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Ruth Tabancay interviewed by Maia Mislant

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Ruth Tabancay interviewed by Maia Mislang

Speakers: Ruth Tabancay; Maia Mislang

Date: May 21, 2023

Scope and Contents:

In this interview, originally recorded over Zoom, Ruth Tabancay speaks with Watsonville is in the Heart team member Maia Mislang. Ruth is a Bay Area-based textile and fiber artist. Ruth explains how her mother Esther Galicia immigrated to the United States from the Philippines to attend Hartnell College in Salinas. Esther's immigration to the US was sponsored by her aunt, Paula Galicia. Ruth discusses Esther's twenty-five years of experience working at Green Giant cannery in Watsonville. Ruth also explains that her father Benny Tabancay worked in the dry cleaning business rather than in the agricultural fields like many other men. Throughout the interview Ruth reflects on her time growing up within the Filipino American community in Watsonville, as well as how her identity and experiences impact her current art practice. She fondly recalls participating in Filipino folk dance classes, wearing traditional Filipiniana clothing, playing street games with neighborhood kids, and making decorations Fourth of July parade floats with her mother and other members of the Filipino Women's Club of Watsonville.

Maia Mislang 00:00

Wonderful, wonderful. I'm going to start the recording now. Okay. Hello, this is Maia Mislang. I'm meeting with Ruth Tabancay. It's Sunday, May 21st. Eleven a.m. Ruth, do you mind introducing yourself?

Ruth Tabancay 00:20

Yeah, I'm Ruth Tabancay, grew up in Watsonville.

Maia Mislang 00:28

Wonderful. When were you born?

Ruth Tabancay 00:32

April 9, 1951.

Maia Mislang 00:35

1951, Is that in Watsonville too?

Ruth Tabancay 00:38

Yeah, Watsonville Community Hospital.

Maia Mislang 00:40

Wonderful. Okay, think I'm going to start with talking about your parents in the United States. Do you do you know about your father's experience as a migrant in America, maybe like, how we came here?

Ruth Tabancay 01:02

I know very, very little. My father died when I was ten. You know, it was you know—those are questions that I guess at that age, I didn't think to ask because I assumed I would learn those things along the way. So, I really don't know anything about how he came here.

Maia Mislant 01:28

That's totally fine. Okay. Do you know perhaps about your mother's experiences coming to America?

Ruth Tabancay 01:38

Yes. Her aunt, Paula Galicia, in Salinas, sponsored her. I don't know if that's the right term. A student. And my mother was to attend Hartnell College, which I think she did for a semester. And then she got married. So she didn't go through the whole, degree- seeking college experience. But she lived in Salinas at that time. And then my father who had a business established in Watsonville already it was called Ideal Cleaners, dry cleaning establishment. So they moved to Watsonville, actually I think they lived on a house on San Juan Road.

Maia Mislant 02:31

Oh okay.

Ruth Tabancay 02:32

Yeah, Is that is that still there? It's like, the road that, I recall we took one we went to Aromas. It was a thoroughfare.

Maia Mislant 02:42

Okay. Perhaps. Um, so your parents were both already in America when they met.

Ruth Tabancay 02:49

Uh huh.

Maia Mislant 02:50

Do you know maybe the circumstances of their meeting?

Ruth Tabancay 02:53

No. Not at all. That's— no.

Maia Mislant 02:58

What was your mother's studying at Hartnell College?

Ruth Tabancay 03:01

I don't know. Actually, she was a teacher in the Philippines. So I assume it was something toward teaching but—

Maia Mislant 03:07

Okay cool. Did she ever tell you about what it was like teaching in the Philippines?

Ruth Tabancay 03:15

Not too much, you know, not much at all. You know, we—I guess we didn't think to ask we weren't curious. And you know, she didn't share a lot.

Maia Mislant 03:30

Of course. Um, well, so you said that your parents were in Watsonville. They moved there right after they got married?

Ruth Tabancay 03:38

Yeah, because my father already had the business established. Ideal Cleaners on Main Street in Watsonville. He worked with Ben Ragsac. I don't know if that's familiar. It's unclear to me who actually owned the business. I—you know, I don't know stuff about that.

Maia Mislant 04:01

It's okay, business details can be boring. Yeah. Could you share your parents' names and where they were born and their birth dates?

Ruth Tabancay 04:13

You know, my father was known as Benny Tabancay, I heard Bernard sometimes, but I don't know if that was an Americanization or, if that was, you know, if it was Bernardo, but he was Benny. And he was born in 1906. I don't know the exact date. My mother was born in 1924. And I believe that are both from Ilocos Norte. Bacarra, Ilocos Norte is what I always hear. And my mother waited until twenty-five—more than twenty-five years later, twenty-five, twenty-six, later before returning to visit. Yeah, she claimed she was afraid to fly.

Maia Mislant 05:21

Yeah, my grandparents are the same. It's kind of scary in airplanes. Um so if she was afraid to fly, do you know possibly like, if she took a boat to America?

Ruth Tabancay 05:35

Oh, you know, I don't know. I really don't know. I have no knowledge of that.

Maia Mislant 05:47

No worries. So you grew up in Watsonville here too, right? Do you remember maybe what your mother did for work in in Watsonville?

Ruth Tabancay 06:00

She stayed home and took care of children while I was in, grade school. And when I was in high school, she went to work at the Green Giant Factory.

Maia Mislant 06:17

Do you know what her work was like at the Green Giant Factory?

Ruth Tabancay 06:20

She worked on the line. You know I think doing whatever the line did whatever was in season, but eventually, she got a job in the laboratory. And was doing, you know, I guess quality control. So I think that was easier than being on the line. I spent a summer on the line when I was in college.

Maia Mislant 06:47

How was that experience for you?

Ruth Tabancay 06:49

You know, I had a really—I had an appreciation for how hard people worked. Who had to do this for years. And I felt fortunate that I didn't have to do that for years. It was hard work, you know, you just stood there. It was noisy, you didn't talk to people, you know, there's—I mean, not while you're working, but there—it was just tedious really.

Maia Mislant 06:49

Yeah. Do you know how long your mother worked at the Green Giant Factory?

Ruth Tabancay 07:27

Well, you know, I—again, I'm very hazy on this. I know that—I believe I was in high school when she went to work there. And maybe she retired at the normal age on retirement age. So if I was in high school, let's just say I was fifteen at the time, and she retired at age sixty-five she would have worked for fifty years. Well, I mean no that's wrong. That's totally wrong. When I was fifteen, she would have been forty. Around forty, so she would have worked for twenty-five years.

Maia Mislant 08:04

That's a really long time.

Ruth Tabancay 08:06

Yeah.

Maia Mislant 08:07

And then you mentioned that when you were in elementary school, your mom was watching children, was this a like, kind of nursery like preschool kind of.

Ruth Tabancay 08:18

No, it was just a family.

Maia Mislant 08:20

Oh, for sure. For sure. For sure. Um, wonderful. So I know that you have some siblings. Could you tell me more about them possibly like their names and when they were born and stuff?

Ruth Tabancay 08:37

Yes. Frances is next in line. And her birthday is August 26, 1952. And then next is Darlene, who was born January 9, 1959. And then Jerry was born September 7, 1960.

Maia Mislant 09:04

Okay, so you have four younger siblings.

Ruth Tabancay 09:09

Actually, I have five. My mother had another child, Linda, who's October 11, 1963. And she was eventually adopted when my mother married Celestino Soriano don't remember that year, but I was in high school. So yeah, so there were five younger and when-truthfully, once I left the family home to go to college, I really didn't live there anymore. And I you know, I don't have a lot of knowledge about who did what, you know. I know everybody went to college eventually. And, you know, people got married, but you should interview my sister because she still lives in Watsonville. Frances still lives there.

Maia Mislant 10:05

Yeah, we would love to. That'd be wonderful. So you were you were the oldest of [inaudible] what was what was that like for you?

