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Juanita Sulay Wilson interviewed by Meleia Simon-Reynolds Part 2 of 2

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Juanita Sulay Wilson interviewed by Meleia Simon-Reynolds Part 2 of 2

Speakers: Juanita Sulay Wilson; Meleia Simon-Reynolds

Date: January 29, 2023

Scope and Contents:

In this interview, originally recorded in person, Juanita Sulay Wilson speaks with Meleia Simon-Reynolds, a member of the Watsonville is in the Heart team. This interview is focused on Juanita's mother, Virginia Alice Viner, and her membership and role in the Watsonville Filipino Women's Club, as well as Juanita's own foundational role in the Watsonville High School Filipino Youth Club. Throughout the interview, Juanita describes the events and services the Filipino Women's Club provided to the community in Watsonville. She explains the racial dynamics within the club and community, including how white women like her mother were accepted into the organization. Juanita recalls how her mother saw herself within the community and discusses changing community dynamics when Filipino migrants arrived in Watsonville, especially after 1965. She also details the development of her own identity as a mixed-race person, explaining the ways members of the Filipino Women's club and her mother –thought about race. Then, Juanita explains the creation and activities of the Filipino Youth Club. She explains the connections between the founding of the Youth Club and other Filipino community organizations in Watsonville. Juanita emphasizes that she and other members of the Youth Club felt it was important to claim and celebrate their Filipino identities.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 00:00

This is Meleia Simon-Reynolds, it is Sunday, January 29th, 2023. I'm in San Francisco with Juanita Sulay Wilson, and today we are going to be doing a topical interview about the Sulay family's involvement in the Filipino Women's Club of Watsonville and the Filipino Youth Club. So, yeah, with that, we'll get started. If it's okay with you, I wanted to start by talking about the Women's Club.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 00:38

Oh, that's fine.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 00:39

And, I was wondering if you could start by giving a definition of what the Filipino Women's Club was, to, perhaps, someone who doesn't know what the Women's Club is, or hasn't heard of it before.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 01:01

It was a group, I— I would say the women's club started— well, there was some form of a women's club before the fifties. I can remember the earliest part of a— the Women's Club actually was in the late forties. There were a group of women who would gather, each— I would say each month. And as a child, I really didn't know what the Women's Club was about, except being around a lot of aunties. But— I figured they were— they— they got together to support each other, and to— to make a place in the community. To help identify themselves. And I know they got involved, eventually, into giving scholarships to youth, which was kind of like past my time, but— in later years, so there were always the scholarships. They did a lot of— they— they wanted to also give their children a sense of culture. And to make sure that we knew our Filipino side. The women at that time were not just Filipina women. They were a multicultural community of women, from different walks of life. From different areas, from Hawai'i. Some were even born in Hawai'i, Filipino. The aunties I knew were born in Hawai'i, and came to the mainland. So, they would support young families. They would invite the women to join them, and they all had small children, so they wanted to preserve and give a sense of culture.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 03:19

So, how did the women who were not Filipino themselves come to be involved in the Women's Club, the Filipino Women's Club?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 03:29

They were— if you were married to a Filipino, you— you were always invited. You— it's just part of the community, because there weren't enough just pure blooded Filipina women around. So, if you were married to a Filipino, you have the right to join the club.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 03:59

Okay. Did you find that there were a, a— a lot of non-Filipina women in the club? From your observations, or from what you heard from your mother?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 04:13

I— they'd nev— my mother never spoke of, of the difference in races. I— that's only myself, and remembering who the women were. And, so, I know they weren't all Filipino. So, yeah. I— I don't know where my thought was going there.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 04:35

That's okay. I mean, when we look at the photos of the Women's Club, we see a lot of women who are not Filipino—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 04:43

Filipino, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 04:44

Or maybe they're mixed race, or maybe they're white, or Mexican or other women.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 04:50

Right.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 04:50

So we know a lot of those women were involved, and it seems like from our past conversations, and from the photos, though, even if they were not Filipina, they were practicing or learning about Filipino culture as part of the club. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about, like, what kinds of Filipino cultural activities the Women's Club members did or passed on?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 05:21

Oh! [laughs] They had the scholarships for youth, they used to fundraise, I guess to keep the club going. I— you know, I really don't know what their whole thing's about, except to make sure the children got their— expose their children to the identity of the Philippines. So, they're— they're the ones who, who made sure that we learned Filipino folk dancing. We learned hula because of the aunties born in the Philippines. So we were exposed, just, in general day life of, of gatherings that we were learning our culture just by doing and seeing.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 06:15

Yeah. Could you describe a little bit about what learning the folk dances was like? Do you remember having lessons, or anything about it?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 06:31

Well I re— yeah, I remember the lessons. I think her name was Morales, but I'm not quite sure. And, there was an auntie, I don't know if that was the one from Salinas, because a lot of the Women's Club would— Watsonville was very close to the one in Salinas, Women's Club. So we would have an auntie come over once a month— if they were having a big presentation of a dance, of a get together, a, a formal dance, usually. And, there was a program, they would come and, you know, prepare for months, and we would meet once a week, and learn the folk dance that we were going to perform.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 07:25

Do you remember—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 07:26

I still remember. [sings] "Planting rice. It's so much fun!" [laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 07:30

Is that one of the songs?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 07:31

That was one of the folk dances, yeah. [laughing]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 07:34

Really?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 07:34

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 07:36

Do you remember, like, the first, or one of the first times you heard the music or got to see the costumes?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 07:46

The Filipino? Th— it was just always there. From the— from the time I can remember. The music— because there was always the band. So we always heard the music. Wh— I remember when a, a big formal event would start or any big event, first there would be the Filip— the, the American anthem, always followed by the Filipino anthem. So we grew up with that. And then— of course, always the, the dance music. So I remember the song, "Dahil sa Iyo," from the time I was little. So—

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 08:33

Would you dance to "Dahil sa Iyo"?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 08:36

Would I dance?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 08:36

Yeah.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 08:37

Did we dance?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 08:37

Yeah.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 08:39

And wh— and, in which— way? [laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 08:41

In— to "Dahil sa Iyo."

