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Erlinda Taytayon Heebner interviewed by Dr. Steve McKay

Speakers: Erlinda Taytayon Heebner, Steve McKay

Date: June 4, 2021

Scope and Contents: In this interview, originally conducted via Zoom, Erlinda Taytayon Heebner speaks with Dr. Steve McKay, a member of the Watsonville is in the Heart team. Erlinda discusses her father, Eliseo Tapia Taytayon, and her mother, Rosalinda Mendoza Taytayon and their experiences migrating to the United States from the Philippines. She shares that Eliseo migrated to the US alongside his cousin Florencio Cawaling in 1929 and worked as a farm laborer until he retired at age 75. She explains that Eliseo and Rosalinda met and married as a result of an arrangement facilitated by the Cawaling family. After their marriage, Rosalinda migrated to Watsonville where she worked in the canneries. Erlinda discusses her experiences growing up in Watsonville including the class and racial dynamics of the various neighborhoods where her family lived and the schools she attended. Throughout the interview, she also describes the various Taytayon family homes as places where many relatives and community members congregated to enjoy her father's cooking and purchase clothing from her maternal grandmother who worked as a seamstress.

Steve McKay 00:00

We get it, you know, properly documented. One thing we want to make sure, and I think I mentioned maybe in the email, we'll we'll record it and, mainly for the audio, and then we'll create a transcript, but but before we do anything with it, before it goes into the archive, we'll send you a copy so that you can, you know, go through it and listen to it again. And if there's anything you want to edit, or you want to take out or anything like that, that's absolutely fine, it's it's your story to control. And so—and then, once we get the okay from you, get that back from you, then it kinda will go into the archives, but just wanna let you know that, you know, at any time, you don't want to answer questions, or you—later you like regret, including [inaudible]—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 00:50

Letting out family secrets, or something like that.

Steve McKay 00:56

You never know what people say, but we just just so you know, you have control over it.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 01:01

Yes, and is this— this is just audio, it's not visual?

Steve McKay 01:05

Right. Yeah, it's just the video just so we could make eye contact, and you know, things like that, but we'll we'll just—for the archive, some people will actually probably do on camera interviews, but we'll pretty much keep it just audio.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 01:20

Alright.

Steve McKay 01:21

Okay. Okay, so we'll get started just to first just formally, if you could say, you know, your your full name and and where you're born and when.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 01:33

My full name is Erlinda Taytayon Heebner and I was born in Watsonville in 1963, January 1st, at the original hospital in Watsonville.

Steve McKay 01:46

Oh wow, a New Year's baby.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 01:49

A New Year's baby.

Steve McKay 01:51

Okay, great, and um could you just say your parents names and siblings names.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 01:58

My dad is Eliseo Tapia Taytayon and my mother is Rosalinda Mendoza Taytayon and I have three siblings. My older sister is the Elisa Taytayon Clock. My brother is Eliseo Taytayon Jr., and my younger sister is Stella Taytayon [Unknown].

Steve McKay 02:23

Okay, great. Thank you, and so I think, you know, just start maybe, I'll ask you a bit about about your your parents and then probably move into sort of, you know, your experiences as a kid and then growing up in Watsonville. But if you don't mind, if you could, you know, share a little bit about about your your dad to start off. You know, do his story. When did he arrive in Watsonville or to the United States?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 02:56

Yeah, my dad, he was an orphan in the Philippines, and he was brought up by his siblings, and he had a cousin, that he was very close to, Florencio Cawaling. And they came to the United

States into Washington Washington—Seattle, Washington when he was 20 years old, and that was in 19—1929, and they both came over together. And they came on the—can't remember the name of the boat that—they are they came on the SS present—President McKinley to Seattle, Washington, and that was April 6 1929. And my my uncle and my dad wanted to come here for work, to work in agriculture, and my mother came many years later. And she came as a bride, an arranged marriage that my uncle and aunt that my—the uncle that my father came over with, did an arranged marriage and that's how my father and mother met.

Steve McKay 04:21

Oh, interesting. Was she from the same town from them or—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 04:25

She was not, but her aunt, her aunt was married to the Cawaling family, their father, so there was kind of like the the connection on both sides of the family.

Steve McKay 04:38

Okay, all right, and what year was that? How old was your mom when they got married?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 04:44

Oh, I think it was 1959 when they got married. Dad was 51 and my mom was 24.

Steve McKay 04:50

Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, with the—with so many of the manongs, the original men who came came over as bachelor's, that was fairly common. Right, to get married a bit late.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 05:06

Yes.

Steve McKay 05:09

Okay, and so—and how did your dad and your parents end up in Watsonville?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 05:14

Well, my dad after he was in Seattle, I think he spent some time in Santa Barbara. And he followed some friends that were from the same area in the Philippines that he was from and they ended up in Watsonville working and my father and his cousin, Florencio Cawaling—Florencio Cawaling, lived in a labor camp and my mother was corresponding with his wife, and that's why she came to Watsonville, was to get married. Work, work brought my father to Watsonville, and in marriage brought my mom to Watsonville.

Steve McKay 05:56

Okay, so, but your dad, he worked in agriculture kind of moving around to different different places on the West Coast, and so Watsonville was just where they ended up, or was there something particular about Watsonville? Did he talk about, like, why?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 06:12

My father loved working in agriculture and he had a core group of friends and relatives in Watsonville, so that he was drawn for that reason. And my mom only had my aunt so it was mostly my father that had people that he knew here in Watsonville.