Ruth Tabancay 10:15

Well, you know, there was a lot of caretaking of the younger kids. Because by the time Darlene was born, I was eight, old enough to fold laundry and fetch things. I recall changing diapers with pins. You know, we didn't have pampers. My mother washed her diapers by hand. I mean, she washed the diapers in the house excuse me. And I remember hanging diapers on the line. So I guess I was, you know, eight, ten, eleven through those diaper years, with Linda, there were more diapers. So I—we did a lot of caretaking of the children.

Maia Mislant 10:56

Definitely, I have a similar sibling situation. It's me, my younger brother who's like two years younger than me. And then two more younger siblings who are seven and nine year so. Okay, so [indiscernible] years.

Ruth Tabancay 11:07

Yeah, you got involved in some of that caretaking to.

Maia Mislant 11:11

Definitely yeah, definitely. So what was it like growing up in in Watsonville? Were there any like fun like, leisure activities that you in your like friends would do? Maybe like in my neighborhood?

Ruth Tabancay 11:29

Yeah, um, you know, I think a lot of my memories center around school. But if you want to go to activities first, our street, Dawson Street was, you know, I guess you could kind of call it like a cul-de-sac, but not really. It was the cross street between two dead end streets. So it connected the two dead end streets, but nobody ever really needed—it wasn't a thoroughfare you only went on our street, if you needed to be there. People would use the two, the the two other streets that were connected—that were—Dawson was connecting, they would use, you know, you wouldn't come into Dawson Street to make your trip longer to get out of that area. So there were a lot of street games. I remember a lot of

street games, and riding bikes, skating. But the street games were the most fun. Because on one of the streets on Marchant Street, where the Ragsacs lived, and the Yoro's and the Haduca's, I think, Haduca relatives. There are all kinds of kids on Marchant Street, and they're mostly boys. But we're all around the same age as the [Unknown] family. Boy. Anyway, so the kids kind of mixed up a little bit, but the time that was the most fun when we played a game in the street called sundown, where we divided up into teams on opposite sides of the street. And it was a chasing tag type of game, you know. And basically, you would send somebody from your team to go tag somebody from the other team. And if you got them, they would now be part of your team. And when you said sundown, then everybody would chase everybody else to get everybody on your side. But [inaudible] kids and all those boys come over and play, that was the most fun. And it was fun when it was after dinner. And late, you know, late, the light would be late on you know, it'd be still late light late in the summer. So that was the funnest thing that we did as far as street games.

Maia Mislant 13:58

That sounds like so much fun.

Ruth Tabancay 14:00

Yeah.

Maia Mislant 14:02

So you guys were all it seems like you guys were all pretty close together.

Ruth Tabancay 14:07

You mean the kids?

Maia Mislant 14:08

Yeah.

Ruth Tabancay 14:10

All we want to all—we all went to the same school.

Maia Mislant 14:13

Oh okay.

Ruth Tabancay 14:14

It was about two blocks away. I don't know if you have been in contact with the Tabasa family.

Maia Mislant 14:21

We have Yeah, actually very recently.

Ruth Tabancay 14:23

Sure, yeah okay. Rosita Tabasa of course, she had the restaurant, which I believe was called Oriental Gardens.

Maia Mislant 14:32

I think I've heard that. I think I've heard Philippine Gardens.

Ruth Tabancay 14:34

It's like a club. Yeah, men went there to play cards. And she—it feels like she spearheaded the folk dancing that all the kids did. And a lot of the kids were—some of the boys— those boys are Marchant Street who did the folk dancing, but we would perform at functions—Club functions for the Women's Club and the Community Club. And that was a lot of fun, I remember having a lot of fun going to rehearse at the Tabasa house. It was Greg Tabasa, Jess Tabasa, the oldest, Francine, and Susan, who played the piano. And it was fun doing that. It was fun, rehearsing, fun performing, we got to wear the special dresses. And actually, that's what my art piece is about.

Maia Mislant 15:34

Really?

Ruth Tabancay 15:35

It's about those butterfly sleeves.

Maia Mislant 15:37

They're so beautiful.

Ruth Tabancay 15:38

Yeah, but they were—each one of them was itchy. And that's kind of like my art pieces about.

Maia Mislant 15:48

The itchiness of the of the sleeves.

Ruth Tabancay 15:50

Yeah.

Maia Mislant 15:51

That's so interesting. I would love to see it at some point.

Ruth Tabancay 15:54

Well, I haven't made it yet. But it's been in my head to make for about ten years.

Maia Mislant 15:59

Yeah. Is it gonna be like the physical sleeve?

Ruth Tabancay 16:01

I'm gonna make one. Or, you know, the other thing I could do, I guess I could, I don't know. Since I'm an artist, I don't usually just go get a sleeve that's already made. A lot of the dresses, well after I mother died, we cleaned out the house and we found a lot of the dresses. I guess I could get one of those

sleeves out. But that, that's an idea for something. But maybe not for this project. Anyway, so yeah, that's—went—I can't remember. If we, if you're the one who told me that there-or somebody else told me that there was going to be a museum exhibit.

Maia Mislant 16:46

Yeah, yeah.

Ruth Tabancay 16:47

Exhibit, then, you know, I thought, well, this would be the perfect place for this piece that I've had in my head for ten years.

Maia Mislant 16:56

That would be so cool. I'm sure Christina would love to get in contact with you to hear more about that. That sounds really cool. I love I love the butterfly sleeves they're so iconic.

Ruth Tabancay 17:06

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So aside from school, a lot of my childhood memories revolve around playing in the street. Boys from the from the neighborhood, the Philippine dances.

Maia Mislant 17:23

Could you tell me more about like, what the dance practices were like with Rosie Tabasa?

Ruth Tabancay 17:28

Yeah, well, the room was really small I think there might have been six couples, well we were boys and girls, so we weren't like couples, there might have been, you know, six girls and six boys and the piano. And I think we probably had four or five dances that we did. The dances changed as we got older. Francine used to do this glass dance. And then as some of the other—as we grew up, I recall Susan doing the glass dance. And I don't know if I—people my age did the glass dance because I was always playing the piano.

Maia Mislant 18:09

Oh, really?

Ruth Tabancay 18:10

Yeah. For this. And I never really got to do the tinikling because I had to play the piano. I had to play piano for all of that. So I don't recall, who was actually doing those dances that I always thought older kids did.

Maia Mislant 18:29

Yeah, that's so cool. What was the glass dance like?

Ruth Tabancay 18:32

Well, I think they use Kool Aid. But it was like a shot—it was not a shot glass it was like a short glass. I don't know what it's called in terms of drinks. But it was a short glass and filled halfway with some liquid. And the dancer would put it on her head and do the whole dance that way.

Maia Mislant 18:56

Oh, wow.

Ruth Tabancay 18:58

Yeah, and sometimes it fell which is unfortunate. And I remember Francine talking about her pin curls holding the glass in place. So um.

Maia Mislant 19:12

There were costume tricks.

Ruth Tabancay 19:14

Yeah. Right, well, I don't know that was during rehearsal. I don't know if she did that, in real life. And she was quite young when she did that. Now that I'm thinking about it, because she—I don't know if you know she developed meningitis.

Maia Mislant 19:27

Oh, no

Ruth Tabancay 19:27

In the mind.

Maia Mislant 19:29

Oh, wow.

Ruth Tabancay 19:31

Yeah, and I'm not quite sure what age that was now, but younger I was still—I had—I was still maybe in middle school or grade school, I mean, high school when that happened. So she danced, Susan danced, there were different people coming in and out who danced like—what I guess you would call a season now. But maybe four, four or five of us that were the regulars in terms of the dancing. I've seen some of the pictures. Do you know Lorraine Bongolan?

Maia Mislant 20:07

I've heard her name before.

Ruth Tabancay 20:09

Yeah, she was one of the dancers. Leticia Ragsac, me and my sister. Jean Vengua was there a little bit. And she contacted me recently. Do you know you Jean Vengua is?

Maia Mislant 20:24

I don't think I do, but.

Ruth Tabancay 20:26

She writes a blog called Eulipion Post.

Maia Mislant 20:30

What' it called?

Ruth Tabancay 20:32

Eulipion Post.

Maia Mislant 20:34

Eulipion Post.