Juanita Sulay Wilson 08:44

Did they dance to it?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 08:45

Yeah.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 08:45

Yeah, they did. Yeah. That's—

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 08:47

That was more of like a group dance rather than a formal—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 08:50

No, those are just— music playing and people would just dance.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 08:53

Yeah. Right.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 08:54

Yeah, yeah. It was very much a dancing— any get-together was a big dance. And, and that's where we learned how to dance, was through the uncles, because there were so many uncles that, as children, they would pull us out on the floor because they want to dance. So they— we learned to dance; the waltz, the Cha Cha Cha, the— whatever was in style at that time, so we learned all dancing from our uncles.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 09:26

Right. Would you— would you say that if you're learning the Cha Cha, the, the waltz from the uncles, would you say you were learning more of the cultural Filipino folk dances from the aunties?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 09:43

Yeah, I would— I would say that the folk dancing to, to— that was introduced were through the aunties, yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 09:52

So they were doing more of the cultural education.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 09:57

–ation, yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:02

Could you tell us a little bit about the hula lessons? We know you are still a practicing hula dancer.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 10:11

[laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:11

When you were a kid, you were– you, you mentioned you were– there was an auntie who would teach hula at the Women's Club kind of.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 10:20

For performance.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:21

Yeah, for performances–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 10:22

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:23

–what was that like?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 10:24

What was that like?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:25

Yeah.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 10:25

I thought it was all one culture, to tell you the truth. [laughing] I mean, it was, like, so similar, but yeah. Yeah, they taught us the hula, for a performance I couldn't– what's the famous one that all kids learn? Why can't I think of it?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:44

"Hukilau"?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 10:44

"Hukilau"! [laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 10:44

[laughs] "Hukilau"! Yeah.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 10:47

Yeah, yeah, I can remember that one, and I think there was another one that we learned, for a performance, yeah. So we would do, you know, a– one Hawaiian, o– you know, a couple Filipino folk dancing, for performance. And– but that's when we were really little.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 11:04

Yeah. Would you wear a, like, a hula costume for hula dances?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 11:10

I would– I– do you know what? I have no memory of the costume for it. I only remember the butterfly sleeves for the–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 11:18

For the Filipino–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 11:19

For the Filipino folk dancing. But I don't know wha– I don't remember what we wore, for hula. At all.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 11:30

Do you– was it kind of the same auntie or aunties who would be teaching the Filipino folk dances and the hula dances, or were they different aunties?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 11:42

I don't remember. I don't have– remember– I wouldn't– I would imagine– I think it was the same auntie. That taught us, on that one, because that was when we were– I was really young. Like, when I was six, maybe eight years old, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:00

Maybe an auntie who was Filipino from Hawai'i.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 12:03

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:04

That makes a lot of sense.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 12:06

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:08

Yeah, I— I've seen some photos of w— Filipino Women's Club events that were being held in Watsonville, or in Santa Cruz area, that kind of had a Hawaiian theme going on. Like, there are Hawaiian decorations, or there was like, different themes. Do you recall anything about, like, the types of events that they would be holding? The dances? Any memories of them at all?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 12:39

It does seem like there was a Hawaiian one, but it— you know, it's a very s— way back that, yeah, it's just, something on the edge, but yeah. I know they had themes when they, when they threw dances, that there were a lot of times themes.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 12:59

What would you say, like, the purpose or the goal of the Women's Club dances was?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 13:13

Other than that, you know, there— they were very much a gathering, and, just being together— it was a way of being together as a whole, than separated in the different parts of the area. And it was one way of pulling people together. They liked to be together. I mean, if it wasn't the Women's Club, it would be another organization.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 13:43

Right. Throwing some kind of event.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 13:45

Some big dance event, yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 13:50

Were— would the Women's Club sell tickets to the dances? What— were, were— was it kind of also a fundraising event?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 14:01

It wa— there was always an admission. So I would imagine that's how they gathered money. Slowly— and then, of course, there were always the social boxes. It was another way of raising money. And, you know— I, you know, since I wasn't in the club, I really have no idea what the purpose was, other than keeping it going.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 14:29

Right. Raising money to support the club—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 14:31

—port the club, in their activities.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 14:34

Yeah.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 14:34

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 14:35

Were the social boxes something that the Women's Club held? Those types of dances?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 14:42

I think they all held them, they were— because it was just one way, that was a popular way, of—

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 14:50

Raising.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 14:51

Raising money. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 14:53

Could you explain a little bit, for folks who don't know, what a social box dance is?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 15:03

[laughs] They would— it was not my favorite. [laughs] And I think I've only been in a couple of them because I was really shy. But, they would gather the young— the young girls, b— young teenage girls. The social boxes was a way of raising money for the organization, and what was nice about the social boxes, especially as a teenage girl, is that though I hated to be in it— and shy, that the organization always gave the young girls part of that money that they raised. So they would kind of like split it. And so, I was a young teenager on that one I can remember, I was able to buy a dress that I wanted. A Lanz dress—

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 16:05

Ooh!