Steve McKay 06:30

Okay, and when did you—as you were growing up, did you, did your father stay friends with them or was that sort of a social—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 06:38

Oh Yeah. Yeah, we we had a lot of people coming. My dad had a lot of manongs that were not married, that still stayed at the camps, and they would often come to our home. My parents like to entertain. My dad was a fabulous cook and they were often at our home during celebrations and holidays. So, we seem to always have people at our home. So my father, he had a lot of friends that still stayed at the camps.

Steve McKay 07:08

Okay, and where was the house that you grew up in?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 07:11

We grew up on Marchant Street in downtown Watsonville, and we lived in a two bedroom house, and there was four kids and my mom and dad, and through the years, my parents brought over my grandmother and my my two uncles. So, we always had more than just our family living in that house. And on Marchant Street, we lived on a block where it was primarily Filipino, Japanese, and Mexican families. So, this is what we had for most of our childhood, and we live right next to Pajaro river, by the levee, and in the back of our house was actually the the Watsonville—trying to think of the word, it was the junkyard, the Watsonville junkyard was—lined our backyard with the with the junkyard, which is kind of kind of cool as a kid, you know, we, we, we didn't lack places to play.

Steve McKay 08:25

And what kind of things did you do? So you like, with the other kids, like, what were some of the things you did in that neighborhood that you can remember doing?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 08:33

Well, you know, the the Pajaro river was a wonderful place. You know, we kind of cringe when we think about it now that we spent so much time in that water, but the kids in the neighborhood, we loved playing in the river. We used to just spend entire days there, you know, it was less than a block away from our home and we used to play in our yard a lot. My dad had this wonderful yard with vegetables and we just loved throwing rocks into the junkyard and watching the big trucks back there and it was always entertaining.

Steve McKay 09:11

That's great, and that sounds like an interesting neighborhood with the all the different families. Did—were they um uh intermarried? Or were they mixed families or just a lot of different mainly Filipino, or Japanese, or Mexican couples, and their kids or what was it like?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 09:31

You know, it was—the families that we socialized with, or the kids we socialized with were mostly Filipino. We had the Tabancays in our neighborhood, the Ragsacs, the Nabors and a couple other Filipino families, and I'm trying to remember I, you know, to be honest with you, we didn't socialize with a lot of other kids that weren't Mexican or Filipino to be honest with you. Not that there was very many families there that were, you know, not those nationalities.

Steve McKay 09:33

That that—those were the kids that were around to be playing with.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 10:10

Yeah.

Steve McKay 10:11

And that you would see at the family parties and things like that.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 10:14

Well, we also kind of lived in this bubble, when we lived on Marchant street because, you know, we had the two corner stores, and they were owned by Japanese families. And, you know, my mom did her her grocery shopping at Daylite, which was also, you know, owned by Asian families. So, we didn't really interact a whole lot outside of our bubble.

Steve McKay 10:14

So there's Daylite and what was the name of the other store that that was—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 10:39

I think it was, the one that we used to go to was Mirada's and I don't remember the other—the name of the other store.

Steve McKay 10:47

And those are all just walking distance right there.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 10:49

Yeah, we used to—my family didn't have a whole lot of money growing up and we would often be sent to the store to buy a loaf of bread, and you know, we would have to wait until the end of the week when my father was paid. So, the the owners of the store knew us well and they'd like—they'd let us sign our name on a receipt, you know, for us to pay at the end of the week. So, that was pretty common practice in that neighborhood.

Steve McKay 11:15

Mm hmm. Yeah. That's great and how did you—do you know, like, how your families ended up in that neighborhood? Was it like they already knew people who were there? Or how is it that that became kind of this little bubble?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 11:32

Interesting. I've never asked my mom that, but I know that my father, before he was even married to my mother, saved a lot of his money and that's how we were able to purchase that home. And I think that my parents bought that house before my brother was born. I think it was after my sister was born my—the oldest Elisa, but I know, we knew one family. My mom worked with Mrs. Tabancay, but I'm really not sure what brought us to that neighborhood.

Steve McKay 12:10

Yeah, just curious to know.

Steve McKay 12:12

That that's really interesting. Yeah, so you mentioned, you know, your your dad, you know, partly, we want to, again, just try to document kind of what it was like for, particularly for these—for the manong early on, and, you know, kind of what kind of support and you said that, you know, your family hosted a lot of parties and things like that. So, um, yeah, what were those parties like? Like, what what—who came over? What did they do? And then you mentioned cooking is often kind of central, what kind of foods did they prepare?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 12:12

Yeah.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 12:48

You know, my my parents always—didn't need an excuse to have a party. So, it was major holidays, and I don't know how—why it was, you know, had to be my dad's cooking, but the

majority of the time these these things were at our house. And, you know, my father, he cooked for weddings and baptisms, and we also belonged to some organizations like the Catholic Association, and I think it was called Makato Association. And so, my father was always someone that would cook it these things, but everyone that attended those functions were our cousins. So, you know, they weren't really related to us, but they were, you know, they were manongs that my dad was associated with, so we spent a lot of holidays with each other, and you know, we also went to their homes as well, but it was great. It was like we always had someone to play with, and somewhere to go on the weekends, and there was always good food. Sometimes it was more like a potluck, and I just have great memories of belonging as a kid, we we didn't feel like outsiders because we associated with each other.

Steve McKay 14:23

Yeah.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 14:23

Which is quite comforting growing up.

