, I can't do too much.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 58:23
Right. Do you remember any like, playtime you would have when you were with your siblings in the fields?

Anastacio Asunción 58:30
Yeah, I mean, you know, because if we were, let's say– even if we were picking or weeding, and we got our other siblings there, sometimes we'd find a rotten strawberry and throw it at each other. You know, or do something to mess them up.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 58:48
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 58:49
You know, so–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 58:51
Some play.

Anastacio Asunción 58:52
Some play.

Anastacio Asunción 58:52
Yeah. And then afterwards– I mean, you work until like now. So, four or five o'clock in the afternoon, all the berries have been picked up and taken. So you either do some weeding, irrigation, or since my brother and I, we'd have either a pellet gun or a BB gun, and sometimes even a 22, we would go hunting in the fields. So the fields that are now where Seascape is on the other side of the railroad tracks, that's where our plot was for a while. We would go along the perimeter– you could– you could find rabbits, quail, doves, and you could go to the reservoir, sometimes find ducks in there. So you'd have to sneak up on the reservoir to see if the ducks are in there. So we would do some hunting and then sometimes we just hiked down the cliff and go fishing on the beach.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 58:52
Some work.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 58:53
After work?

Anastacio Asunción 59:02
After work. Yeah, so–

Anastacio Asunción 59:19
So you did that. Were you ever working in other agriculture as you got older outside of strawberries?

Anastacio Asunción 59:58
No. So after my dad got sick and my mom left the business, I worked for several years with my aunt. So she would pick us up, she'd take us out to the fields and she was hired by someone and we'd pick berries with her or someone else.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:00:18
In a different sharecropper?

Anastacio Asunción 1:00:20
Different sharecroppers on a different ranch.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:00:22
I see. I see.

Anastacio Asunción 1:00:24
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:00:24
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 1:00:25
So that's where I earned enough money to buy my bicycle.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:00:27
I see. So, what– what was the– what was your house like in San Andreas then?

Anastacio Asunción 1:00:36
Okay, the San Andreas house was probably maybe a three bedroom. So you had one bedroom for my parents, one bedroom for the sisters and one bedroom for the boys. And we had bunk beds. So at that time, there were the three or four boys still living there. So we'd have maybe two sets of bunk beds. One bathroom, you know, and then there was a kitchen and a kind of front room, living room. And that was basically it.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:00:36
Okay, who lived around you at San Andreas?

Anastacio Asunción 1:01:18
There were other– there must have been 10 to 15, maybe 20 different families– 20 different family units and a variety– and they didn't necessarily work on the same plot area that we did, because Reiter had multiple– multiple ranches going.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:01:38
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:01:39
So um, but we would know some of the people that were, you know, that we worked near– but like, I think one of the– I think you mentioned the Reyes I think they lived either at San Andreas or the Rio Del Mar camp. And I think that's where I ran across the Reyes.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:02:00
They lived at San Andreas.

Anastacio Asunción 1:02:01
San Andreas, okay. But we didn't have, you know– the only time we really had a lot of interaction was probably at Christmas. Maybe Thanksgiving. And one of the things we loved about Christmas is one of the other families that was living there was a Japanese family, and we would love to go there because we could eat Japanese food. So we'd have sushi, we'd have, you know, the– some of the noodle dishes and stuff, teriyaki chicken, and then their kids would love to come to my mom's because they could have Mexican food.

Anastacio Asunción 1:02:01
Mmm. What was their name?

Anastacio Asunción 1:02:34
The Tanoi's. And they–they– as long as I can remember they were in the strawberry business. And eventually, once the camps got shut down, a lot of these people moved into town or in the country and had bought their own home, like my mom did after– after my dad got sick. But they would– they were still involved in the strawberry business.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:02:34
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:03:07
Because we would have infrequent contact with the Tanoi's and a couple other families that we knew from the berry– berry experience.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:03:15
Okay. When you all went to Rio Del Mar was that– that was after San Andreas?

Anastacio Asunción 1:03:21
Yeah. Right.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:03:22
What– what was that situation like?