Juanita Sulay Wilson 16:05

–which was popular, then, so. You know, it was, it was nice in that way, but being a shy person, it was really hard.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 16:16

So, basically–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 16:18

To be in it.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 16:19

In the, in the social boxes, the, the young girls would sell tick– like, tickets to dance with them, right?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 16:29

No, no, no.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 16:30

No? How would it go?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 16:31

It would go that they would line– they would line them all up in the front, sitting in chairs. And, they would start with one, on one end, and just, you know, say– say they chose six young girls, or y–young ladies. And they would just start, and, an uncle or your father would start dancing with you and say– they would get– they would bid like \$5 to dance with you. So they would pay \$5 to whoever was at the table, and then they would dance until another uncle came, and would– whatever, pay whatever he said he would pay, t– and it would just go that way until it kind of, like, slowed down. And then, they would call the end, and then they would– the next young lady– somebody would start it off.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 17:31

I see.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 17:32

And it would just– go on, until the end.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 17:35

Do you have any memories of this happening, when you participated the few times you did?
Can you describe, like, what it was like, for you?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 17:45

Dancing?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 17:46

Yeah, with the, with the—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 17:48

With every—

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 17:49

The manong, yeah.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 17:49

Yeah, with— it was like, you know, u— usually in a huge room, with a lot of people all around, and it was just— being shy, and dancing, and looking, and scared, you know, and going, "nobody's gonna dance with me!" [laughs] You know, that kind of thing— fear. That kind of a fear. You know, it, it's, it's actually really scary, you know? And—

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 18:18

We've seen photos—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 18:20

[laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 18:20

—of you with the queen sash on, so—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 18:22

No, I— oh.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 18:23

The princess sash.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 18:25

Oh, I'm— yeah, I don't know how I got there.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 18:28

Would that have been, because of the money you raised, for the social box dances?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 18:35

You know what? I don't remember. I don't remember, how that– I have no idea, how we were picked for those, for those things, yeah. For my sister, she remembers.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 18:56

Yeah?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 18:57

Because that was a little different type of fundraising when they did a yearly queen, or whatever, for the lodges. There, the girls that– they would have to sell tickets. Go around asking uncles to buy tickets.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 19:15

So it sounds like the Women's Club and a lot of other organizations were doing these events for community gathering, for fun, but also for raising money to support the community. Do you remember any other things they did to raise money?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 19:38

Not in– not in the Fil– in the Women's Club, I don't remember.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 19:44

I'm curious about the Filipino Women's Club cookbook that– that's in your collection, that we were looking at. Could you tell us a little bit about that particular object?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 20:06

A lot of organizations did that same type of thing, of putting a cookbook, and I'm sure that was a fundraiser, also, for the Women's Club. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 20:18

So, the cookbook we're talking about has a lot of recipes that different members of the club donated. Some of them are, like, more traditional American foods, some are Filipino, others are, like, even more eclectic, I remember seeing, like, some Indian–inspired kind of things in there. And I'm wondering, was Filipino food something that was present and practiced among the women of the Women's Club? Cooking?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 20:57

Cooking? You mean just, regular cooking, and–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 21:00

Cooking in general, or cooking Filipino food.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 21:02

Would y– usually, I, you know, [laughs] I can't speak about any other, but I know my mother learned to cook from the uncles.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 21:12

Oh, okay.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 21:13

So. A lot of the food that we ate at home were basic, traditional type of Filipino food. And, to give you the Filipin– Filipino name of those foods, I don't know. A lot of it– we called it just chop suey. [laughs] Because, I don't know why. But it's something I remember hearing. But I know there's a Filipino name for the different dishes. Yeah, but–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 21:45

And your mom was cooking them?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 21:46

My mom was cooking them, when my dad wasn't at home. And, every once in a while we would get an American dish. Because my dad wasn't home. Other than that, no, my mom learned to p– learned to make biko from my dad, or one of the uncles. You know, and most of her cooking was just from–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 22:09

From them.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 22:10

From them. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 22:13

So, your mom knew how to cook Filipino food. She was a member of the Filipino Women's Club. I– I wonder h– how you think your mom experienced being in the Filipino Women's Club? What– what do you think that was like for her as a non-Filipina woman?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 22:39

I would think in her young years, at the ages– she got married just before 18. I think it was a place of safety for her. It was a place where she could go and meet people safely. And– and

where there was support for her. A lot of the community in the clubs were a lot of support for these women, who were married, especially women who were married to Filipino men.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 23:17

How so? Do you think they were s– how were they supporting them?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 23:22

Just encouraging them, and being able to bring their families to a safe place. Encouraging– I know they've taught my mother, I guess, Filipino– some Filipino customs, to make sure. I can remember coming home crying from school. I guess I was in kindergarten, and– and I'm sure it had to do– race-wise. Because of the story she told me, and I thought it was just something my mother made up, but, working for the San Francisco school district, and when they started their ethnic studies program, trying to introduce it into the school system, through Dr. McCloud. The story came up there, and I'm going, 'oh my god,' my mother must– one of the aunties must have told my mother the story.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 24:32

Of the race riots?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 24:34

Of– no, not of the race riots, but of being different. Why I was different and– and how I can be proud of myself, of being different. It, it– at first, it was a very soothing story, but as you got older, you're going, 'whew, that's kind of racist!' You know, as you're, you're becoming aware of the outside world. And it's n– something you wouldn't repeat, except in your own family, or in your safe place. But it was a ways, a way– the story was a way of making myself feel better about who I was, and why I looked the way I looked.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 25:18

So, so–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 25:19

So I w– because I looked different. And, s– and, when I was little, they was like, where'd you come from? Where are you from? You know, so, because of my coloring, that I was different, and it was a story of, of creation.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 25:40

Oh, okay.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 25:42

I don't know if I should tell the story–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 25:43

Yeah, I mean, I think you should!

Juanita Sulay Wilson 25:43

–but, I, I– it s– it sounds so racist now, but the story is, that, when God was creating man, He created a man, a, a person. And why He baked him I don't know, but sh– or would put– I guess she'd use baking terms, put them in the oven. And she forgot, or– forgot, God forgot that that, what He was creating was there, and He pulled it out. Pull– He went running, and pulled him out– pulled them out, or the– what He was making, and he was dark, too dark. And it was not what he was going after. So, He would ba– put another batch together, put it in and watch it very carefully, and pulled it out. And it was too light. So He's– went for the third time, ba– baking this thing, putting it in. He watched it very carefully, to make sure He went past the point of the last batch, and He– when He pulled it out, He was– pulled it out, and it was perfect. It was a golden brown. So that's why our skin looks the way it does.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 27:09

I, I– I like that!