Steve McKay 14:26

Yeah, yeah, having that bubble. We—I grew up with lots of cousins too, which we, you know, didn't realize we weren't even related to till later, you know, kind of thing. That's what is so, what are—so how did your dad, he just liked to cook what—was he, did he do it—did he work as a cook or he just really liked to do it or—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 14:46

You know, he was in the army, and I believe he was a cook in the army but he was also by default—he told us that when he was in the camps, somehow he was the person that would cook for everybody and my guess it's just kind of a skill that he mastered over the years, and he was really into growing his own vegetables and fishing. So he was—he was just very well rounded when it came to eating, you know, he would cook, he would catch, and he would grow. So, my mother, this is probably something we don't want on tape, but my mother didn't cook, and my dad was the one that did most of the cooking.

Steve McKay 15:29

Okay. Oh, that's great. So, what were some of your favorite dishes that he made? What were the things that you know that you remember from this?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 15:39

You know, we always had, we always had fish in our home, and I know that it was a special, you know, it was it was a special time when my dad caught sea bass. So, that was kind of that was kind of, kind of nice. We all enjoyed that. And of course, for special occasions, he'd make

dinuguan for everybody and everyone would say that his dinuguan was the best, and it probably was. And he'd make adobo, and he—and I don't know where he learned to do these things because, you know, this was before the internet, but my dad used to pickle beans, and, oh god, he would dry fish. And we'd always have garlic and onions, and you know, because it's during the summer, we would have plenty of this stuff, but maybe not so much during the winter, but he would he would save this food or store this food in a way where we could eat it during the winter months. So, he's very resourceful in that way.

Steve McKay 16:43

Yeah and did he catch the fish himself? Or did he—and where did he like to go fishing?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 16:50

Um, Palm Beach is what I remember, but he did a lot of fishing that was like one of his favorite hobbies.

Steve McKay 16:59

So, but mainly just from the beach, the surf fishing.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 17:03

Surf fishing, and my brother and I used to love to go with him, and the rule in our house was if you caught it, you cleaned it. So, you know, my brother and I loved catching. I didn't like cleaning, but I do have a lot of great memories of fishing with my brother and my father.

Steve McKay 17:20

Uh huh. What was the, what was the biggest fish you ever caught? Or what did you like?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 17:25

Oh gosh, I don't remember. I don't remember. My brother, today—I was talking to my brother the other day and he still has the the original fishing pole that my dad bought him when he was a kid and he continues to fish today. He loves to fish and he still lives in Watsonville. I don't remember. Yeah, I don't even remember. I know I caught fish, but I don't remember a lot. I just remember going going with my dad and enjoying that very much.

Steve McKay 17:55

So, that was just one of his weekend hobbies. You'd go to the beach and—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 18:00

Yeah, very early in the morning.

Steve McKay 18:02

Uh huh.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 18:04

Yeah.

Steve McKay 18:05

That's great, and then you spent the day there, or you guys would play on the beach.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 18:09

No, there was no playing, it was just fishing. We were there for a reason and my my dad, gosh, it felt like we—back then it felt like we would walk for miles. I'm sure it's only like a mile or two, but it felt a lot further. But my dad was a very early riser, so, we'd go like at five or six in the morning and we'd spend the morning there and then be back by lunchtime. So, that was something we did regularly on Saturdays.

Steve McKay 18:37

That's great, and it was just usually you and your brother and your dad or the rest of—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 18:41

Uh, sometimes my sisters. I was a bit of a tomboy so that was—that was something that I enjoyed.

Steve McKay 18:47

Mm hmm. That's that's really nice. My dad was a fisherman too and so he liked to go and fish and kind of have a serious attitude about it too. He'd get mad at us because my brother and I would always just be messing around, and hes like hey, cut it out, you know. That's that's that's a nice nice memory. That's great, and did—any other kind of activities he did with the with his—the other the other manong? Did they—do they also fish or do other things together?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 19:24

You know, my dad was really into gardening and he always grew in excess. So, I know he used to share a lot of that food that he grew with, you know, some of our relatives and the fish too, you know, he did—he always had more than he needed and for some reason I remember him always sharing the fish and vegetables with other people. We had a huge yard back on Marchant street and we only lived there up till the age, my age of 11, and then we moved out on Green Valley Road on Doering Lane when I was 11. So, that was like a whole different experience as for being in that bubble on Marchant Street.

Steve McKay 20:13

Yeah. Yeah. Why why did that—why the move?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 20:17

Um, why the—Oh, I know why, they were going to tear our house down and make that a city park. My parents were aware of that, so we wanted to move before, you know, we were in a crunch situation, and and I think that park is still there. They got rid of that junk yard and our house and built a city park there. So, that's how we ended up on Doering Lane, and we lived a few houses away from the Cawaling family, which is my uncle that that my dad came to United States with. So, we were neighbors with them.

Steve McKay 20:52

So, sort of recreated a little bit of at least some part of that neighborhood.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 20:56

I thought it was kind of strange back then, you know, of all the places to move in Watsonville, we're living next to our cousins, and as a kid, you're like, why are we doing this? But you know, I'm sure our parents had their reasons.