Anastacio Asunción 1:03:24
Very similar. But there were no barracks as for the braceros. Bracero program had already been done. And I think one of the reasons we'd left San Andreas is– I– I'm going to think that the– for whatever reason, maybe the Reiters lost their lease on the land or something, and so they had to move. And so– and these houses were very poorly built. Single wall construction, so freezing in the wintertime. Not necessarily the most sanitary place.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:04:01

Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:04:02
You know, plumbing was questionable. You know. But for us, as a kid not knowing too much because we did very rarely went into town. I think I was probably in– in Junior High before I went to my first movie, the old Fox Theater downtown on Main Street. It was one of the first movies I went to. And we just didn't do a lot of stuff in town.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:04:34
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:04:35
We did– I mean, most of our life, I would say 90% of our life is either on the fields or in the camp, doing whatever, you know, goofing around. There were some canyons close by the San Andreas camp so we can go play in the camp.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:04:52
What would have that been like?

Anastacio Asunción 1:04:54
BB gun fights, rubberband fights, climbing trees and stuff, and then there was one place that had kind of a sandy cliff. So the cliff was probably two or three stories high. So we got bedsheets and made them into parachutes and jumped off. And luckily, so the sandy– you'd land on a sandy bottom. But yeah, so you know. And then you know, we'd go hunting.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:05:22
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:05:23
You know, and then there used to be a wheat field. And so once they harvested the wheat, we would get cardboard boxes and use them as slides and slide down the hill. Or use the hay bales to make forts and have some kind of war game with– with our friends.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:05:41
Oh, wow.

Anastacio Asunción 1:05:42
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:05:43
So– so your– your family was working in the strawberries and your dad got sick.

Anastacio Asunción 1:05:49
Right.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:05:50
Um, your mom then shifted to doing– did you say–

Anastacio Asunción 1:05:54
Domestic work.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:05:55
–Domestic work. Was it more like caretaking or more like housekeeping?

Anastacio Asunción 1:05:58
Uh, a little of both. So she would go to this first woman who lived in Rio Del Mar. She would go three or four days a week, she would– the woman was elderly, so she would cook for her, clean her house, and kind of, you know, just sit and socialize with her. And that was for most of her day. And then once that woman passed away, she got another job from a woman in Santa Cruz right off of High Street. And she'd be basically the same thing. But the whole time, we are still living on Buena Vista where she had bought a house. And it was a three bedroom house. So– and it was kind of– there was a front room, kitchen in the back, and then three bedrooms, one bath. My mom and dad had the room in front. And you'd have to go through my mom—through my sister's bedroom to go to the bathroom or to get to the front room. And then the boys had another bedroom here. And at that time, it's already just me and my older brother John. Mel had already gone graduated college and he's in the Air Force, I think.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:07:10
I see. I see. Um, when y'all were working in the berries, did you ever see any kind of like labor actions or union actions at all?

Anastacio Asunción 1:07:23
No, not at that time.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:07:24
Not in the berries?

Anastacio Asunción 1:07:25
Not in the berries, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:07:26
Yeah, I haven't– I haven't heard of any in the berries in particular. Were there, as you kind of got a little older, maybe like high school, did you ever hear about or witness any of the other kind of strikes or actions that were going on the area?

Anastacio Asunción 1:07:42
So by the time I got into high school or early college, you're already having the development of the UFW.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:07:48
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:07:49
So primarily, they're focused on the lettuce and row crops, but there are some people going into the berry fields. But, you know, I don't see it directly. I– you know, I'm hearing about it secondhand, I guess. From– from literature I'm reading about on campus.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:08:10
So you didn't really like see it?

Anastacio Asunción 1:08:11
No, no, no.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:08:13
What did you kind of think about when you heard about that? And that it was happening in Watsonville?

Anastacio Asunción 1:08:18
In Watsonville? Well, I thought it was a good thing. Because, you know, I mean, thinking about it, you know, they're they're making a ton of money off the berries, and they're paying the workers. And, you know, and from doing my my studies of anything else, all these people making tons of money, the, you know, Henry Ford and Rockefeller, they're making a ton of money they're paying– they're paying their employees peanuts. You know, I mean, you know, you wonder, God, you know, where's their soul at if they're taken advantage. And the whole thing in um, I guess in the 20s and 30s, the strike breaks that they were doing with the industrialization of the United States. I'm saying "God!", you know, reading about them saying, "God, this just makes total sense why these guys are going on strike".