Juanita Sulay Wilson 27:10

[laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 27:10

Wait, the perfect golden brown–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 27:13

[laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 27:14

–just right!

Juanita Sulay Wilson 27:14

Just right! [laughing]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 27:15

Just right.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 27:20

But now, I think about it, it sounds so racist, now, but– [laughing]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 27:23

But it kind of feels like the kind of thing that would be comforting to a young person.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 27:28

Young– from an– a very young child. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 27:31

Yeah, yeah!

Juanita Sulay Wilson 27:32

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 27:33

And y– you think that that's something that the women, the Filipinas in the club may have said to your mom, you– if, if your daughter or your kids are experiencing feeling excluded or bullied, then you can tell them this story.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 27:50

–story.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 27:50

Oh, wow.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 27:50

Yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 27:54

That's really interesting. So, so– so you feel that your mom was, like, supported in– in motherhood, kind of, by the–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 28:03

Yes.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 28:04

–other women?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 28:04

Yes. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 28:06

How to raise mixed–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 28:08

–race children, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 28:09

–Filipino kids, yeah.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 28:10

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 28:13

Can you remember anything else that your mother might have learned from the women in the club?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 28:18

[laughs] Not right now, no, I– I can't. Yeah. It's so long ago that–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 28:28

Right. I, I w– I'm curious to know, I, I– we've seen lots of photos of your mother, wearing really beautiful Filipiniana dress, and I'm– I'm curious, like, how did she get these dresses? How did she know? Was that something that she maybe learned, or, or did with the other women in the club?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 28:55

I think they always just looked after her. And made sure she had the appropriate– I'm sure the aunties had a lot to do with getting their dresses for her. Or, and I remember an auntie in Santa Cruz, who made a couple of dresses, for my mother, which I met, I think her daughter once, at one of these gatherings, but I didn't get the name.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 29:21

Is it Tana? Estelita Tabios? Possibly?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 29:29

I have no idea.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 29:31

That, that's really interesting, so, y– sh– your mother was, was getting dresses from other people who were involved in the club, possibly, too?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 29:40

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 29:41

Yeah. Do you, do you think your mom liked wearing the Filipiniana dresses?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 29:48

I think she did. I think she enjoyed it. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 29:53

What did you think, when you saw your mother wearing the dresses?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 29:58

What did I think?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 29:59

Yeah.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 30:02

She looked beautiful in them. Yeah. Yeah. And I think she felt a part of s– of something too– that she felt accepted.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 30:13

Yeah. What do you think your dad thought?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 30:19

I think my dad was very proud.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 30:21

Really?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 30:22

Yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 30:23

How so?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 30:24

That he had a family that– that I guess, that he needed to have. I don't know, it's like, I– you know, I think he was just very proud of her, but, like I said, they were not vocal. They were not,

in front of us, or— so, it's hard to tell you what it was like. Because it just wasn't spoken to us of how they felt. [laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 30:58

We think she looked beautiful—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 31:00

[laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 31:00

—in the dresses too, they're so cool. Do you think that you, you— when you saw her and the other women wearing the dresses it made you want to wear the dresses too and, like, feel, like, connected? Like that was like something very beautiful, like an ideal—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 31:20

Oh, we've always wanted to wear them, from the time we were little kids. And that— and we were able to, because, they ma— I can remember my mother even making ours.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 31:31

Oh, really?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 31:32

Yeah. That one of them taught, you know, taught her how. And, you know, she had the pattern for the sleeves. So, whatever performance we had, my mother made ours. So, all the mothers made theirs the— I guess, that's how we all got similar dresses, alike. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 31:52

Oh, wow, so, your mom was also taught how to do a s— particular kind of sewing to do the Filipiniana dresses?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 32:00

Right. The— yeah, yeah. Doing— how to, how to fold the sleeves and put them together, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 32:05

Wow. And it's very— it's kind of challenging, too.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 32:09

I guess. I, I have the pattern to it, but I s— look at it and go, [laughing], "do I really want to? No, I'd rather have somebody else do it. Thank you." [laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 32:21

[laughs] Oh, wow. How— do y— do you remember other women who were non-Filipina in the club? Do you think that they had similar experiences as your mom did?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 32:39

I would think so. I would think s— I think, because it just gave them something to grab a hold of, but, just be it— I, I, I imagined just, just women, being able to get together. You know, it's, it's important for any of us, to be able to— just to get together with another human being, and experiencing the same type of thing. Th— the common experience. So that's where the support comes from. Because they're all experiencing similar situation. Because, you know, through marriage, through marriages that they couldn't have legally, that they all had to travel, to marry. You know, the, the race part of the situation. I don't even remember my father ever going to town with us, when we were little. And it— it was always because he was tired. We were— for some reason, because he worked so hard, that he would never go to town with us. And the only time he would go with us, or we went together as a family, is when we had dinner in Chinatown.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 33:56

Yeah, because, it was— felt a safe space.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 34:00

I— it was a safe space, other than— because I— going down, Midtown— downtown Watsonville, past a certain bit, I don't ever remember my father going, like, to Ford's dep— eartment store with us. To, you know, for shopping. In a grocery store. My father, I don't have any memory of my father ever going with us. And, w— we never knew why. Until later, you know. Later down the road and then, then— then things made sense.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 34:39

Yeah, yeah. And so, the women's club events, and the space that they had, was a space where you could kind of get away from this racism and the anti-miscegenation and just be together, have support, to be a mixed race family.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 35:00

Yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 35:07

What— what kinds of roles did your mom have in the club? Was she ever in the leadership role in the Women's Club?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 35:17

I think she was— y—you know, she had a few offices, here and there, yeah. But, later on, not so much. Yeah. New, a new type, new— especially later in her life, it's, you know, changing, and, different, different dy— dynamics in, in— in the club, but.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 35:51