Steve McKay 21:10

Yeah, to be close to each other, I'm sure that's part of it. So it's, you know, again, one of the things we're looking at, for the project, is that, you know, for a long time, the only thing kind of that marked Filipinos in Watsonville were the riots of 1930 and, you know, kind of anti-Filipino animosity around that their, you know, feud. Did your family ever talk about any of that kind of stuff, did that ever come up?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 21:45

You know, my, my father, I remember him making comments here and there. It wasn't any big discussion in our home, but he would make comments like how, when he first arrived in the United States, people would call him monkey, and that really bothered him a lot, and he also talked about having to be careful. He shared with us that there are certain places he couldn't go in Watsonville. And, you know, it wasn't until 19—1981, I was a student at San Jose State and I took Asian American Studies, and I I was the only Filipino, and this isn't related to anything, but I was the only Filipino in that class. I think my instructor was Chinese, but he did have us read America is in the Heart, and that was my first connection with, you know, the experience that my dad went through. And I remember talking to him more about his experience back then, when I had more of a background, and he did talk about being some—someone being shot in the fields, but I don't know who that was, or if it was related. I'm assuming it was related to that, riot because it was about the same time, but I don't know, it was—it wasn't something that he really talked a lot about. And I'm not sure if it was a pride thing, or it was just something he just didn't think about a lot. You know, we came along when, you know, he was in his 50s. So, it had been quite a while. Quite a bit of time it passed already.

Steve McKay 23:40

Yeah, yeah. That was That must have been the Fermin Tobera, who was shot, you know, and died in 1930, as part of that. Must have been that incident. That's interesting. So, was he, when you brought it up, was he happy to talk about it? Or seemed a little reluctant? Or—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 24:00

You know, I had to interview my father, for a paper I was writing for that class in 1981, and it was hard getting information out of him. You know, he wasn't, you know, I wish I had saved that paper, but after a lot of moves, I don't have it anymore, but I remember it wasn't that easy getting that information out of him. I'm not quite sure why.

Steve McKay 24:24

Yeah, I was gonna say. It could be painful, you know, that's that not easy things to talk about or live through.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 24:33

Yeah.

Steve McKay 24:35

That's interesting. So, but for you growing up, did you feel, you know like, you mentioned that how nice it was in your in your bubble, but were there parts of towns that you didn't go to, or people didn't go to in that sense?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 24:51

Not for us, I don't think so. You know, when we were in that bubble, you're asking what fun things we did as a family, we would, you know, go downtown to the to the city, the City Plaza downtown, and you know, going going into town to go window shopping or check out the sidewalk sales with my mom was something that, you know, we did for fun even though we were just looking and not really buying because we didn't have a whole lot of money, but I don't remember not being able to go certain places. It felt comfortable. It was more when we lived out on Doering Lane, and I've talked to my siblings about this, that it felt different. You know, when I was 11, and we were in a different part of Watsonville, where there seemed to be more white collar parents of our friends and it just felt a little different. Even though we did have friends that were Mexican and Filipino, but it was our real first experience having Caucasian friends.

Steve McKay 26:03

Interesting, and so what school when you move there—so then you must have been, like, junior high or about to go to junior high?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 26:10

Um, I think I was in fifth or sixth grade and my siblings were in junior high. I think they were at Rolling Hills, and I was in Amesti, and my younger sister was at Amesti, and I'm trying to remember on our street we had we had maybe three Filipino families, and then we had some Mexican families, and we had some Caucasian families, maybe one Japanese family on our street. So, it's a little different for us.

Steve McKay 26:49

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, how did it feel—I mean, so it was just slightly different, just and you're also older, so it's a little different in that sense but—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 26:58

Well, you know, I was 11, 12, and you know, I had these new friends at a new school and some of my friends, you know, for example, one of my friends her mom was in real estate, where, you know, my other friends were, you know, their mothers worked in the cannery and in the fields. So, it was, it was different because, you know, we didn't even have the concept of going on vacation in an RV where my friends did. So, you did feel a little different.

Steve McKay 27:31

Yeah. Um, I wanted to ask just you mentioned go downtown with your mom, that sounds like a nice thing. What are some other things that you did with your mom? Or how was it for her because I think there were fewer Filipino women, right, in town? What did she do and how do you think she managed?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 27:52

Well, my mom was a—she worked in the cannery at night. So, she was someone that slept during the day and worked at night and that was the way that my parents did things for many years because you know, that way we didn't stay at home by ourselves, and that's how they made their money, and my mom was always working. I just remember she was always working, picking up extra hours, and she worked on the the assembly line for many years. And I remember towards the end of her her time working at Green Giant, she wanted to be a forklift operator in the freezer department. So, she applied for that job, and she was one of the only women that did that and her whole reasoning for doing that was of course for more money but um, you know, my mom—I can't I can't even imagine today my mom driving a forklift in the freezer section at ,you know, it at the cannery, but yeah, I thought that was pretty cool.

Steve McKay 29:07

That is cool. So she did get the job and she—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 29:09

She did job and she she had a lot of Filipino friends. My mom was—when we brought my grandmother here from the Philippines, my grandmother was a seamstress, and she worked for some city funded program downtown where seniors were hired to sew. So, she worked there but she also worked out of our home as a seamstress and she was also a fortune teller. So so a lot of women would come to our home to have, you know, dresses and pantsuits made for them, and then they also give my grandmother a couple dollars to read their fortune, and read their palms and things like that, but we had a lot of women coming in and out of our home for those two reasons.

Steve McKay 30:04

Oh, that's fascinating, and so did your grandmother speak English? Or did she do this all in Tagalog? Or what was—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 30:11

Tagalog. Yeah, she didnt really speak good English. These are all my mother's friends and relatives that would come over.