Ruth Tabancay 20:35

I can send that to you. She writes so much about her-exclusively her Philippine experience. But she does mention it sometimes comes out weekly. She's very, very nice writer. And she really explores a lot and she found me on the internet. And so she wrote a piece about my artwork. Actually I have linked on my website. And maybe that would be a way for you to get to her blog.

Maia Mislant 21:03

Yeah, that'd be wonderful.

Ruth Tabancay 21:05

So she came in and she danced for a while. The boys were kind of a mishmash of those kids on the street. The Yoro family, I don't know if the Haducas danced, Greg Tabasa. Anyway, there were enough boys for the number of girls that were there.

Maia Mislant 21:25

It all worked out anyway.

Ruth Tabancay 21:26

Yeah, yeah.

Maia Mislant 21:28

How did you start dancing?

Ruth Tabancay 21:31

You know, I don't recall. I have a picture that I love that I would like to include somehow with my art piece. Because my mother and father-my mother's dressed in a Philippine dress, which I don't have. My father had the hat that went with the organization, he belonged to Dimas-Alang. I don't know if you've heard that term. Yeah, and it's kind of odd because the hat was a fez. You know, you know, it was a fez. It was that cylindrical shape with a tassel on the top. And I always wondered why it was that, you know, I guess at some point, I always thought it was Philippine hat. But then as I grew older, you know, it's a fez and the song that they always marched to, was "March From Carmen." And, you know, that was the

processional song. Yeah, yeah. So somebody at some point pick that European opera to—as their processional song. I remember one time in the picture that I have in my head, that it's my mother and father, and my sister and I, the one who was born just a year after, and we're both wearing Philippine dresses. You know, I just love that picture it's the four of us. And at that time, we were dancing at the Veterans Hall. And they somehow got dancers from someplace else. Cause in my mind, it was this huge line of dancers, you know, probably was like maybe fifteen or twenty. You know, but it was like stretching the whole length of the ballroom. And I don't know, who-where those kids came from, because they wouldn't have all fit in the Tabasa living room. They learned those dances someplace else. But there were many more than what was our normal quote, dance troop. And that was a really special time. Special event, yeah.

Maia Mislant 23:49

Do you-what was the event for?

Ruth Tabancay 23:52

Well, they always had these events called coronations. Every year when there was a change of office, new officers there were ceremonies and seems like they were special walking and processions and handing over the gavel or whatever it was. It was all the ceremony. And we were there for that, and I believe there must have been a dance afterwards. You know, an adult dance after, they always had those pretty frequently. But that was one of the times we did dances were for things like that.

Maia Mislant 24:32

That's so sweet. Do you remember like ever like your parents dancing together maybe?

Ruth Tabancay 24:38

Yeah, I remember them dancing together in our living room to Lawrence Welk, I don't know if you know Lawrence Welk. He was on TV every Saturday night. And he did these— music that was popular then for dancing. And my sister and I cried. When they danced together, we cried because we had never really observed affection between them. I think every, every adult now kind of can look back now that they're adults, and they can assess their own relationship to their loved ones. And realize that, you know, we cried because we had never seen my parents touch each other. I thought then, you know, I find that so funny now that we cried. So anyway, so we didn't—I don't recall seeing them dance at these coronations, but in our living, room was [indiscernible] in some way I guess I don't know.

Maia Mislant 25:42

Yeah. It is pretty impactful to see your parents in such a like, intimate setting. It's so nice to be like, Oh, I don't know. It's very like sweet.

Ruth Tabancay 25:53

Yeah. Yeah, and it was it was to the TV, you know?

Maia Mislant 25:58

Yeah. Yeah. And the living room was just so like, intimate as a family setting to. Yeah, so this music was like lively, like poppy music, or was it?

Ruth Tabancay 26:09

Well, you know, the dance music back then in the fifties, it was like an orchestra, and they had an accordion, there was [inaudible] piano. It was like, waltz type of stuff two step I guess, songs that are popular in the day that were kind of, I don't know I guess now you would call it muzak, you know like popular song. Just kind of different instrumentation and not made, exciting, but you know, like elevator music, you know? You know, it was, you know, a, you know, a song that that was familiar, but, you know, made palatable, I guess, in some way? Yeah.

Maia Mislant 27:01

Sorry, for a second. Excuse me, so I know that like, dance halls and things are pretty big for like the Manong and stuff. Do you know if your parents ever like did any dance halls? Just because we're on the topic of dancing?

Ruth Tabancay 27:24

No, no. I don't have any knowledge of that, I don't know that there was a dancehall in Watsonville. There were the Philippine dances, and they seem to recur, occur, maybe monthly, you know, it's part of the-maybe not that often, but it seemed like often enough. And I just know that they occurred. So, we didn't get to go. We didn't get to go as kids. But, I mean, just for that, just if we were doing that folk dancing.

Maia Mislant 28:02

For sure, for sure. You said that the Philippine Gardens was like, card games place.

Ruth Tabancay 28:13

Well, I know that they were cards in the back room, and this is with when I got older, and Emilio became part of our household. My mother was married to Celestino for just a brief time, maybe one or two years. And then Emilio became part of our family. And he's the one who was with our mother for decades. You know, he was the father figure in the family, but I had already gone to college, but when he came into the family, so my knowledge of him is not as intimate as all of my brothers and sisters. And really my sister Frances would have-cause she was there the whole time, even when she went to college she went to Cabrillo and San Jose State, I think for a while. She was at San Jose State, and she commuted. So I think she would-and my brother was there for a long time also. So yeah, anyway. They have a lot more insight into that because they were there after high school, and they have that experience.

29:25

Yeah. Can I ask you more about Celestino?

29:29

Yeah. Actually, I would rather not have him not be part of this. Yeah, that was a brief time in my mother's life, and it was not a great time for me.

Maia Mislant 29:46

I see. Yeah, yeah, that's no worries about that. Um, well then, I think, can you tell me more about your experience in school in Watsonville?

Maia Mislant 30:01

He made you guys listen to it?

Ruth Tabancay 30:01

Oh yeah, the school, it's almost laughable now. At five grades K through four, and one classroom for each grade, can you imagine? A whole school with just five rooms, K through four and teacher for each grade and the principal was also the principal at another Watsonville school. So, she's back and forth. I remember the principal's husband had a radio station in Watsonville. And he, at the time, we called him Yugoslav, Yugoslavian. And he had a Yugoslav language radio program. Yeah, in Watsonville, and on Sundays. And my father, I used to listen to it, because my father worked for him at the reservoir Hotel. In addition to the dry cleaning, he was at the residence to our hotel on some weekends and some nights also. There were some weeknights that he was there. I think as a dishwasher, my mother said he was a chef. But I think if anything, he was a line cook, or you know, cut fruit, you know, just, he-I don't think he was the actual chef. I think he did other things in the kitchen. So, and that was kind of fun that the husband of the principal, Mrs. Soto was my father's boss and had this radio station that we had to listen to on Sunday morning.

Ruth Tabancay 30:12

He didn't understand it of course, there were a lot of Slavic people in Watsonville. Have you lived in that area for a while?

Maia Mislant 30:55

No, I'm in Santa Cruz this is my first year here.

Ruth Tabancay 31:17

Where did you live before that?

Maia Mislant 32:08

I'm from Santa Barbara.

Ruth Tabancay 32:10

Okay, yeah because a lot of the farming and storage ends in "ich" like Marinovich. I can't remember all the names of the "ich", but it was all Slavic names. And so there was a community there, a Slavic community that I don't know a whole lot about, but it made sense to me that, that he had developed this—that he was able to get this radio station going and, you know, probably the older generations that, had that spoke that language.

Maia Mislant 32:50

Yeah, it was like Yugoslavian music?

Ruth Tabancay 32:54

Yeah, well yeah, and music too, I think for some reason, I think it was like polka. But I don't know. And, you know, for me, it was like all morning, but it probably was just an hour. You know, when you're a kid everything is longer than you think it's gonna be he probably had an hour of a radio station.

Maia Mislant 33:15

Did you enjoy it at all? Is it.

Ruth Tabancay 33:18

Oh it was something we you know, had.

Maia Mislant 33:20

It was like a ritual?

Ruth Tabancay 33:22

Yeah.