Well, what kinds of changes?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 35:52

Well, you know, just changes, newcomers. She, she— where she was in the majority of it, in the early years, she became the minority in the club. So, just, the whole changing of the community involves a lot of aspect.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 36:16

I see. So, in the later years, when there were more Filipinas, coming from the Philippines—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 36:25

—Philippines.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 36:25

—and joining the Women's Club, she maybe wasn't as much in leadership roles, and—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 36:32

Right. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 36:33

But she still stayed in the club—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 36:35

She stayed in the club. Yeah, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 36:38

Do you think that the experience of, like, support and safety ever changed with her? Do you think it kind of remained the same?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 36:49

I think became different for her— though she would not give up. She was there. Because it's the only thing she knew. If you think of, of her whole life, from 18, to, to death, that was her whole life. Were those communities. And she really didn't know anything else outside of it. In the community— other than church, maybe, but not so much church either, because she would drop us off and— [laughs] — and go. You know. [laughing]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 37:23

How, how do you think it was different for her, later on?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 37:33

It was more– I w– I– because she didn't come from the Philippines, and she didn't speak the language, things in the club, I think got harder for her. A– as the new took over.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 37:58

Things were changing, maybe people were s– not speaking English as much.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 38:03

Exactly. Exactly. Where the– where, in earlier times, that– it was– wasn't that way for any of us. The uncles never spoke dialect, in front of somebody who didn't speak it. It– th– there was– they always spoke English. If somebody didn't speak the dialect, they always spoke English, in front of everybody. Where, it changed down the road. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 38:40

As new immigrants–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 38:41

As new immigrants came in. Yeah, so.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 38:46

How do you think that she may have felt about that change?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 38:51

She never said. Never said. She never complained. Never. But she wasn't going to be– she would stay right where she was at. Because that's what she knew.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 39:08

I mean, it, it– it sounds like it was very important, and meaningful place for her all through her–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 39:14

Her life.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 39:15

Despite whatever–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 39:16

Whatever changes came along. Yeah. Yep.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 39:21

Do you recall like observing any dynamic shifts yourself? In the club?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 39:30

Oh, in the club, n– I didn't personally in, in the club, l– I only can look at it as a child, as a mother being a member of the club, because I, I never became a member of the club.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 39:44

What, what did you think about it as a child?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 39:50

I was a child, I w– hey, we got to go see people that we never– or children that we never see, so. It was a place that we can have friends, and play with new kids. Yeah. Because we all went to different schools. And the only place we all met in one place were in our communities and in these different clubs, yeah. So.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 40:21

Well, I think that that's a good segue into talking, possibly, about the other club that we wanted to talk about, the Filipino Youth Club. Do you feel good about moving on from the Women's Club? Or is there anything else y–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 40:38

No, I mean, that was, that was difficult, because, you know, hard to– hard to explain things when you're seeing through a child's eyes. At the time. So, and then when you become a teenager, [laughs] –

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 40:54

You're kind of doing your own thing.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 40:55

Yeah, exactly. [laughs] Oh, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 40:59

Yeah. Well, I'm, I'm kind of– I, I want to switch to the Youth Club, then. We're gonna start kind of the same way. For people who've never heard of the Watsonville Filipino Youth Club before, could you define what it is or what it was?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 41:22

Yeah. We wanted a club of our own. We didn't belong to the Women's Club, none of us. We didn't belong to the Community, because we were the community, even though we weren't officers— you know what I mean? We didn't— none of us belonged to the lodges. We were teenagers. We wanted— we wanted something of our own. So we wanted a f— we wanted— we used to call ourselves 'flips,' not knowing that it was an insult to our, our peers, because we didn't know it was not the thing to say, at the time, but, we were finding our own identity. Even though we were Filipinos, we knew we were Filipinos, but we wanted something to say that we were Filipinos, and we were proud of it. So we wanted a club of our own. So, that's how it, it all started, and my mother happened— our house was always open, to all of our friends, or anybody. And my mother had— liked it that way, because she always knew what we were doing. So, her house was always open, you know. [laughing] She'd rather have us at home than not— not knowing what we're doing, which we were brought up as children, that we did not get into trouble, or as they say, "don't make waves." So that's how we ended up being the silent minority, because we were taught not to make waves, "don't make trouble." I forgot what I was going for there, but. Yeah, we wanted something of our own. And so, my mom said, "oh, well, if you guys want to, but you have to do it the—" We go, "yeah, wan— we started the club!" My mom would go, "you have to do it the right way." We're going, "right way? We want a club, we could do a club, if we want to do a club! We're gonna be the Filipino club, or the 'flip—' we're going to do the 'flip' club." [laughs] My mother said, "no, no, no, you have to do it the right way," not knowing that there was a— I do- what are the words I want? You have to go through certain steps through the Community to be— to even have a club, and that you needed to go to the leadership of that Community. But as teenagers, who knew that? I mean, we grew up by being— so, my mother wouldn't let us just start a club, so, she went and talked to the leaders, I guess, or— and—

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 44:22

The leaders of the Filipino Community of Watsonville—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 44:25

The Filipino Community, Watsonville. And— to be able to start our club, and we had to do it the right way, with the, you know, however you start any club. And— getting an advisor from the Community, besides my mother, and somebody else, and have all the things that you needed to do, when— and then that's where we learned that we don't— we're not using the word 'flips.' [laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 45:00

How did you learn that?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 45:01

Th— they just said th— you're, you're not using that! [laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 45:07

Oh! Were you all surprised that it was something–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 45:10

We didn't understand why. They didn't un– they didn't explain why either. Even though, being teenagers in the sixties– or fifties, '59, I guess we started, or, somewhere around in there, that– I lost my train.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 45:31

Right, the– you, you didn't realize that it was something that could be offensive to people.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 45:38

–sive– people. Yeah. Yeah. Because we weren't offended, because that's– [laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 45:42