Steve McKay 30:19

Uh huh. So it's it's really—that's that's really interesting because, you know, through this project, we're learning a lot about the men because it's tied to why they came, but we haven't—myself, I haven't heard that much about, you know, Filipino women and and their community. So, if you don't mind, like I would just love to hear a little bit more about like, you know, who these women were that were coming, you know, to your house where they like your mom, did they marry some of the earlier Filipino men who came, or what was the what was the background of most of the other Filipino women?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 31:03

Let me think, I—how did my mom know these people. I don't know if they were from the Catholic Association, if they were women that my mom worked with, from the Makato Association. My mom, I think, through other women would—my mom would know people that would want dresses made for them, you know, back then it was so cool to have pants suits and, you know, these are things that that they were really into. Pantsuits and polyester suits that these women would wear and my grandmother was a fine seamstress, but I think it was word of mouth because I didn't know all these women, they weren't all related to us. So, I think people just found out that my grandmother did this, and you know, it's kind of funny because we lived in this two bedroom home and sometimes my uncles were there and my grandmother and I remember my grandmother would just have material and sewing machine, you know, sewing machine out, and then we'd have a bed there. So, it was—and then these woman would come over and get fitted and measured. So, it was like my grandmother—and that's

what my grandmother did in the Philippines, when my mother my mother was growing up and they lived in central Manila. She rented a room out in town and my grandmother was a seamstress in the same way. So, she did the same thing there that she did in Watsonville.

Steve McKay 32:40

So, when did she come to the United States? How old were you when your grandmother came?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 32:44

When my grandmother came, gosh, maybe eight, maybe eight.

Steve McKay 32:53

So, your mom petitioned for your mom— or your for your grandmother to come over?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 32:57

Yeah, my grandmother and my two uncles and financially, you know, that was a really hard time for our family because my father worked in the fields and my mom in the cannery and bringing each one over and then they lived with us because they weren't employed when they first got here, but I just remember that financially my parents struggled a lot during that process, during those—that span of time when my uncles and my grandmother came to United States.

Steve McKay 33:26

Well, I'm sure, but that's like your family's this key, you know, like the pioneers I'm sure for that.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 33:35

Yeah, but it wasn't always—it wasn't always easy because you know that many people in a small house like that is well you know how it is it's very, you know, you don't have your own space. I remember just my mom used to take us to the to Watsonville Public Library, and my thing was this escaping in books in a room because everywhere you went in that home there were people, you didn't get your own space.

Steve McKay 34:07

Yeah, that's—and were your uncle's, did they stay in the Watsonville area? Did they move away where—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 34:14

My my uncle, one of my uncle's worked for many, many years at um, I think he worked at the same school that I went to, you know, I went to Linscott, and I think he was a janitor there for many years. And then my other uncle moved to Modesto and he worked at the Gallo Winery.

Steve McKay 34:34

Oh, Okay.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 34:35

So they both moved.

Steve McKay 34:39

Wow. Yeah, that's so—it sounds I mean, so you had lots of community both from on your father's side from various stuff and work and then from your mother, and then your grandmother so, it really sounds like it was quite a busy place. Yeah. Yeah, that's that's fascinating. So, yeah, I guess, you know, partly then for you, I guess just like how was it, It's, uh,—so, where did you go to high school?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 35:12

I went to Watsonville High School, graduated 1981, the same year that uh Mary [last name unknown] did.

Steve McKay 35:18

Yeah.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 35:21

I started off when we lived in downtown Watsonville, I went to to Linscott in Pajaro Valley, think it was called Pajaro, and then when we moved, I went to Amesti, Rolling Hills, and then Watsonville High School.

Steve McKay 35:41

And what was it like, were there a lot of the big Filipino kids at Watsonville, at that time, in the high school?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 35:50

Yeah, I think there was a lot of, you know, we were first generation Filipino Americans and it seemed like we all kind of, we didn't hang around with groups of Filipinos, we kind of all blended in. I know that my my older sister had a lot of Japanese friends, and you know, my friends were Caucasian, and Mexican, and my brother had a lot of Mexican friends, and we kind of just blended in. I don't think we—you didn't see like Filipino groups together, at least I don't remember that.

Steve McKay 36:35

And did your parents—so I'm also first generation, you know, and, you know, we—my parents never taught us the Filipino Tagalog at all. Was that something like in your family, what was it like?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 36:48

Oh, they always wanted us to speak English, you know, in their their, at the time, their English wasn't that great. My father only had like a third grade education and, of course, coming to the United States, I think my father learned how to read and write. You know, after his parents died, he dropped out of the third grade, I believe there were missionaries in the Philippines that that taught him up to the third grade before he dropped out of school. And then in the camps, he said, there was a teacher that used to visit the camps and teach reading and writing. And that's how my father learned how to read and write, but now I forgot what your question was.

Steve McKay 37:38

It was about just, you know,—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 37:41

Oh, speaking.

Steve McKay 37:42

Yeah.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 37:43

Yeah. So, I do remember that they really wanted us to speak English to them, you know, and we lost that somewhere along the way. And, wow, I, you know, you you have that, that that feeling of guilt for not knowing Filipino and when when, you know, an older generation comes up to you, or even a younger generation speaks Filipino and you can't respond, you almost have this guilt like, wow, you know, I should know this. And it's kind of interesting to be connected with, with Watsonville in the Heart and see that there's a whole lot of Filipino Americans my age that don't know how to speak Filipino. It's like, oh, okay, it's okay.