Maia Mislant 33:23

For sure. So it seems like your dad was pretty busy with the dry cleaners and the working on the weekends. Do you have any memories of like any free time you had with your dad, maybe when he was like off work?

Ruth Tabancay 33:42

One time we went to the boardwalk in Santa Cruz.

Ruth Tabancay 33:51

And a few times we went to picnics in Hollister. Filipino—I don't know if the Women's Club who organized it. It was at Bolado Park, I don't know if that's still there. But we look forward to that every summer, actually. And he was there for that. He was quite a bit older than my mother. I would say he was, twenty years older than my mother. She made it sound like it was a greater and greater age gap. Yeah, but she was born in 1924. And he was born in 1906. So it's actually only 18 years. So.

Maia Mislant 34:40

That's pretty funny. So these picnics, were they like an annual thing like only once—

Ruth Tabancay 34:47

Every summer and we kind of look forward to it. I remember getting to wear special—yeah, we got to get special outfits for it. Play clothes, you know, but clothes were a lot more special back then. Because people didn't, have nearly the amount of clothes that they have now. And you have these—you have school clothes. And when you came home, you changed into play clothes. You didn't wear the same clothes all day, because you had to keep your school clothes nice. You know, I got special outfits for Easter, for school and there was not a lot of clothing purchase in between, you know, you got your school clothes at the beginning of the year and basically, that's what you got all year. So to get a special outfit for Bolado Park was fun. And we wish there was a swimming pool there and it was an event you know, every summer we look forward to it.

Maia Mislant 35:46

That's so sweet. Do you remember what like your clothes would have like looked like it?

Ruth Tabancay 35:51

Um, you know, they were like shorts and tops sets, you know. You know, I don't remember more—anything more special about it. It's just that, you know, we got to get a special summer outfit. It wasn't just school clothes, because as I said, you didn't—now it feels like kids get clothes year-round all the time. There's too much clothing. There's too much clothing being used.

Maia Mislant 36:19

It's quite an expense yeah.

Ruth Tabancay 36:21

Yeah, and it was it was special then. So to get an outfit for something was special.

Maia Mislant 36:26

Yeah, that is special. Do you remember what these picnics were like? Was it like a potluck style? Or like.

Ruth Tabancay 36:36

Yeah, we had this special hand-woven mat from the Philippines. Yeah, and you know, we couldn't find it when we cleaned my mother's house out. So I knew it was starting to wear and have some holes in it. Because it was folded every year. And so those were the weak spots—so they would develop weaknesses. And I think eventually got thrown away. But my mother complained that it said, is whoever made it for her was custom made it said Mrs. Esther Tabancay. And she, you know, that's not that's not the convention for the name. It was, it should have been Mrs. Benny Tabancay according to a convention, but you would never just put your own name on it. You know, but Mrs. Esther Tabancay was not—that was not a name anybody had, you know? You took your husband's name. And it was always, you know, like Mrs. Ben Ragsac, you know, or Mrs. Connie Ramirez. It was not—I mean, not I mean, Tec, I can't remember his name Tex. Anyway, it was always the man's name Mrs.—you never used your own name.

Maia Mislant 37:47

So this was like a special like—

Ruth Tabancay 37:48

Special for Bolado Park we always brought it out for that. [inaudible]

Maia Mislant 37:57

Very nice. Did your family like bring any food to these?

Ruth Tabancay 38:00

Yeah, yeah. I don't remember—I didn't cook it, so but the most fun for us was the swimming pool.

Maia Mislant 38:08

Yeah. Did you play any like fun swimming games with everybody?

Ruth Tabancay 38:12

No, it just splashed around, I don't recall any, any particular games?

Maia Mislant 38:18

Yeah, it's fun to be in the water anyways. Very exciting.

Maia Mislant 38:31

I know that you mentioned before, in your in our in our preliminary phone call, you said that your mom was involved with the Women's Club in Watsonville too right. Do you remember wha—

Ruth Tabancay 38:45

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I interrupted you.

Maia Mislant 38:47

Oh I'm sorry, do you remember what like her duties in the club might have been when she was working with it?

Ruth Tabancay 38:55

She was always some kind of officer, secretary or treasurer. And because she was, she got to ride a lot on the float. And, or the cars mostly, I think the float was an ambitious thing early on. But there were a lot more decorated cars. Later on she got to ride in them—because as an officer, so she was always doing something. I don't think she was ever president. It feels like she was secretary or treasurer. And I think one time we had a meeting at our house, and she really, really cleaned it. Everything had to be really special for this meeting. But you know, I think it was a way for women to form a community. Really for the Filipino women to have a community.

Maia Mislant 39:44

Yeah, I think Christina does a really good job of highlighting that through exhibition. She has a part called the manong network and it's kind of about all the work that the like the women in the Filipino community did in Watsonville and it's really special. It's a very beautiful part, I think. You also mentioned that she was close with Virginia Sulay, right?

Ruth Tabancay 40:09

Yeah, yeah.

Maia Mislant 40:11

Do you remember like what they might have been doing maybe in the in the Woman's Club?

Ruth Tabancay 40:18

You know, I don't know, I know that Virginia was at a lot of the events. And she seemed to be like somebody who could organize things and get things done. And I did I tell you that Virginia drove my mother and me to a dance one time? I think it was only in Santa Cruz. My mother didn't drive, you know, it was like, you know, it was special to be taken to something out of town like that. And I don't know why I was there. But I know, she was all you know, she was very organized about it. And, you know, I felt like, you know, she was really, she was really going out of our way for us, I thought. And since she herself wasn't Filipino, I thought, you know, this is this is special that she's kind of—made she's made inroads into the group. And it was one of—and it was accepted as one of the members. And it wasn't like, she was different somehow, because she wasn't Filipino. She was the only Caucasian I recall being part of the group. So yeah, she got things done. You know, she could do things.

Maia Mislant 41:30

You remember like ,what kind of things she would, she would be like accomplishing?

Ruth Tabancay 41:35

Yeah, not in particular. I just remember mostly, just my general sense is that she does things and that she took my mother me to this dance one time. She had a daughter, who's older than me. And two sons, and I think they might have been involved in some of the Philippine dancing.

Maia Mislant 41:59

Yeah, Juanita.

Ruth Tabancay 42:02

So yeah, and I kind of don't remember their names now. But I think they were in my grade and my sister's grade. So they were right around the same age the two boys.

Maia Mislant 42:16

That's exciting. Would you guys like all hang out together and stuff?

Ruth Tabancay 42:22

Not, really no, we would, just grouped together for the dances. They didn't live in the neighborhood. They weren't part of that summer play fest in the street. And even the kids who played in the street with us, when we got to school, we weren't really friends with them, you were like, guys, and they have their own- a lot of guys. They had their own group of people, and yeah, you know, the did guy things, but.

Maia Mislant 42:51

Guys can be so boring. Yeah. How did that like, make you feel like going back to school and you're like, oh, like, I know, these people but.

Ruth Tabancay 42:59

You know, I didn't, I didn't really want to be, really, I didn't miss them, you know. We just played in the summer but, you know, I didn't want to play with them, basically. So, you know, I didn't want to be in a—didn't need to be in a circle of friends with them throughout the year.

Maia Mislant 43:17

No, why was that?

Ruth Tabancay 43:20

I just had my own friends. You know, just, you know, girl, friends.

Maia Mislant 43:26

Really? What was that like for you? It was like.

Ruth Tabancay 43:28

Having girlfriends? Um, you know, I always kind of paired up with one or two girls in my grade at that five-room school. It was small so we knew everybody going through, you knew everybody. And when we were in fifth grade, we went to Minty White, which had a lot more kids. And, you know, kids, we didn't know. And then EA Hall. Well, more kids came, and we didn't know. So Watsonville High School where, you know, that was at that time that was the only high school in Watsonville. So you either went there, or to the Catholic High School, Mora High School.

Maia Mislant 44:13

And you didn't go to the Catholic High School.

Ruth Tabancay 44:14

No, no.

Maia Mislant 44:17

Was your family religious?