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:09:15
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:09:15
I mean, you're making a big sacrifice. I mean, you're making a choice between feeding yourself or trying to do a little bit better for you and your family. And that's a tough thing to call.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:09:25
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:09:27
So yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:09:28
Did you feel like, because you had worked in the fields, when you heard about UFW and stuff, you were pretty, like, interested or–

Anastacio Asunción 1:09:38
Yeah, I mean, I was– I was thinking these– these guys are finally doing the right thing. I mean, everyone else has been unionized. Right. You know, I think the farmworkers like one of the last groups to be able to be unionized in terms of on a large scale. I mean, obviously now they're unionized, and all these other things like Starbucks and stuff, but for someone that, you know, works in a very harsh condition– and we would never be able to eat the kind of food that we eat without these people. You know, the farmworkers. And you look and you drive from here to through Salinas going toward San Luis Obispo, and there's just fields and fields and fields. And you know, if you go toward Monterey off Highway One, there's a big Dole plant there. And you see all those trucks lined up. Well, all that all those trucks are taking that produce to the other part of the world, the other part of the country. And I worked for a time when I was in college for the Driscoll Berry research facility, the one off of Riverside,– no not Riverside, I forget the name, it's over the bridge, and I forget the name of that road. So my job was to drive to the fields and pick up test plot berries, sometimes I would have to pick them, I might– I'd have to pick a crate. So I could do that. And then take the crate back to the lab so they could do some tests on it. And then sometimes I went down to the coal storage place all the way out– oh I guess it's San Juan Road, all the way out San Juan road. And that's where they have their big cooler. Well, they have machines in there that test berries by vibrating them to simulate a truck taking them across country. So they developed the berries based on transportation capacity. You know, and I– after I got out of the berry business, you know, when I was in my mid teens, I never really ate strawberries, because everything I picked up in the market– in a store tasted horrible. Because it's– there's no taste to it and because the berries are picked three quarters ripe. And so if you don't– if you pick them ripe off the vine, they're– they're absolutely gorgeous and luscious, you know, nice and sweet, fully red, almost borderline overripe, but that's when they're probably the best. And when you go to– go to Safeway or wherever and you look at the thing, you can see there's all– there's half the berries ripe or semi ripe and then there's kind of white-yellowish. That's under– that's over– under picked.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:12:28
No good.

Anastacio Asunción 1:12:29
No good. I mean, you know, you bite half and you gotta throw it– the rest of it away.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:12:32
Do you ever get berries from the farms here?

Anastacio Asunción 1:12:36
Every now and then I do, but I'm always disappointed. I mean, I still eat berries now and then but– and sometimes the best ones are the ones you um– you find on the street corners, rather than the ones in the market. Or you find berry vendors on the side of the road out in the country. Like if you go on Highway One South and you turn onto Salinas Road, there's usually someone sitting on the corner once you cross the overpass. You know, that's always a good place. But I mean, I'm always looking to see, you know, how ripe they are.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:13:13

Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:13:14
And like anything, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:13:16
Right. Hmm. Did you ever talk to your dad or any of the uncles around during when UFW was in town in Watsonville?

Anastacio Asunción 1:13:26
Yeah, my dad was a– no, because by that time, they're already– he's already out of the business. The UFW is probably not showing up until probably the late 60s, early 70s. And so my dad probably got out of the business by the mid to early 60s.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:13:47
What– what do you think he thought about it though– about the unionizing?

Anastacio Asunción 1:13:52
Um, I think he would have probably been a little indifferent. Not necessarily seeing the whole picture–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:14:00
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:14:00
Because of his background, and, you know, where he's coming from, you know. Because he always had a skewed view about the Spanish American War. Because I– once I got into college, and I learned about the, you know, more details about the Spanish American War. I tried to converse him about, you know, why didn't he do this? Or why, how did you feel about this? And he had kind of a "Eh, you know, that's– that was then and now, you know", because I know he had– when he was in the Philippines, probably some friends or family relations that got impacted by the Spanish American War, either they were killed by them or– or, you know, there was a time when the Filipinos thought because the Americans were kicking out the Spanish they would get their freedom. But shortly thereafter, the Americans came in and it's kind of squashed the rebellion. So that's what I kind of talked to him about. And he goes "Nah, that's okay, I mean, nah".

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:14:30
He had kind of felt like– did–did you think he felt like pro-American about it?