Used– it felt like a empowering kind of thing–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 45:46

Exactly. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 45:50

So– so you went through the steps to start the club, on your mother's advice, went to the Filipino Community of Watsonville, asked them for permission, who– who became the Community Advisor? Do you remember?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 46:05

I think it was Ben Ragsac. I think. It's in the record somewhere, I forget.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 46:12

That would make sense.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 46:13

Yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 46:14

You started the club. Besides you, who– who else was kind of, like, among the founders, or, like, the first leader–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 46:25

It was—

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 46:25

— of the Filipino—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 46:26

It was whoever we could grab. [laughs] And then we just invited anybody else that we knew who was part Filipino. Or not! [laughs] If you were, if you were— because there were a lot of children, who— that, not a lot, because there wasn't tha— we were lucky. We were one of the few of all the uncles, Manongs, who were married, you know, if you looked at the thousands and thousands of them. W— we were one of the luckier ones, that our fathers were, you know, we— we had a family. Why do I keep losing my train of thought? I don't know. Where was I going? I don't know where I was going now.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 47:16

You were saying you, you brought in people who were part Filipino—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 47:20

Part —Filipino or, or associated.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 47:23

Associated in what way?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 47:24

In what way? Because, those who married also had married whites who had children by another marriage. And they always accepted them. As their own. So their, their children in— in that aspect—

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 47:43

Might not have been Filipino—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 47:44

Who may not have been Filipino, but their stepfather was Filipino. It's all the same, you know? [laughing] Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 47:52

I can see that.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 47:52

Yeah. They're being raised, you know, that's— to us, it was all the same thing. Yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 47:59

So, so, can you–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 48:00

Kind of– that's kind of like how the Community started, isn't it? [laughs] Think about it.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 48:06

Yeah. It seems kind of like a parallel of the Women's Club in the early days.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 48:10

A– and the Community– especially the Filipino Community.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 48:14

Oh, really?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 48:15

I mean, they were so multicultural. Same thing.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 48:18

Yeah. Anyone who was associated?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 48:24

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 48:25

So, can you say some of the names of the other kids who were involved in the Filipino Youth Club?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 48:35

You mean off the top of my head?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 48:37

Do you remember anyone who was, like, particularly involved? Like you were?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 48:41

Maurice Carrillo. I mean, he's my buddy! My sidekick. [laughing] Well, yeah, because we, we ran around together in high school, so. We were all– same age. Freddie Silapan. Of course, Garcia, Manzie's husband. Gosh, I can't remember Phil, for some reason. I don't know, just– I have to look at the names.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 49:15

Anyone— was, was Maurice— Maurice and you, and, I think a I— some of the other people you listed are also mixed race. Do you feel like most of the kids who were involved were mixed race?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 49:31

Oh, gosh. Most were mixed race. There was one or two who weren't, or a couple who weren't. But there weren't that many that were full blooded Filipino then. Most of us were mixed race. The majority. There's a few that weren't.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 49:58

Do you feel like because you all were mixed race, it was, like, particularly important to be able to express this, like, 'I'm Filipino' identity in the club?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 50:11

I guess that could be. You could look at it that way. Putting down our— putting down our roots and saying, "we're here." I guess we didn't let anybody define who we were. Outside of, you know— we know who we were in the community, but outside of it, we were declaring who we were.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 50:39

Yeah. Well, what kinds of things did you guys do to kind of declare this identity? What kinds of activities?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 50:48

We just had the fun get togethers, and— and we had one dance that we threw, through the help of my mom and others. But it was just fun just getting together. I guess, kind of like the same clubs, you know, it's just being able to be together. And a lot— with a lot of kids that didn't necessarily go to school together, even in high school, because though we only had two high schools, we had Watsonville High and Mora High School, in Watsonville, but then we had kids from Pajaro. The Monterey— I mean, you gotta remember how Monterey was part of that community, Monterey— parts of Monterey County with parts of Watsonville community. So there were kids from those areas. And outside, so.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 51:47

Hanging out—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 51:48

Hanging out.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 51:49

I, I think in Maurice's interview, he mentioned that you all would learn, like, popular dances together for the Filipino Youth Club.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 52:00

Oh, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 52:01

Is that something you remember?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 52:02

A lot of dancing. We I— like our uncles, we loved dancing. Because, what else? They taught us how to dance, so. And just learning the popular, yeah— we learned how to do the waltz, and the other things, but, yeah, the popular dances. Yeah, we w— got together and learned how to rock and roll.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 52:22

Do you remember any, like, specific dances or, like, songs that you would dance to a lot?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 52:27

Oh, God, I'm the worst one to ans— to ask that question to. I mean, they were all— I don't remember any particular song. It was just any rock 'n' roll song— was. I mean, anything you'd dance to. Yeah. But.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 52:48

And you all held a dance that community members came to? We have a couple of things that we scanned from your collections, the— that was, like, an invitation. It was, like, a Mother's Day dance. Can you— do you have any memories of how that event went?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 53:06

What? No, I don't! [laughing] All I remember is the tickets at the door, but, other than that, no, w— not anymore. Not anymore. [laughing]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 53:17

It's like a blur.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 53:18

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 53:19

This is— when I do, like— I'm in charge of an event, like, I— it's like a blur to me.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 53:23

Af— yeah. Yeah, afterwards, it's like— well, even, like, speaking, at— at your event, it was, like, it was a big blur. I don't know what I said. You know? Well, I had to say it, but, you know, whatever it was it, it needed— I felt I needed to say, I guess, I don't know.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 53:44

Do you think that you all kind of felt inspired by the dances and events the other clubs put together—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 53:54

Oh, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 53:54

—and that's why you decided to—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 53:55

That's— that's where we learned to do things, yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 53:59

Yeah, when you look at the— we've seen the, the bylaws of the Filipino Youth Club, and it looks to be quite similar to the bylaws—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 54:10