Steve McKay 38:30

Yeah, I think it's, it's super common. Also, you know, my parents had also our our, quote, unquote, cousins, and we realize it was a pact among all of them. We used to think it was just so that they could talk in front of us, you know, they all had that sort of American Dream, you know, speak English and, and of course, as kids were like, Yeah, that's what we're, you know, we do at school and things like that. So, we didn't think anything of it and it really it isn't until you're adults, and you're like, geez, you know, would have been nice if we could could speak Tagalog, you know, growing up, but that's interesting. So, did you know other kids, other Filipino kids, in Watsonville that that grew up speaking, like Tagalog or Ilokano at home.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 39:12

You know, it was the the group of kids after us. I remember cousins that were 10—10 years younger than us and their families came—for some reason their parents were okay with them speaking Tagalog and not English to them, which I find very interesting and I don't know what what made that difference. I don't know if they saw us and saw that that's what they don't want, I don't know, but I do have cousins that are younger than us that speak Tagalog.

Steve McKay 39:54

Did their parents maybe come over at a later?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 39:59

Yeah, Like the 19— I remember being maybe in Junior High and high school, and they were younger than me, than us, and their parents came over later. Like during the, I don't know, 70s, 80s?

Steve McKay 40:19

Yeah. Um, but yeah, that's it—one are the things we're finding is that, you know, this difference between the generations of when when people came, so there's like your, your parents or your father who came from quite early on and then, of course, the laws changed in 1965 to make it easier for more families to come over. And that second wave, I think, is a little bit different. Some of them are professionals, others, different— they did you—was that—Did you see that kind of thing in Watsonville, kind of different generation?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 40:53

Yeah, I did see that, um, the ones—the the parents that came over later, were nurses, teachers, and had different different backgrounds than what my parents had.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 41:15

We did, we did and we actually learned learned a lot. Mrs. Lota was my godmother, and we used to go over to her house, she was a teacher for many years in Watsonville, and we used to go over to her house to learn how to do Filipino dances. Perform this at parties, but she was really good about teaching us all that. She was one of the ones that that came later and had a different type of career than our parents.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 41:40

And so, did those families interact in—or was it you know, like, did they get to know each other?

Steve McKay 41:56

That's that's interesting. So you did like tinikling and those dances? Oh, that's, that's interesting.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 42:04

And that was good—that was good memories.

Steve McKay 42:07

Where did you guys do the dances in that—did was it like a club or—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 42:11

The Catholic association would always have Christmas parties where, you know, where your kids were, you know, humiliated and would have to sing or dance, but—and we also go to the to the Vets Hall, you know, for Filipino gatherings. There was always somewhere to do that.

Steve McKay 42:38

And so, okay, so and then the sort of Filipino community got a little more mixed in that sense then because from the earlier group, the manongs, and then this later group, but they all intermixed and, and was it the church that was sort of the kind of binder or—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 42:56

This is like the generation that my uncle's, you know, my uncle's came later, and they had this group of friends, and they were the ones that have kind of the next next generation of kids, you know, I have cousins that that are now in their 30s 40s. You know, I'm almost 60 so so, there's this next group of people, Filipino Americans.

Steve McKay 43:26

But, but everyone kind of hung out or went to the same events and things.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 43:31

Yeah, we all got along. It was great.

Steve McKay 43:36

Yeah, that that that's that's really cool. And so it was partly through the Catholic— through the church. Did you all go to the same church? Or was it—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 43:43

Um, I don't think we all went to the same church. I know that we went to St. Patrick's for a while and it was—I don't think it was it was because we went to the same church, I think it was more that we were all Catholic.

Steve McKay 44:05

Okay, and Filipino. It was mainly Filipino Catholics?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 44:10

Yeah. We have some people that were married to Filipinos that were Caucasian, but not many.

Steve McKay 44:23

That's interesting. So, did your mom keep working in the canneries up—How long? Did she keep doing that kind of work for a while?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 44:33

She did. She is turning 85 in August, and she worked up till the time she was 50. She worked up till I think the cannery ended up closing. I'm not sure but yeah, she worked for most of our childhood.

Steve McKay 44:57

Until the canneries closed.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 44:58

Mm hmm.

Steve McKay 44:59

It was like mid 80s or something?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 45:00

Yeah, I think I'd left home already.

Steve McKay 45:05

Yeah, and so yeah, and what did you—what were you thinking when you were finishing high school? Were you ready to get out, were you wanting to stick around? What was the—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 45:13

You know, my—I didn't know what I wanted to do and my sister had left for college, and my brother was still at home and working, and I decided to go to San Jose State. And I left when I was 18, and it's, it's interesting because I'm 59 now, and I've never went back to Watsonville in terms of living there, but I always go back, it's still home, you know, it's still home. And actually, my husband grew up in Watsonville, and we met a couple years after. We didn't know each other in high school, and we met years later, but his family has a tie to Watsonville. They have been around for a while. So, we always go home to Watsonville and consider Watsonville home, even though you know, I haven't lived there since I was 18.

Steve McKay 46:09

Yeah, but there's so many strong memories, and so many things happened there. [unintelligible] What did your parents think about you going to San Jose State? Were they excited? Were they—did they think it was too far? Or, you know, what was their attitude?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 46:26

Probably shocked because I wasn't much of a school school kid, and so they were okay with it. They had gone through, you know, my my younger sister—or my older sister had left for college, and then I did, and then my younger sister went to San Francisco State. So, I think that what I do find interesting, growing up, you know, my dad and mom, for the longest time, we always thought that that college was this extension of high school, you know, it wasn't an option you just went. I thought that was kind of interesting growing up.