Anastacio Asunción 1:15:10
Yeah I think he did in some ways, but not necessarily getting the whole context or the whole picture of what was actually done, in some ways, because it's so fresh in your mind, it's not– you haven't had time to think about it, or process it and what are the, you know, the ramifications of what just happened, you know? So in some ways, he thought, "Oh, the Americans are coming here. It's a good thing".

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:15:36
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:15:36
You know, they're better than the Spanish. Yeah. So there was that. And I think that's kind of where he was coming from.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:15:43
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:15:44
So yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:15:45
I can see that. That makes sense.

Anastacio Asunción 1:15:47
Yeah, I mean, you know, I– and I'm, you know, hot and bothered about it. And I– he's just "Ehhh", you know, it's like, trying to talk someone from an opposing political view.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:15:59
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:15:59
You know. Everyone has their own perspective.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:16:01
Yeah. Um, is there anything you think, like about your childhood in the area that I haven't asked you about that you want to talk about?

Anastacio Asunción 1:16:12
Mmm no, not offhand. I mean, see I mean, it's– because I'm 72.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:16:22
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:16:22
So my childhood is 60 years ago. So, you know, it's– it's this is kind of interesting that– in that, talking about this paper that I wrote 50 years ago.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:16:35
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:16:35

It just, you know, it just kind of– trying to regenerate all those feelings and thoughts.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:16:44
Well, let me ask you this. When you're in high school, what kind of stuff did you do for fun? I've heard of people doing drag racing, people doing all sorts of stuff for fun in Watsonville. What– what did you do?

Anastacio Asunción 1:16:57
Well, I didn't really have a car that I could go drag racing, but I had friends that had cars. And we would do stuff like that, you know, cruising around. One of the things we did is one of my friends had a pickup and we were probably sophomores, juniors. So we would go driving in the countryside. You know what an M-80 is? It's a basically a firecracker about that big, about this big around. We'd light a firecracker, throw it in a mailbox, drive off, and see the mailbox explode. Yeah, you know, we would drink even though we were underage. One time we were drinking and getting high. And for whatever reason, my buddy lost control of his Volkswagen. And we went backwards through an apple orchard.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:17:49
Oh, my gosh.

Anastacio Asunción 1:17:50
And I don't know how we missed a tree. We must have gone 50, 60 yards into the orchard.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:17:56
Oh, my God.

Anastacio Asunción 1:17:58
And we kind of wrecked his car. And so he goes, "Oh, my parents are gonna kill me!" So we– there's three of us I think– we hatched a plan. "Oh, let's make like he got stolen and dump it off a cliff!" So, you know, stuff like that.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:18:17
Oh, you didn't mention that you went with a friend to a cockfight? Was that in high school? Or in–

Anastacio Asunción 1:18:23
Oh, no I was already in college.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:18:24
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 1:18:25
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:18:25
Could you– could you describe what that was like?

Anastacio Asunción 1:18:27
Yeah. Um, so one of the guys I went to school with, he was younger than me. His name was Eddie Bermeo, and he lived in Watsonville. He's Filipino. And, you know, we hooked up after– you know, I came back to Watsonville, because we had multiple friends that we interacted with. And, you know, we went over his house for– I don't know why. And I asked him about the– the chickens. And he goes, "Oh, those, you know, I'm training them. My dad's training them for cockfights". And I go, "Wow, that sounds really interesting. You know, can I go to one?" And he goes, "Yeah, you know, let me know. And I'll give you a call and, you know, give you the word where to go and stuff like that". So I went– I went with him a couple of times. And it was some place out in North Monterey County. So it's on a– on someone's farm or back in the woods somewhere. So you drive in on a dirt road, you go to a grove of trees and inside the grove there's a big opening. So there must have been close to a hundred people there. So it's set up in three different areas. There's a staging area where they weigh the chickens, set– get them ready to go into the pit. And then there's the pit which is bigger, and it's probably maybe the size of this room. And there's all these people around the pit and– so if– if Hana's on the other side, and I see her there– and there's a fight about to start, I lock eyes with her, and I make hand signals to her like, this means $5 or this means $10. And she's going to pick the other one. That's how we make our bid.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:20:18
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 1:20:18
So at the end of the fight, we go find each other, and we settle up.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:20:24
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 1:20:25
And there must have been– and they're all done by weight– so there must have been 20 or 30 fights. So it's like, two or three hours. And then on the periphery there's like a snack area where you can buy something to drink, something to eat. Someone maybe it's barbecuing or something. Hopefully not the– not the loser. But yeah, I mean, so– and it was interesting, you know, and there were—there were some Filipinos obviously, Hispanics, some Asians, some Caucasians, so there was quite a mix of people.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:21:03
Was it mostly men that would go?