Exactly.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 54:10

—of the Filipino Women's Club.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 54:12

Of course. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, and I'm sure it's similar to the Filipino Community Club, you know? Yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 54:21

So it seems— do you think you all were like, you were just do— learning— doing what you knew, from your parents?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 54:30

Knew. Right. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 54:33

I see.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 54:33

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 54:34

Yeah. There's a couple other objects related to the Youth Club that we wanted to ask you about. The first being, that pennant you have from the Youth Club that says Filipino with an F on one side, and Pilipino with a P, on the other side. And I'm curious if you could tell me a little bit about, like, why the pennant had those two different spellings on them?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 55:12

It's, I guess inclusive.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 55:14

Really?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 55:15

Yeah. 'Cause, the one with the F, represented Filipinos, American born. And we had to include those who were not, so, we put the P– the Pilipino with the P, for those who are born in the islands. Or, full blooded Filipinos. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 55:42

Yeah. D– would you say that it was, like, a conscious and, like, important thing for you all to be inclusive in that way?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 55:51

I think it is. I think that's something that we all thought it was important to do. We were just a little ahead of our time. [laughs]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 56:00

Yeah. [indiscernible] I get it. Why, why do you think you felt that was important?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 56:07

It was just to make sure everybody was included, in that club, that it represented everybody. So it was not just one over the other, that we were all the same. That we all had the same

rights, and we all, you know, we were all equal. No matter where we were born. Or who our parents were.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 56:39

Was that, that kind of value, something that you all saw in the other clubs at the time?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 56:47

You know what? I don't know, that's a good question. Because, well, I would say yes, since it was inclusive for everybody in the community, in the Filipino c- community. Because we were multicultural in that, but under the umbrella of the Filipino. So, I think that's something that we were kind of, like, raised with from the ver- very beginning, and not knowing it. Because we really didn't feel- yeah. It was all a big umbrella. And it held underneath a lot of things that are not true today. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 57:39

So, ear- earlier, you mentioned this kind of demographic shift where there were more new immigrants coming in, which changed things a bit in the Women's Club, and you're- and y'all are- y'all were trying to be inclusive of people who were, maybe, newer immigrants, in the Filipino Youth Club. Was that kind of demographic shift happening during the time where you all had the Youth Club? Like, were there lots of new immigrants coming in? How did you feel?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 58:13

There weren't- not yet.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 58:14

Not quite yet?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 58:14

Not quite yet. Not in the early sixties.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 58:17

Okay.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 58:18

Not- yeah. It, it didn't happen 'til more in the seventies. When that- when the big shift in things- you know, whatever we were sacrificing ourselves for, to make things easier for those who came after us, that was our big thing of growing up, is that, we are making- the uncles made way for us to, to exist. And for us, to make way for the next group who came along, to make it easier for them. So, things changed, later on, in the seventies, I would say, when the

biggest part of the changeover happened. And then, then things started getting a little iffy, after that, you know, as for what that umbrella covered.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 59:17

Right. I'm wondering— I know it's a little bit of a tough topic, but could you explain a little bit about how things became iffy or how the understanding of, like, being—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 59:32

All— all inclusive?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 59:33

—Filipino changed? Yeah.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 59:34

It didn't become inclusive anymore. It, it started going the opposite way.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 59:39

Oh, really? How so?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 59:39

—of inclusive. Well, I would say, because, a— as things started changing, and newcomers have come, that we were being told that we were no longer Filipinos. And then, we all started— I would say I started thinking about, well, why did we sacrifice? You know? What were we sacrificing for? I didn't know. You know— I guess, maybe, that may be a thought later on, I don't know. It, it, it— it did the opposite that— that instead of including everybody, it— the umbrella got smaller and included only certain— certain full-blooded Filipino immigrants. It— changed over, it's change— started changing over. So.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:00:45

How— how did that feel for you at the time?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:00:49

I guess, it kinda, like, hurt a lot, it kind of made— it, it made waves that— that things that we've never experienced before. I mean, if we experienced it, it was, like, erased, because we on— we were only raised within our community, but then our community changed. And we were not accepted in the community that we were raised in, as that community changed. So we started feeling unwanted— no— we were starting to lose our identity, in the change. And there was— there were no— the bridges became difficult, because now we became a part of, of laborers to professionals, because of the sacrifices of— of making sure that those relatives in the Philippines got education, where— and, and money was sent back, but nobody was paying our

educat— our education. And then, they c— and then, they came over as professionals, where we became, "oh, they were the laborers."

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:01:05

Right, right. So, not only is there, like, a different— yeah—

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:02:22

—a class, it's a different class.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:02:31

—different class. It's a different—

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:02:32

Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:02:34

—understanding of what it means to be Filipino, but also there's a class difference going on.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:02:37

Cl— exactly. Exactly.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:02:42

That must have been really challenging and hard for you and your peers at the time.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:02:48

Not so much of my peers at the time, because we were strong. [laughs] We were s— we were strong. In the sixties, my, my age group. It, it just— it, it started, you know— the ones who came after us really didn't experience what we experienced. That we were stubborn— I guess we were more or less like our uncles, our dads, who fought in the labor, for rights. That we were fighting for our right to be who we were. But as we got older as adults, and finding out certain things were no longer true. And so, then, that became the community conflict.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:03:40

So, I know that the Filipino Youth Club, it, it— how long did it last?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:03:48

Oh, it didn't last too long. Because there were— the younger ones couldn't take over. And as we, we teenagers got to— closer to our twenties, and, going into the military, th— some of the guys going into the military, you know, changes— were— becoming young— you know, adults, and— it—

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:04:16

So after you all were kind of moved on from high school, moved on from being in the club, how do you think you and maybe other people who were of your generation continued to fight to be yourselves?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:04:31

How long did we fight? I– we–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:04:33

Oh, how did you fight?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:04:34