Ruth Tabancay 44:19

Um, we went to church a lot. But my mother didn't drive. When my mother died, I recall a few times she walked to church. But mostly she only went later on when she had a ride. And mostly only for Easter or Christmas, or for weddings or whatever. But I think a lot of it was because she didn't drive. And we were really limited. Because my mother didn't drive, we just had to walk every place or find a ride.

Maia Mislant 44:54

Yeah. Did you like walking around places?

Ruth Tabancay 44:58

Yeah, Watsonville so small. Small, so it was easy to get to all of the schools that we went to. Cause it was close to our house.

Maia Mislant 45:08

It was convenient. Oh, I forgot to ask, the elementary school the very small one. Do you remember what the name of that was?

Ruth Tabancay 45:15

Yeah, it was Lynn Scott.

Maia Mislant 45:17

Lynn Scott.

Ruth Tabancay 45:18

Lynn Scott. Yeah.

Maia Mislant 45:19

Okay. Good to know. Did you do any like, like school sports or like school clubs or anything like throughout?

Ruth Tabancay 45:28

You mean later in high school? That there weren't any—I don't think they're a clubs in middle school. I remember in high school making posters, you know, banners for the football team that we'd hang in the cafeteria. Because even back then I like doing art basically. I would paint not every week but paint these big banners that would hang in the cafeteria. I'd say, "Go Wildcats" or something like that the week before a game. And then at game they would—cheerleaders would take that banner. And the football players would run through it.

Maia Mislant 46:19

Oh my god. Like it's your hard work.

Ruth Tabancay 46:22

Yeah right, well, that's what it was for. You hung it up in the cafeteria. And then they you know, that's how they introduced themselves onto the field, you know. Yeah, in high school, I think it was in French club. I don't know what we did I think we took a few trips. I was in what was called California scholarship Federation we took trips to—yearly trips, so we went to Monterey, and saw like to like the naval language school. And then in the afternoon, we would go to a movie. Because Watsonville had a very small theater, like, you know, like things like West Side Story and Sound of Music. They didn't come to Watsonville. There were a lot of movies that didn't come to Watsonville. One time we went to San Francisco to—I can't remember what educational institution they went to. But in the afternoon, we went to a play in downtown San Francisco. I mean, it was it was a real event. What else, I remember two—at least one more field trip like that, where we went to some type of institution as a tour and something and then going to a movie. I think one of the times we saw 2001 Space Odyssey. Which, which is special because it didn't come to Watsonville. I think the teacher even drove us in his car. Maybe teachers drove us—it wasn't a big enough group to take a bus. So I was in kind of nerdy types of clubs. I was not in chess club. [indiscernible] Yeah. Yeah, so yeah, I worked hard in high school. I cause I wanted to go to college.

Maia Mislant 48:28

Yeah. It sounds like you worked really hard. Do you have any, like subjects in high school that like stood out to you?

Ruth Tabancay 48:38

In high school?

Maia Mislant 48:39

Yeah. Or in college in high school?

Ruth Tabancay 48:45

Yeah, I liked science. You know, I was a bacteriology major. Yeah, I loved microbiology. Yeah. You know, we had to take things like chemistry and biochemistry and physics and all that. And I kind of liked that. I felt like I did pretty well in math, until I got to the stage where it became too abstract for me. Yeah, I just couldn't, I couldn't wrap my head around it anymore. And I even thought I would take math even beyond what was required, but then it got it just got too abstract for me.

Maia Mislant 49:28

It gets really tricky. I got the same way about math. I liked it until I liked it as long as I was good at it.

Ruth Tabancay 49:36

Yeah, and I took some chemistry classes. I took a chemistry class where it got a little bit too much for me. And Physics I always felt in control of, and I think that's because I didn't go into the next level.

Maia Mislant 49:54

Bless you. I have a nasty cough too. Something's going around Oh, if you needed to like time to get water or like any refreshments or whatever, please feel free to.

Ruth Tabancay 50:41

So um, I cough because I have chronic lung disease. Diagnosed in 2013 with nonspecific interstitial pneumonitis and 2019 I had to have a lung transplant. So I only got one good lung and I have a diseased lung still in my chest. They're getting worse, but you know, people can live with lung. And I don't have to carry oxygen with me everywhere like I used to.[inaudible] little suitcase with the with extra oxygen.

Maia Mislant 51:20

Yeah, sorry my Wi-Fi disconnected for a second.

Ruth Tabancay 51:30

[inaudible] That's if you've noticed that well, I'm talking.

Maia Mislant 51:41

Yeah. That sounds really hard though.

Ruth Tabancay 51:48

I think I've had a lot of challenges for two years after my transplant I didn't make any artwork. And we had no interest in doing anything. So, yeah so, I'm starting to rev that backup now.

Maia Mislant 52:06

That's exciting. I like all that-I can see all the artwork behind you it's so like, so beautiful.

Ruth Tabancay 52:12

Yeah, this is my studio, it seems to be the best place for reception and the comfortable seat and lighting. And I do all my Zoom meetings from here. While behind [inaudible]I just keep tacking things up as I make them. It looks interesting, or what I want to keep looking at I'll just take it up for a while.

Maia Mislant 52:31

I love it. Can we talk about it a little bit?

Ruth Tabancay 52:35

Yeah.

Maia Mislant 52:35

Cool. Okay, so I know you do like, like fabric art and like crocheting and stuff is that also what's behind you right now?

Ruth Tabancay 52:46

This piece right here or at the tip of my finger, that's a crocheted piece. And that was a project I did for a class called Eco Art Matters. And it was ecological and social justice situations through Laney Junior College. And that's my rendition of the San Francisco garter snake endangered species. So I use the colors of a San Francisco garter snake.

Maia Mislant 53:20

I love the shapes of it. How did you even do all that?

Ruth Tabancay 53:23

Yes, hyperbolic crochet. And it's— I don't want to get too much into the math of it. But a normal—what normally people learned in high school is Euclidean geometry. It's a flat plane that extends forever as far as the eye can see. And it's one plane, Hyperbolic geometry is non-Euclidean. And it's based on a constant negative curvature. So basically what happens the farther out you get from the starting point, the more it's going to ruffle. Yeah, so you see a lot of ruffles there. And the opposite of that would be a sphere, which is an increasing positive curvature. So you get a sphere with that type of geometry. And anyway, so I'm really into this Euclidean non-Euclidean thing. And a lot of my crochet is based on hyperbolic geometry.

Maia Mislant 54:29

So cool. That's so cool I crochet too. And sometimes I'm like, I don't know. I feel like sometimes I'll work on things and then it'll like ruffle in ways that I don't expect it to. So it's cool to see you utilize that [inaudible].

Ruth Tabancay 54:47

I make those raffles happen and crocheted—I think my largest piece might be 21 pounds. And it's totally ruffled, it's all it's very dense, it's very heavy. To crochet something I put her on the couch next to me to crochet.

Maia Mislant 55:11

God, that's so fantastic. And then I know you do embroidery too; I can see the—

Ruth Tabancay 55:18

Yeah. I embroider a lot of bacteria and set them into petri dishes. And they're the actual color of the bacteria, the stains, the arrangements, the shape, and I've sold a lot of those. But I'm done doing that now. Now, I made, I made fifty of those for Stanford and.

Maia Mislant 55:49

Sorry, fifty for Stanford?

Ruth Tabancay 55:52

And then I made them after I thought I was done with them then I got this request for this commission. So I made those but I I'm not interested in doing more at this point. I do— most of my embroidery now is on plastic.

Maia Mislant 56:09

I noticed yeah, It's for the like germs.

Ruth Tabancay 56:13

Right, it's for—to represent microorganisms that would digest plastic.

Maia Mislant 56:19

That's so cool.

Ruth Tabancay 56:21

Yeah. There's a lot of research going on with that.

Maia Mislant 56:24

Yeah, it's so cool that you use such as like, it's very cool, how connected it is with science and stuff.

Ruth Tabancay 56:34

The art I make always has to do with a personal experience. I wouldn't know how to make abstract art. I don't know how—I don't wouldn't know what to base that on.

Maia Mislant 56:48

Yeah.

Ruth Tabancay 56:48

But, uh so if you look on my website, everything that's on there is tied to some type of personal history or some important educational moment in my life.