Anastacio Asunción 1:21:05
Yeah, mostly men, I would say 80% of the people there were men. There were some women there, more likely their girlfriends of people who are there for whatever reason.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:21:14
Hmm. What did you think when you saw it for the first time?

Anastacio Asunción 1:21:18

I was fascinated.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:21:19
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:21:19
You know, by how much money was floating.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:21:21
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:21:22
Because you know, you think this room– if the if the pits in here somewhere, I mean– and they're two or three feet– two or three people deep, you know, there's a lot of money floating, and it's all cash.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:21:36
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:21:37
So, you know, luckily, no fights broke out while I was there, but I could see where a fight could break out if someone didn't want to pay.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:21:44
Right. Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:21:46
You know, and then weapons come out. More likely, it wouldn't be a gun, it probably be a knife or a club. But it was fascinating in how, you know, this whole nonverbal communication me betting with Hana for this particular fight that's going on. That what fascinated me the most.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:22:03
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:22:03
You know, you could just make a hand signal and you know, da-da $10! Or, you know, maybe $100 or something. I mean, there'd be some big money floating. And then– these were small. These- this was almost if you want to imagine it's like a minor league. And around the Fourth of July and some of the other holidays during the summer, there's a much bigger thing going on. And you might have to go to Stockton or somewhere in the Central Valley to go to these big cockfights.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:22:30
Oh, yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:22:31

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:22:31
Did you ever hear about any getting raided?

Anastacio Asunción 1:22:35
Just a couple stories where I guess as you drive in there's kind of a lookout. And once the signal has been given that, you know, the sheriff was coming in, everyone just–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:22:48
Runs.

Anastacio Asunción 1:22:49
Runs for it. You know, they– more likely they're gonna grab their bird if they're a handler.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:22:53
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:22:54
And grab their knives and take off.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:22:56
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:22:56
You know, they'll leave the dead ones or the ones that are not very good. Just let– the guys that handle the chickens are so into it. You know, it's like a part of them. You know, like we– that one picture in the thing. It's a part of them. Well, let me grab something. Can you pause for a minute. I'll show you something. That–

Anastacio Asunción 1:23:25
–And– but this kind of says the whole thing.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:23:30
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:23:31
If you read this– oops. [Referring to a large poster depicting a Filipino man holding a fighting rooster. The poster includes a poem].

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:23:37
[Reading the poem]. "Defeated in life, the poor man turns his hope to the cockfight. And if in the battle your bird falls to its death. I have died many times with my birds but each death I'm born again with a new hope that one day I will find a bird that will bring me honor. Is that not the dream of all men?"

Anastacio Asunción 1:23:58
So yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:24:00
He looks like a fighter.

Anastacio Asunción 1:24:02
Yeah. So Filipino guy. You know, I mean, I don't know whether it was here in the States or wherever else but it just kind of struck me.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:24:13
Yeah. It was really important.

Anastacio Asunción 1:24:16
Oh, yeah. And there's several books that I've tracked down and read about cockfighting. Thought it was such a– such a thing. And it was– it is not just the Filipinos. You know, Hispanics do the same thing.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:24:27
Yeah, yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:24:29
And there's even some people in the South that do it too, so Caucasians.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:24:33
Right. Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:24:35
Yeah. So different, you know, ethnic groups do it.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:24:37
Wow.

Anastacio Asunción 1:24:38
But yeah, I mean, that's what these chickens look like.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:24:41
Mmhm. They're really intense.

Anastacio Asunción 1:24:42
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:24:43
They are sometimes like trained to be really strong. Like they have to do exercises.

Anastacio Asunción 1:24:48
Oh, yeah. They have a special diet. And their– yeah, I mean, when I was visiting with my friend Eddie, you know, he says, "Yeah, they– they train them". You know, they'll actually even massage the bird–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:25:00
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:25:01
–You know, after a workout. So it's like an– you know, it's an extension of him. It's an athlete.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:25:06
Yeah. Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:25:08
You know, it's pretty intense. And those blades are about this long. And there's a little bit of a handle on them so they can strap it. They tie it to the leg. And so it's like a spur.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:25:21
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:25:22
And so when they're fighting to come together, they kind of look at each other and they jump up like that and try to kick each other.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:25:29
Oh my gosh.