Steve McKay 47:09

So, they very much promoted you guys going and wanted to—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 47:11

Yeah, yeah.

Steve McKay 47:13

That's great. That's great, and what did you study at San Jose State?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 47:18

I actually started at San Jose State and ended up transferring to Sacramento State and, and studied huma—human resource management.

Steve McKay 47:28

Okay, that's that's great, and see, then you would go back to Watsonville. So, your mom's still living in Watsonville?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 47:35

My mom's still living there with my brother. My sister lives in Folsom, California and then I have another sister that lives in Oregon. And then I've been in Colorado Springs for 23 years, It's been awhile—24 years?

Steve McKay 47:53

Yeah. So, do you guys, come, go back—sounds like you're able to go back to to visit partly because your your husband's family's from there too, you get back to Watsonville.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 48:04

Mmm Hmm

Steve McKay 48:05

For you, how has it changed? Like, in how does it feel, really do I know it still feels like home, but how have you—How do you perceive Watsonville kind of over the years?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 48:19

You know, I just I just remember and—I just remember, just apple trees, and fields of agriculture, and space. You know, and it just feels different in terms of that now. So many people, so much traffic and congestion, and it's a different Watsonville than it used to be.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 48:51

It's still beautiful, though. It's still beautiful. It's it's, I don't know. You go there and you you you remember how beautiful it is, just all the agriculture. I mean, I love, you know, I love driving, or walking on the levee when we're there because my parents—or my mom lives by the levee in Watsonville, and my husband I often go for walks, and I love seeing all the field workers out there because reminds me of my father.

Steve McKay 48:51

Yeah—

Steve McKay 49:21

Yeah. How long did your dad work in the fields then?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 49:26

Oh, he worked—he finally settled, I think, for the last 22 years he worked for a man named Howard Tao, a Japanese owner of a strawberry field. And he worked for Howard for a long time, and he was such a—boy, they were so kind to our family. It was amazing. I mean, it's more like working for a friend then then a boss. They are so so good to us, and Howard would sometimes go to Japan with his family and leave my dad, who was a foreman for him, in charge of his strawberry fields. And yeah, my dad my dad, really—he enjoyed being outside. He enjoyed working in the strawberry fields.

Steve McKay 50:14

And then toward the end, he was a foreman and kind of yeah—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 50:20

Yeah. Mr. Tao had a lot of trust in my father, and my father worked, when he first started working in the strawberry fields for Mr. Tao, the majority of the people that worked for him were

Mexican—Mexican immigrants who didn't speak English. So, my father had to learn to speak Spanish in order to be their foremen. So, he taught himself—or he learned, you know, while he was there, how to speak Spanish, which is kind of cool.

Steve McKay 50:57

Yeah, that's really that's, that's very interesting. By then there's just not very many Filipinos in agriculture probably.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 51:03

No, no. Yeah.

Steve McKay 51:08

That's—so he so ,he really knew strawberries to be in that one farm for that long.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 51:13

I think it was maybe 23 years, he worked for him and I think he retired at the age of 75.

Steve McKay 51:20

Wow, really.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 51:21

Yeah.

Steve McKay 51:22

Wow. That's amazing. I mean he really—and that's that's a tough physical job no matter what.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 51:28

Yeah, I think that my dad, and I don't know if it was from the military, but, you know, when he served at Fort Ord, but he was a very structured person, you know, one that got up at a certain time, ate three meals a day, and he was just very structured, and very resourceful, and he loved serving in the military. He loved serving for the army.

Steve McKay 51:55

Yeah. Thanks for mentioning that I wanted to learn a little bit more because he served in a Filipino regiment, right?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 52:04

I think it was the second second battalion, Fort Ord, and I have notes about him, I'm trying to remember what year that—I don't have the details. But—

Steve McKay 52:25

Do you know how he ended up joining and yeah, what—how he ended up, you know, going into the, to the military.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 52:36

No, I don't, I don't remember, but I I don't remember what brought him to do that. I know, he became a citizen afterwards, after he got out of the military, and I don't know if that—I don't even think that that was something that he was considering when he first gone—when he first went in, but there's something about the uniform that my dad loved, you know. My my own husband is retired military and, you know, when my father came to visit us, at one of our duty stations, he—you could just see it on his face the that it brought back memories of being in the Army. And he was actually buried in his uniform when he died. So, that's what he wanted. He had a great love for being in the military.

Steve McKay 53:28

Did he talk about being, you know, like his experience in the, in the, in the infantry and talk about World War Two?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 53:37

He he talked about— well, of course, you know, he only served with Filipinos because that's what that was the only thing that was allowed or allowable for him, but I think that he didn't share a whole lot about what happened. But afterwards, towards the end of his service, he ended up in the Philippines, stationed in the Philippines, and he was able to see his fam—family for the first time since leaving, and I could only imagine what that felt like for him to be in a U.S. Army uniform and seeing his family in the Philippines. That just must have been pretty amazing for him, you know.

Steve McKay 53:52

Yeah, just to come back in that way, and wow, that that—and just just that separation for that long, that's amazing, wow. Did he talk about that at all or about being able to go back?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 54:45

Yeah, just that he was really happy that he was able to see his family because like—well his siblings, who who raised him, and that was just a very happy time for him. His siblings never uh came to the United States.