Maia Mislant 57:02

Yeah. These do seem like very [indiscernible] I see it , it's cool. I know that you said that you have a background in was it nursing you were a retired physician.

Ruth Tabancay 57:18

Right, uh huh.

Maia Mislant 57:21

How did you like, make the switch from like, a medical field into like, becoming a full-time artist?

Ruth Tabancay 57:32

I always like to make things even as a child in Watsonville. I liked stitching, sewing. I remember in brownies I made an apron. It was a hand stitch apron. And I'm sorry that I don't have that anymore. But I was trying to do crochet mostly. I taught myself how to knit when I was older, like in college, I tried some embroidery, not very much, mostly was interested in crocheting. Then I taught myself high school and college things like needlepoint, hairpin lace things like that. So I was always working on something, I sowed a lot of clothes. I made a lot of clothing for my sisters. So I like doing that. I like that—the activity of sewing, machine sewing. Yeah, and so of course, it takes a lot of time to go through school. So I couldn't do very much while I was in school. And then medical school. I still had, I still have an Afghan I crocheted, and I made a few articles of clothing while I was in medical school. When I was a resident, I don't think I had time for sewing when I was a resident. But when I was in private practice, I took workshops, things like that, because I still wanted to. To make something. Even took graphic design classes, cause it would help my design skills. And then one of my teachers thought I should go to art school. So one of the graphic design teachers. So, and what I would do is I would take these graphic design classes after working all day in private practice. It was exhausting. I couldn't have done it if we hadn't had live in help. So I guess after eleven years of private practice, I felt like I was done. You know, I felt like I don't need more of this, but I wanted to do artwork. So my husband was very supportive of me leaving practice. Around the same time my oldest daughter who is ten somebody had asked her, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And she said, a babysitter, you know, because the babysitters had this cushy life, they watch movies, they painted their nails, they talked with their friends, you know. And I didn't want her to have that ambition to be a babysitter. I wanted to be more involved in their lives. And so one year, 1992, I went to art school part time, and I worked part time in my private practice. And it was just, I had to pick one it was too much. So yeah, I so I, I left the practice. And it was, it was hard for about a year and then I got used to going to—being an art student.

Maia Mislant 1:00:47

That's so exciting. How was it like, transition for that one year? What about it was like difficult?

Ruth Tabancay 1:00:54

What was difficult is I was surrounded by everybody else who knew how to draw. They had all these skills coming in. People had so many skills, I kind of questioned, 'why are you taking drawing class

number one?" Drawing number one, when you when you already know how to figure draw, you already know how to do this. Why this class, you know? So I was intimidated a lot in those three years, I would say, by everybody else's grasp of the of tools, and making things life-like.

Maia Mislant 1:01:33

It can be really intimidating, just like atmosphere. I definitely had a similar experience with that. And I think it's really difficult because it's like, in my experience, I'd be like, "Oh, I don't want to like do art in front of other people." But then you kind of like lose out on all the opportunities to like, get better.

Ruth Tabancay 1:01:53

I used my eraser more than my pencil, in those first few classes, maybe even the first semester. You know, and nobody else, nobody else is using an eraser. You know, I brought the wrong size paper to class the first day. I was just a mess, you know.

Maia Mislant 1:02:10

Yeah. Yeah, starting anything new so hard and just art worlds are so scary sometimes.

Ruth Tabancay 1:02:15

Yeah. They can be intimidating so anyway. Yeah, but I felt very comfortable as time went on, since I went part time. And I eventually found the textile department. You know, so now I could work with materials, but I was working with techniques I'd never used before, like weaving with a floor loom. I love weaving with a floor loom. There were other fiber techniques like knotless netting, wet felting, I did a lot of fiber sculpture, which includes things like basketry. I didn't want to make traditional baskets, I wanted to do something else with those techniques. So I got a lot more techniques, but still along the line of knitting and crochet and, you know, actually embroidery. I do mostly embroidery now, but I didn't really start doing that till about seven years ago. I didn't embroider very much at all. I did a lot of stitching, I hands stitched a lot of sorry, I hand stitched a lot of tea bags, because I worked at tea bags for quite a while for eleven years.

Maia Mislant 1:03:27

I thought your tea bag blanket it was so cool.

Ruth Tabancay 1:03:29

Yeah, and I worked with them for about eleven years, and I needed to do something else. So actually, what kind of jolted me out of the teabag phase was taking a class at—it was a year long class. It met every week in Seattle. And I flew back and forth. It was three quarters. So literally it'd be thirty weeks, but I know I flew back and forth twenty-six times to take this class. And I had different teachers and different concepts and it really, it took me away from tea bags. And now I don't use tea bags involvement when I see them, I think oh tea—you know I just like tea bags. There's a piece that piece that circular piece is made of tea bags. But that's the kind of stitching I did was hand stitching of tea bags, so I never really embroidered till about, I guess 2015 was the first time I tried the petri dishes. And I started exhibiting them more actively in 2016 and 2017. So I became known for that in this area in this area. And when I meet artists, I mentioned the petri dishes and a lot of people have seen them.

They, you know, they recognize it, but they hadn't met me before just cause they seem to have made their way around.

Maia Mislant 1:05:03

That's so cool. Do you ever like include like, your experiences like from Watsonville? And maybe like, like your Filipino heritage in your art to?

Ruth Tabancay 1:05:17

Not really, it's mostly based on science. I would say if anything, my art is based on microbiology and magnification. Scale. Yeah, playing the scale. But the first thing that I got really excited about was the butterfly sleeve dress, the butterfly sleeve project that I've had in my head for so many years. It doesn't relate to any of the other work that I do when I have a show, which I have coming up at the end of July. I have a solo show and it's going to be based on ecological issues. There's no—I haven't found a way to, to put that one piece in with other artwork. So when I heard that there was going to be an art show, art exhibition, you know, along with this I thought this is perfect, this is a perfect place for it. And then I heard was it from you or somebody else that two people well, one person I know well, Johanna Poethig. Yeah, and she's in my gallery she's what she used to be a member of my gallery. Jenifer Wofford. Yeah, so I've never met, but I would love to meet her. She actually bought one of my pieces at an auction. I always thought I got to email her, and I never did. And now I so it's been like, a year and a half now and I never emailed her. So I would love to meet her—I was yeah, those are two really special people to curate an exhibition.

Maia Mislant 1:06:57

Yeah. Yeah. That's so wonderful. I can see if Christina can somehow make some magic work. Some of her Christina magic.

Ruth Tabancay 1:07:05

Okay. Yeah. So, I hope they liked the piece I'm making. I don't know, what kind of artwork is being emphasized in this show. If it's more traditional, or if it's, you know, has to do with more contemporary issues.

Maia Mislant 1:07:27

I can tell you more about it if you want.

Ruth Tabancay 1:07:29

Yeah.

Maia Mislant 1:07:30

Um, yeah, so a lot of the—so there's four exhibitions, a lot of what we're using is like, I guess they'd technically be considered artifacts, but we have a lot of like, family photos that we're including, because we really want to, like, uplift the Watsonville community. And we have like photo albums oh, I'm never—I'm not, I'm not gonna be able to match that like art to the artist. But there's an artist who has like these plates. And there's a picture of the manong in the middle. And it's kind of like, going to be set up like a dining table. And it's like, yeah, it's like, you're like eating with them. It's supposed to be very

intimate. And then I think it's Connie. Connie Zheng, who's making this map of California and I think it's about like, the migrant experiences, but it's some kind of like, embroidered piece. But yeah, most what we have is photographs, artifacts, like I think that we're gonna have going to have a family's. What's it called—it's not like a lute It's a mandolin of sheet music. But, yeah, if that if that gives you a better idea of everything.

Ruth Tabancay 1:08:53

Because I feel like mine is more conceptual and minimalist. And you know, there are a lot of young Filipino artists out there, who are who are making quite radical work on radical themes. And I didn't know if the show would be including that. Like that.

Maia Mislant 1:09:14

I don't think—how do I say. I don't think it's gonna be very, very radical. There's definitely gonna be elements that are kind of like, meant to like, push people a little bit.