Anastacio Asunción 1:25:30
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:25:30
Yeah. I have not seen one. I mean, I imagine it's pretty– pretty intense.

Anastacio Asunción 1:25:34
Yeah. I mean, it could– it could end in an instant.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:25:37
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:25:37
So if the guy hits a lucky blow and catches them in the head or the neck or the heart, he's done.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:25:42

Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:25:42
And sometimes they could wound each other and they're still going at it. And so what happens is, if– there's kind of a stalemate, so the two handlers will grab them, move them together and kind of picket each other. So they kind of rile them up again, and then let them go at it again. So the fight could be 30 seconds or it could be a couple of minutes.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:26:05
Did you ever see anyone like patching the birds up afterwards?

Anastacio Asunción 1:26:09
Nah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:26:09
No.

Anastacio Asunción 1:26:10
No. They're a loser. They end up in the gunny sack.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:26:13
Aw, they're stew.

Anastacio Asunción 1:26:15
Yeah. I mean, they're usually a fight to the death. If someone– because at the end, the winning bird, or whoever's still on top has to peck them. And that signals that's it. If the guy– the bird doesn't peck them, the fight's not over.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:26:35
I see. I see. Oh wow. Yeah. I mean–

Anastacio Asunción 1:26:40
They can be as small as this, or they can be, you know, like a regular sized rooster.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:26:44
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:26:45
And that's why they have a weight class. So there was actually a scale there for them to weigh the bird. And so it doesn't have to be exact, but they're– so the bird might be handicapped.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:26:58

Do you think that the cockfights were like– I'm trying to think of the question– do you think it was kind of like Philippine Gardens in that it was like a space for the men? Like, especially like the bachelor men to find community with each other?

Anastacio Asunción 1:27:17
Oh, yeah. I mean, it was– it was like you and I, or you go– you– you guys going to a club.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:27:22
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:27:23
It was a social event.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:27:24
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:27:24
So it was a way for them– after they're working six or seven days a week– they got a break, when it's actually them for– let off some steam. I mean, because in many cases these guys didn't have a lot of money. But they would save their money so they could go to these things and make the bets. So you know, someone might bring several hundred dollars worth of cash they've saved up to make bets. They might make some money. Obviously, they could lose some money.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:27:50
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:27:51
And then the handlers– same thing. So the handlers have their own bets going, versus the spectators will have their other bets going.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:27:59
I see.

Anastacio Asunción 1:27:59
So there's multiple– multiple levels of bets. You know, and certain handlers are better known for certain kinds of birds or how they train their birds. Because, you know, it's like, one team– one team is going to be better than the other because this guy has more of a legacy or reputation of being a very good handler. So their birds are– you know, more people going to bid on quote 'the favorite'.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:28:26
Oh, wow.

Anastacio Asunción 1:28:27
Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:28:28
It's really intricate.

Anastacio Asunción 1:28:29
Yeah. So I made– actually, I made this while I was in college.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:28:31
Oh, really?

Anastacio Asunción 1:28:32
Yeah, I've had it for that long. So since the– probably 70s, early 70s.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:28:39
Um, I'm kind of feeling we can start wrapping up a little bit.

Anastacio Asunción 1:28:44
Okay.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:28:44
I'm wonder– I know you were a middle school teacher,

Anastacio Asunción 1:28:47
Right.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:28:47
So what subject did you teach?

Anastacio Asunción 1:28:51
I– well, starting out in 1975, I taught– I went to UCSC for my Ed. degree. And then they placed me in San Jose, at this school called Piedmont Middle. And at that time, there was a shortage of teachers. So I taught two sections of English, two sections of math and two sections of social studies.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:29:14
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 1:29:15
So for the first year or so. And then, a kind of things settled down, I started teaching social studies, US History primarily. Even though for a certain amount of time, I did teach sixth grade or seventh grade social studies, but most of my focus was eighth grade social studies.