Steve McKay 55:05

Did he, after that ever go back much or?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 55:08

I think he went back once. I think that was in 1981.

Steve McKay 55:13

Oh, Wow.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 55:15

Yeah.

Steve McKay 55:17

Oh, yeah, and your mom, did she travel back and forth at all or—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 55:24

I think my mother went once or twice with my brother. Yeah.

Steve McKay 55:34

Yeah. Have you ever gone back to the—ever gone to the Philippines?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 55:38

I have not. I have not yet, I say yet. My daughter has. I have a I have a 29 year old daughter that went a couple years ago.

Steve McKay 55:52

Oh, did—was she able to visit family? Or, you know—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 55:56

She just wanted to—she just wanted to experience that, she had a curiosity.

Steve McKay 56:01

That's great, and what was it like for her? What did she say about it?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 56:05

Um, you know, she she, I believe she called my mother while she was there, just to say that she was there. And she—I don't know this generation, you know, my kids, it's kind of funny because my my name growing up, Erlinda, sounded very, to me, very Filipino and for some reason, I wanted it to be more Americanized, my name. So, when I had my kids, I don't know if there was something in the back of my mind, but I named them very American names and then when they got older, they asked me why I didn't name them after their grandfather, because they just think it's so cool. You know, having a Filipino name, so I thought that was kind of funny.

Steve McKay 56:57

Yeah, I think it takes a generation to kind of—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 57:00

Yeah, but there's that curiosity—curiosity with them.

Steve McKay 57:05

Yeah, yeah, my kids are—one graduated college, and ones just finishing, and they ended up wanting to do projects about the Philippines because they were curious, and yeah, I mean, it's a really great healthy curiosity. It's nice to see them wanting to learn that's—understand their own histories and things like that. So, that's great. Well, this is been, you know, really nice, just so so wonderful, just to chat and talk. You know, the projects gonna—we're hoping we'll continue for a while we'd like to be able to collect stories for the archive and oral history archive, but we're also trying to capture some of the, you know, like photos or other kinds of things, and materials to scan, you know—and partly for display, we're hoping to do a large exhibit where we'll be able to have both the stories and then also some artifacts. So it's, I don't know if you have many photos or other other, you know, kind of memorabilia from from your parents or from your father.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 58:25

Yeah, I think I have my dad's passport picture. It's date stamped Manila, 1929.

Steve McKay 58:37

Wow.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 58:37

I have my dad's dog tags from when he was in the army, and I'm sure my brother—my brother has things too.

Steve McKay 58:47

Yeah. Well, I mean, so and I'm not sure, it's a little harder with you further away, but maybe this—maybe if we can get in touch with your brother, if there are things that he has, you know, in—and your mom's still in, in Watsonville, that's right? So. if if maybe we could get in touch with them just, again, partly maybe just to gather some of these things and we'd be very careful just to scan photos or—and somehow kind of archive like the dog tags, I think would be phenomenal to have some representation of those. Do, you think that would be possible to be in touch with your brother?

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 59:39

Yeah. We're trying to think what we have it's mostly photos that you'll probably get from from my brother, but I have photos that are with the exhibit, Watsonville in the Heart exhibit, that are still at the library. You are welcome to those.

Steve McKay 59:57

Okay, I think we actually—good, that's fantastic because I think we've been digitizing those.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 1:00:03

Oh, Okay.

Steve McKay 1:00:03

So that—so I think we would then have some of that. Okay, alright.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 1:00:07

Yeah.

Steve McKay 1:00:08

Okay.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 1:00:09

But in terms of objects, you know, I have to think about that, what else we have. I'll have to ask my brother and see what he says.

Steve McKay 1:00:20

Okay. All right. That'd be— okay, yeah, that's fantastic. Well well, thanks, I know is on a Friday, and you know, there's the—you're could be busy, so I really appreciate your time. And—

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 1:00:32

Yeah, you're welcome. Thank you, I really appreciate what you're doing.

Steve McKay 1:00:35

Yeah, well, that's really, I'm just gonna have that thought of you guys playing in the junkyard and [unintelligible] I love that, just image, and and that so and—that's really, you know, I think there's there's, you know, what little history there is, tends to be about the the riots, or something like that, and just those kinds of stories of the families and things like that are often are part of the kind of historical record and so so it's really, you know, special to to, you know, to hear those stories, and know that we can kind of collect those stories, and and just try to make a richer historical record. That's really what we're trying to do.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 1:01:16

That's awesome. Thank you so much.

Steve McKay 1:01:18

Okay, Erlinda so I will I will send you a copy, an audio copy of the of the interview, so in case there is something you want to expunge or anything like that, and and and and otherwise, I might be in touch again, just about the objects or the or the photos, but but I'll definitely be in touch with the recording and then we'll just take it from there, but hopefully, then it'll be cataloged into the archive and then as that gets developed we'll be— we'll stay in touch, so you kind of find out what happens to it.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 1:01:53

If I find any photos, do you want me to scan those and send them to you or?

Steve McKay 1:01:58

Yeah, that would be great. Yeah, that would be fantastic.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 1:02:00

I'll see what I have.

Steve McKay 1:02:01

Okay.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 1:02:02

All right.

Steve McKay 1:02:03

Okay. Erlinda, thank you so much.

Erlinda Taytayon Heebner 1:02:05

Thank you. Have a good weekend.

Steve McKay 1:02:06

Okay. Okay, you too, take care. Bye bye.