Ruth Tabancay 1:09:27

Yeah. So I didn't know if well, you know, Johanna, and Jenifer. I really, you know, I believe they have the conceptual eye, but I didn't know if this was the right show for the piece I'm thinking of. So we'll see. I have always wanted to make it, and then I'll make it and then it'll be— it'll be it'll be actualized

Maia Mislant 1:09:52

And come to fruition.

Ruth Tabancay 1:09:53

Yeah

Maia Mislant 1:09:54

Very exciting.

Ruth Tabancay 1:09:55

Yeah. There are young artists who you know—actually there's kind of a movement now in the Bay Area to do outreach to bipoc artists. Yeah, and so more of that work is coming up. You know, there's a lot more work I feel that's based on people's traditions. It's more—but it's an in a radical way, it's not a craft way, it's not a sweet way. It's a hard driving way. I don't know how else to put it, but you may know what I'm talking about. It's not sweet. It's actually looking at the Philippine experience and things like that so.

Maia Mislant 1:10:44

Yeah, yeah, it can be pretty rough. Definitely. Um, okay. I'm gonna loop back I think, to maybe ,did I— I don't remember if I asked you this yet. Do you remember like every, like visiting your dad at work? Maybe like.

Ruth Tabancay 1:11:11

Yeah, I remember going there. And it was hot, you could hear the steam from, from these irons that you know, you basically would lay a pair of pants on this big board and pull down this thing that made a lot

of steam. Didn't iron back and forth like this, although there were irons like that, but I just remember these big machines where, like if you have an ironing board, you know, the top of it was as big as the ironing board and press down on it and steam would come out. I remember that. And it was hot, and it smelled funny. I guess because of the steam. And I only recall going there a few times.

Maia Mislant 1:11:57

For sure. Yeah. Okay, so it was more of a like they were like doing the work to take care of clothes. It wasn't.

Ruth Tabancay 1:12:06

Yeah, I remember that a lot. I was young you know, I just it just seemed [indiscernible] mysterious to me.

Maia Mislant 1:12:16

Yeah, for sure. Especially if it's all like big machines with steam. So daunting. Could you tell me more about like maybe a memory you have with the car parades with your mom in the Women's Club?

Ruth Tabancay 1:12:36

Oh, yeah. We had a lot of fun in the summers making the paper flowers that would decorate the cars and the floats. I don't think there were too many floats. Because there was so much work involved with a float. But we love making those paper flowers out of tissue paper.

Maia Mislant 1:12:58

Do you remember what kind of flowers you would you could make?

Ruth Tabancay 1:13:01

Like accordion fold them and then, you know, fan them out into this thing that looks like a carnation. So we were not allowed to do the decoration ourselves. On the float, we just were the flower—we just made the flowers, but that was enough for us.

Maia Mislant 1:13:21

It was fun enough. Do you remember how many like years you're working on all of the float decorations?

Ruth Tabancay 1:13:30

You know, I don't know I-it always seemed like every year when I look back at it, but it probably was not every year, because I believe there were more decorated cars than floats just because the floats were so big. You know, when you're a kid you don't think about well, you need a platform to pull the trailer. You need to pull the float you need to make a structure. If people are going to sit down, you have to fix this chairs down so people don't fall off the float. You don't think about that when you're a kid how much work that is to make something that's safe. I don't think there were too many floats. So the decorated cars seem to be more of those.

Maia Mislant 1:14:18

So it started in more of the floats and then it kind of transitioned to the car.

Ruth Tabancay 1:14:22

Yeah, yeah, and I think as I think as people got older, maybe they were less physically able to, to do you know to do the float

Maia Mislant 1:14:30

[indiscernible] Very exciting.

Maia Mislant 1:14:40

I'm so curious about the Women's Club still. I don't know, can you tell me maybe more about what you remember about the Women's Club and maybe some events that they might have hosted?

Ruth Tabancay 1:14:51

Yeah, you know, I remember the meetings my mother would have to go to a meeting and my father would have to take care of us for that night. And actually, I remember more of the meetings and what they actually did, like service organization. I don't know what they did. If they, you know, we think of service organizations now as, like collecting clothing for the homeless or, you know, something like that—I don't recall, something like that, that they did I don't know what projects they had. I wish I did know what projects they had. I would hate to think that all they did was go to a meeting, but I think they would organize things like that picnic. And, you know, later on, I think the Women's Club kind of folded into the Watsonville community. And men were then involved in it, and they have that building that they have [inaudible] in Watsonville? It's a building. I don't know, when that happened. I was well out of high school when that happened. And as a service organization, I don't know what they did, either, you know, that there seemed to be like, a community and then the Catholic community was seemed like it was something different. Filipino Catholic, something-it seemed like something different, because I remember doing things that the church with this with a Filipino group. So it just seems like—but probably the more important thing is that there was a continuous organization that Filipinos could belong to. And have that community have that support with each other. And I don't know how that existed with other ethnic groups in the area. Because we grew up in—at Lynn Scott School. There were Mexican children, there were Japanese children. There were—I think, in Watsonville, there were like two Black families. So there were one or two Black kids in our school. I don't know what kind of organizations the other groups had. But it feels like Filipinos are pretty tight knit. Yeah, and I think it was important that they have that support, because they were still, you know, it was a time that you know, about the riots and things like that. Yeah, and they're—they-you know, there needed to be some way for the community to feel that support. So I think the important thing is that there was always some continuous thread of that. And now, it feels like—and this is just my sense. There's a group of Filipinos who grew up in Watsonville. And then there's a whole bunch of immigrants who came over much later. And I think you can tell me this, I don't think the two have joined together. Um, yeah, I don't know. I just my sense is that it's a dare—you know that they don't [inaudible] that the current immigrants seem to be on [indiscernible] much better educated. They're doctors and lawyers and, professionals. And the experience of the immigrants was—I think my father was different from most of the immigrants who came who worked in the fields. Yeah, and I—he, you know, he never worked in a field he worked at the

dry cleaners in the restaurant. So even our—my experience is a little bit different there. But, so there's, there's different groups there.

Maia Mislant 1:19:00

There definitely are. Yeah, I know that. It's something that we've talked about—I took a I don't know if you've met Kat Gutierrez but she's a professor here. And I took her like Philippine history class, and she said that there is kind of, like, notable shift after I think, like 1965, or like, before, in America, it was like, like people coming into America from the Philippines or laborers. And after it was kind of like, nurses and doctors, and there was like, a kind of clearly social, like, distinction, I guess, wasn't really like spoken upon. But as far as the community, here it goes. I don't know, like, for sure. And I don't really know if that's something I could like, speak on. But I think that that's something that people have definitely observed and it's kind of hard to like, navigate, I don't know.

Ruth Tabancay 1:19:48

Yeah, yeah, they have a different experience. And my mother continued to go to the community. The hall basically because a lot of the older the seniors got absorbed into that community. And she was friends with a lot of the the later immigrants, but still even then I don't feel like the two communities as a whole melded together.

Maia Mislant 1:20:14

Yeah totally.

Ruth Tabancay 1:20:16

Yeah.

Maia Mislant 1:20:17

Did you have any like family that came over after your parents?

Ruth Tabancay 1:20:22

Yes. My cousin, Angel, he was a Tabancay, I believe my aunt, a different aunt on this one on the Tabancay side sponsored him. And Angel now has got this—there's and then a whole bunch of other Tabancay's came over after that, that after my father died, my mother didn't keep in touch with them. A lot of it was because she didn't drive. So and they lived in Hollister. That's where they were from, and we just don't know that much about the Tabancay side of the family.

Maia Mislant 1:20:58

Yeah, it's kind of hard to keep those ties.

Ruth Tabancay 1:21:01

Yeah. So you know, they—we were closer to the Galicia side, my mother's aunt and that family, we were closer to them. That's where we went for holidays and everything like that.

Maia Mislant 1:21:21

Were they like closer in Watsonville?

Ruth Tabancay 1:21:24

I'm sorry what was that?

Maia Mislant 1:21:25

The Galicia families.

Ruth Tabancay 1:21:27

They lived in Salinas.

Maia Mislant 1:21:28

I see. Okay. Closer than Hollister?