Anastacio Asunción 1:29:31
So I used a lot of the skills that I learned at Santa Cruz in my classroom, because initially I was having my kids write three papers a year. So they would– and again, I was just using what I learned in Santa

Cruz. That– to do a research paper, you got to have multiple resources, you have to use quotes and stuff, and I would give them quote 'non-traditional' subject matter. So I– for US history in middle school, it starts with the Colonial period, and usually I got til post-Civil War, because just the amount of time. So I would pick and choose certain things that I wanted to focus on. So for the Colonial period, I looked at the relationship between the English, the Americans, and the Native Americans. And then when we got to the next period, Western Expansion, I looked at the impact that the Western– the settlers had on the Native American culture, and how they tried to decimate it. And then we got to the Civil War, same thing. The relationship between the North and the South, but also how the African Americans got interacted with, and in some ways neglected. And you know, it took them a long time for them to give them the right to fight for them– fight for their own freedom. And then– backing up, sorry. With Western Expansion, I kind of focused on the Lewis and Clark, and that whole thing. I mean, that was a crapshoot. They were so lucky. You know, if it wasn't for Sacagawea they would have been lost and gone. We never would have heard of Lewis and Clark. I mean, it was by happenstance that when they got almost to the West Coast, they ran into her tribe, and her family, and they helped 'em get further west.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:29:31
Okay.

Anastacio Asunción 1:29:45
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:29:55
Yeah. So, you know, and then I would– I mean, just do kind of different things. So toward the end, one of my things– because we were finishing up– I would have them cook. So one of the things was– and I had him do a paper for it– they– we talked about Western Expansion. What Western life was like, so they had to find a recipe and cook it, document it. And for extra credit, you could bring into class– bring enough that you can share with the whole class. So a couple things they had to do– they had to make rabbit stew.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:32:18
Oh my gosh.

Anastacio Asunción 1:32:18
So they had to find a market.– and there was a couple markets in San Jose they could go to– find a market and make the rabbits stew, or make flapjacks or a couple other different things. And so they would do their presentations, and then share the food with– with the class, you know, so they would have– and usually it was a group, it was two to three kids in a group. And they would have to document the pictures were the ingredients, the process of cooking, and what the final product ended up like. You know, so it's something a little different.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:32:52
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:32:53
But it gave them a better sense of what was life like in the West, you know, because you get it romanticized, you know, you get a covered wagon, blah, blah, blah. Well, I mean, it was really hard.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:33:03
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:33:04
You know, and I would use movies to kind of further delve into the depths of a particular subject. You know, there was a movie called Last of the Mohicans. So why would look at that, and that happened– that kind of centered around the French and Indian War, that period of time. And so the whole dynamics of, you know, one– one group trying to play off the other. So the English are trying to use Native Americans for their benefit, the Americans are trying to do the same, and never really trying to kind of understand and how they just totally ignored the importance of Native American culture. So yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:33:48
How, um, kind of how do you think about like, the importance of documenting and preserving the history of the Watsonville farm workers community, kind of like with your experience as a social studies teacher, like, how do you think about that? Do you think about students maybe learning about it in classes one day?

Anastacio Asunción 1:34:15
Yeah, I think especially in this area, if even if it's just quote a 'local history class'–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:34:21
Right.

Anastacio Asunción 1:34:21
You need to see the whole spectrum. You know, because in many cases, I mean, you know, as a quote, 'historian', you only necessarily see the highlights. You know, it's like, when you watch TV, and you watch sports, you know, sports and all they're doing is showing you the highlights, they don't initially see the whole game. Yeah. And you need to see the whole game. It wasn't just so-and-so making a touchdown or so-and-so making so many baskets. There's a lot that's going on in a game and that's kind of like– I look at sports in terms of– as a historical event. I mean, you got the highlights, right. But you got to know why it– how did it end up like that way? I mean, like the Warriors lost the other night, well, they lost because they couldn't sink a basket in the last five minutes, the other team got hot, they turned the ball over too much. So there's reasons why they lost. And the same thing for learning about local history. I mean, we are who we are because of what these people did, and why it happened. And that's what you need to know, to truly appreciate where we're at right now. So in a lot of ways, some of the younger generations don't see that. Because your life is moving a lot faster than my life, you're– at my point in time when I was your age or going to UCSC, you know, it was a totally different experience. There was no social media, there was no internet and stuff like that, you know, computers were just coming up. You know, I remember I almost took a computer science class, but I didn't want to have to go do all those punch cards. And see my brother was in the military. Mel was in the military. And that's

what he did. He works on some IBM machine, but he always– was always talking about doing punch cards. I'd go, "Eh, I don't want to do that". You know? So– but yeah, I mean, I think it's very important, you know. So– so people, and not just people of our ethnicity but everyone in general, needs to see the whole picture.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:36:31
Yeah. Do you think that, like, having lived here for a long time, do you think that people around in Santa Cruz don't really know the whole picture?