How did we fight? I– we just stood up. I mean, even coming to San Francisco. I don't tell anybody– I don't allow people to identify who I am. I'm Filipino, that's it. It's what I put on my taxes. It's what I put on applications, I put on everything, paper that I fill out. And I think we're at– my generation, that's how we are. You– you're not id– no one's d– identifying who we are. I think it helps to see our children in that way, too. They're proud. The children after that, I don't know. [laughs] The great-great grand, you know– that, that are living now, I don't know how they're gonna identify, you know? It's like–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:05:31

Well, going back to the club, the Youth Club–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:05:34

Oh, okay.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:05:35

Okay. So what was your role, official role in the Filipino Youth Club?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:05:41

My official role? I don't know if I even had one. I liked being a mem– I j– I just liked being part of things. I don't have to, you know– I just liked being part of the team.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:05:56

Was there someone who was, like, the president?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:06:00

There is, but you're gonna ask me who it is, huh? I have no idea anymore.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:06:05

I think it was Maurice.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:06:06

Oh, okay. [laughing] Maurice had a–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:06:07

[indiscernible] had a– we'll have to look at the documents.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:06:09

Yeah, yeah. I would– yeah, most likely. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:06:14

I know we also– the other object I wanted to ask you about is– there's a photo of, like, a car, decorated for the Filipino Youth Club in a parade. Do you recall that at all?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:06:30

I remember that, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:06:31

What was that like– what was that for? And what was it like?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:06:34

It was for the Fourth of July parade. And that's another place that we're going "we're Filipino. We're the youth." And I, we were all still in high school. So we were all either sophomores or juniors. At that time. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:06:53

Do you remember the day?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:06:55

The Fourth of July? Always. Yeah. I still remember–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:06:59

Can you describe it?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:07:00

To– can I describe it? Good lord. What did– riding down, in a convertible, sitting on top and waving to people, going– I do– I have no idea! We're proud of who we are, so, you know!

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:07:17

Were you guys wearing Filipino dress on the float?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:07:21

Yes, we were! Of course. That's part of our identity. And so, the car, this one, the Filipino Youth C– yeah. It was in a car, yeah. Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:07:33

Yeah, I– I mean, we know–

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:07:34

That's part of our identity is the clothing, so. Yeah, we wore them as teenagers, too, wherever we could. [laughs] We did it in high school. You know. When we danced the Tinikling. So, yeah. Like I said, we were a dif– little different, we–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:07:35

Did it feel– feel good to show off in the Filipino clothes to the whole community?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:08:03

Of course! Yeah. That's who we are.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:08:07

Yeah. Do you– this might be kind of, like, a weird question, but, do you ever remember, people who were not Filipino, like, in your high school or in the broader community ever, like, saying anything to you about, like, these moments when you were showing off? Like, what– how did people react to seeing the displays of culture, like the dance or the dress in the parade? Do you remember anything?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:08:38

Nope. That– I think we were pretty much, pretty much accepted by them. And if not, it was still in the time that, whatever they thought, kept to themselves, unlike today. [laughs] Yeah, or, unlike our fathers' time. You know, that– yeah, nothing– as teenagers, I don't remember too much coming at us.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:09:12

Any positive reactions?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:09:15

Of what?

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:09:15

Of, like, seeing the dresses, were people like, "oh! Cool!"

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:09:19

Oh, they did! A lot of people liked them, yeah. Yeah. Non, non-Filipinos, they– they loved them, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:09:28

I, I mean, I– I imagine that audiences of the parades would have been like, "wow, these are cool outfits!"–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:09:35

–you know, "so extravagant," because, they really are!

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:09:35

Yeah.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:09:39

Yeah, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:09:40

Yeah. Well, in– in Maurice's interview, he kind of mentioned that being in the Filipino Youth Club, even though it wasn't for, like, a very long time, he felt that it was pretty impactful for his future involvement in community organizing, or, like, being in other kinds of clubs– kind of curious, like, what– what your thoughts are, like, do you think that particular experience of the Youth Club impacted you in, like, beyond the Youth Club in your broader life?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:10:17

I didn't– it impacted because we were not fearful of saying who we were. And, and I think we learned a lot about– before it became– the, the teamwork, that we learned to work together. And we learned to compromise. And I think a lot of the stuff that we learned together as a group, we carried it on, to life, and I know, just moving up here to the city, when I happened to run into a very– a person who encouraged of a lot of being proud of who you are, and to present it to other people, that I was able to do that. And I, and I– yeah, I was able to do that, and, even though I worked at a school with some Filipinas and Filipino children, they didn't realize I was Filipino, and they thought, "oh, look at that! That's so nice that Miss Wilson can wear a Filipina dress!" Not knowing, you know. [laughs] But– but yeah, it carried through. It made– we were strong, but it made us stronger. And made us fight for what is right.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:12:04

Is there, is there anything else you'd like to say about the Filipino Youth Club, that you'd like people to know?

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:12:11

I have no idea. I'm not– I'm like my parents. I'm not really a storyteller or a talker.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:12:18

You're a storyteller! You told so much stories!

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:12:20

It's like, it's like, I have– it's like, yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:12:24

Okay.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:12:25

Yeah. I thought–

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:12:26

Well, I think– I'm trying to– I'm gonna take a peek here. Feel like we've, we've covered everything for the Youth Club, and for the Women's Club. And so I think– I think I'm gonna stop it here, if that's okay.

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:12:40

That's okay. No, I don't have anything else to say! [laughing] I– like I said, I am not a storyteller, talker. [laughing]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:12:50

Alright!

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:12:50

I– I'm just one of those people who just fits in. Whatever you need me to do. [laughing]

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:12:56

You're an archivist! You're a researcher! And an archivist! [laughs]

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:12:58

[laughing] Yeah.

Meleia Simon-Reynolds 1:13:03

Well, I'm gonna stop there, thank you so much!

Juanita Sulay Wilson 1:13:05

Okay, thank you so much!