Anastacio Asunción 1:36:42
Well, oh, no, I think there's some people that know. But there are some people that have moved into the area or even people going to school. Because like you said, you're from Ventura, right? And you're from Southern California. So in some ways you don't know the nuances of Santa Cruz. There's certain things and you know, and in some ways, my one of my golf buddies is, was born and raised here. And we were talking about how, you know– there were four of us in the car driving back from Monterey this morning or this afternoon. One guy was from Washington state. One guy who grew up in San Carlos. Carlo grew up here, and I grew up in Watsonville. And I said, you know, you know, we don't you know– no and he says, "Oh"– and Carlos always harping about, "Oh, you know, the good old days when Santa Cruz was a small town before the University". He always raps on me about oh, look, you know, look what the University did to you, or what the University has done to our town. You know, but that's– you know– but then there's a whole different side. Because he's Italian, Caucasian, but what what were the Hispanics feeling like, the Filipinos, the Asians, you know, there's the whole thing about the Chinatown that used to be here got torched out, you know, and you know, why? You know, everyone's just– I mean, it's no different now than it is then. People are just trying to make a living, provide something better for their family. You know, in some ways, that's why my parents did what they did, by not necessarily immersing me in the cultures, they were from, but wanting me to push beyond that. And then, you know, luckily, I was able to, as I got to college, re– you know, re-understand where I came from, and got a better appreciation of where I came from.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:38:38
Yeah, yeah. Hmm. I'm wond– I'm gonna– I'm wrapping it up right now. But is there anything else you feel we need to document here? About your family's experience, about your experience growing up here?

Anastacio Asunción 1:38:56
No, I mean, I think– I mean, I can– I'd have to think about it, you know, reflect on it. After you've gone and if something comes up, I'll contact you. But I think, you know, I think you guys did a great job. I mean, it's taken 50 years to reemerge.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:39:13
Yeah.

Anastacio Asunción 1:39:14
You know, and I hadn't really thought about it in 40, 50 years.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:39:17
Yeah. Wondering if we could share one last thing?

Anastacio Asunción 1:39:21
Sure.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:39:22
Could you share a particular fond memory about your parents when you were kids?

Anastacio Asunción 1:39:28
I get– I can– one of them from my mom was– one of the big deals is, she– there was a bakery in Watsonville called PV Bakery and they made this French bread that was crunchy on the outside but really soft in the middle. And a big treat for us, she'd take a couple of the kids. We'd go to Manresa or something. And she would get a loaf of bread. Get some cheese and sardines, and we'd sit and have a picnic. You know, and that bread was fantastic. And then probably one of the strongest fond memories is just going fishing with my dad. Like we would go to Moss Landing. And he'd let me fish by myself by the bridge, and then he and a couple buddies would go clamming. And that was always amazing. You know, but, you know, in most cases, they were always working to provide for the family. You know, they don't have the leisure or luxury that we have now, or that I have now. Like I said, I never went on a vacation until I was in college. I never flew on a plane till I was in college. And now I– I've gotten quite a few places where I, you know, you know, I couldn't even envision myself going to Hawai'i every year for the last 20 years, or every other year for the last 10 years, or traveling and doing what I do now, when I was a little, you know, the little farm kid running around on a labor camp. So yeah, and that's because my parents were pushing us for something different. And that's– and that's, I think what all parents do is try to provide an experience so their child does not have to work as hard as they did. And I'm assuming that's with your parents too. They want something better for you. I mean, I don't know what your parents do, but they're probably saying, you know, "You're doing a lot a lot more than what I was able to do", or because of the circumstance.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:41:44
Yeah. Thank you so much.

Anastacio Asunción 1:41:47
Okay!

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:41:48
I'm gonna stop it.

Anastacio Asunción 1:41:49
All right.