Ruth Tabancay 1:21:31

Yeah.

Maia Mislant 1:21:35

For sure. Do you ever like maybe how big their family was?

Ruth Tabancay 1:21:39

Whose family?

Maia Mislant 1:21:40

The Galicia side.

Ruth Tabancay 1:21:42

Yeah, there was the father and the mother. The mother was my aunt, my mother's aunt and the father, Marcelo Galicia was kind of like a work contractor for some of the farms. So he kind of had an important role in the Filipino community because he was kind of like the leader. I guess he organizes crews, and he is the one who I guess negotiated with the big farmers. So he was not a laborer himself but more of I guess you would call him an administrator. They had three children who were a little bit older than my mother. No younger, no little-one was older and two are younger than my mother. So, that that was the family and their progeny. Their sons and daughters are [inaudible] that's the extended family we grew up with them [inaudible] my aunt and her three children.

Maia Mislant 1:23:01

This was the aunt that sponsored your mother to come.

Ruth Tabancay 1:23:03

Yeah, yeah Galicia.

Maia Mislant 1:23:06

Okay. Okay, so they kind of have like, longer, like standing in America kind of with your—

Ruth Tabancay 1:23:14

Yeah, yeah, they were here longer. They were established, more established.

Maia Mislant 1:23:19

I see. That's cool. How do you feel like—how do I say this? I don't know. What I meant to ask. Did you—have you ever gone to the Philippines?

Ruth Tabancay 1:23:38

No. No, my daughter has though. And she visited my mother's relatives.

Maia Mislant 1:23:44

Oh, how was that?

Ruth Tabancay 1:23:46

She enjoyed it. You know, she you know, she went with my niece, my younger sister's daughter. And they, you know, they visited the town where my mother grew up and that some relatives and were chauffeured around but they enjoyed being on their own also.

Maia Mislant 1:24:14

Yeah. Your mom she was from you Ilocos Norte, Bacarra right? Yes. Okay, just double checking that. Yeah, it's always a joy to go back. I've only been once, but I would love to visit.

Ruth Tabancay 1:24:31

Were you born there?

Maia Mislant 1:24:32

No, I was born in America.

Ruth Tabancay 1:24:34

Okay.

Maia Mislant 1:24:36

Yeah. Kind of silly. Was there anything about like growing up in your neighborhood that you haven't gotten to share yet that you might want to?

Ruth Tabancay 1:24:50

Yeah, you know I just want to say you know what I was thinking about getting ready for this—mostly the things that came up were the the games in the streets with all the neighborhood kids. And the dances those are the two things that I remember the most and school. Going to school that little five room, it's hardly worth it to even you nobody would ever make a school that small now was one grade K through four, one room room for K through four.

Maia Mislant 1:25:23

Very tight knit.

Ruth Tabancay 1:25:24

Yeah.

Maia Mislang 1:25:26

It's important, I think, I don't know I remember like being small and like, everything like that is so like big to you[indiscernible]to you. And it's just so hard to like, you hold on to it sweetly, I think. Was there maybe anything about your parents that you might have wanted to share that you haven't gotten the opportunity to yet?

Ruth Tabancay 1:25:49

You know, I think that the story I like telling was the crying when they danced. And you know, nothing really pops out, really, my mother didn't drive. She tried to learn how to drive. And she was tuning she saw she said she was too nervous. Like she would step on because she didn't grow up with cars. So that's the other thing is that she said," Oh, my step on the brake instead of the gas and hit something." And actually, my grandma, Paula, Paula Galicia, she tried to learn how to drive and she broke her ankle. Because of that, because I think stepping on the pedals or wrong way or something.

Maia Mislang 1:26:40

Oh, well, I guess it would have been a stick shift. And it's like hard.

Ruth Tabancay 1:26:44

Maybe was but I don't know what she ended up breaking her ankle, learning how to drive. So that way became a very scary thing. So everybody else's mother drove and I was envious of that. Because we had to walk every place or, or try to get a ride, so.

Maia Mislang 1:27:05

Yeah. Definitely. I don't know sometimes walking is like enjoyable. You get very attached to what you like what you know, around you.

Ruth Tabancay 1:27:13

Yeah. Well, you know, it was part of school part of the school experience. You know, one thing my mother did, she tried to learn how to drive but she also went to night school. To learn how to use a sewing machine [inaudible] sewing machine.

Maia Mislang 1:27:28

What do you like, make you guys clothes and stuff?

Ruth Tabancay 1:27:31

Yes, a little bit. You know, I don't remember that. She did that for very long. But I know she went to night school to do that. And I remember you know, getting ready to I just remember after dinner, she you know, getting ready for night school and getting getting all cleaned up, you know, and, you know, not wanting to show up—you know, wanting to show up very neat and groomed and proper. Yeah, yeah. People now I feel like everybody just wears or play clothes all the time. This—you could show up for an

event dressed up or not dressed up. And it would still kind of be acceptable. Like, I get a lot of art openings. Some people are very dressed up. And some people are just wearing their play clothes. And you know, you know what I mean it's.

Maia Mislant 1:28:28

totally Yeah.

Ruth Tabancay 1:28:31

So that's that was not acceptable. Then when you went someplace. Especially I think she would feel like you know, as a Filipino woman, she had to be perfectly groomed. Yeah, and, you know, everything very proper, you know.

Maia Mislant 1:28:49

Appearances are very important.

Ruth Tabancay 1:28:51

Yeah. Yeah. So I do remember her getting ready for those classes. And now when I think about it, I thought that was pretty gutsy. Because she doesn't—she did not do a lot to put herself out there. And I think that's cultural, you know, people now just kind of, you know, are much more independent and self-driven. But I think back then, you know, she went without the shelter of the community. So yeah, so I feel like that was that was more than what I would have expected.

Maia Mislant 1:29:31

Yeah, looking back Are you like it's like an impressive [indiscernible]

Ruth Tabancay 1:29:35

Yeah, yeah.

Maia Mislant 1:29:36

Totally yeah. Yeah, I don't know going out like that alone was obviously scary. It's kind of like silent ways that we kind of are like, I don't know that people are impressive, but I think is very I don't know endearing almost. Yeah. Oh, so we're at an hour and a half now. So I think I'm gonna start wrapping up. But is there like, anything else you would like to share with me or anything?

Ruth Tabancay 1:30:15

Um, I guess if I want to wrap it all up, I think growing up in Watsonville was mostly fun. You know, I remember a lot of fun with the things that I already told you. And I liked school so that was fun for me, you know, I had—it wasn't like I didn't dread going to school, I really—as I got into high school, I kind of made that my community and we weren't running around in the street anymore. So there was a lot of fun in there, you know. And I didn't feel ostracized, you know, my mother always kind of made us feel like we had to be on best behavior, or that. And she did not feel that Filipinos should expect more. In terms of leadership, you know, that, that we had a certain—we're in a certain strata. And we weren't expected to go beyond that. I mean, we were not to set our sights beyond that. There was something else I want to say about that.

Ruth Tabancay 1:31:31

[indiscernible] it was so important now I lost it.

Maia Mislant 1:31:42

I feel like that's kind of ironic, I feel like, I feel like she was still being like a leader of sorts.

Ruth Tabancay 1:31:51

In her within her community, she was doing—as I said, I thought it was gutsy for her to take lessons without the support of the community. What I wanted to say was that the experience I had with the Japanese families in our community, they all were successful businesspeople, they had nursery, they had the grocery stores, you know, they're, you know, they were productive members of society. And it was only as an adult, I learned about the Japanese internment and wonder what happened to all that property when all those people were interred. So, you know, somebody must have taken care of it. Because, you know, I had one friend whose family owned a nursery, a flower nursery. And, you know, if that had been left to go fallow, you know, they would never have been able to return to have it be the successful business that it was when I had my friend in high school. You know, it was not talked about, I don't know if people your age note that people my age didn't find out about this. We're adults, you know, and I've talked with other adults about that, who didn't find out about the Japanese internment until they were adults. And we were shocked that that this could be hidden from us. Yeah, I was growing up with kids. Okay, we're talking about the mid-fifties like, or late fifties now. And so it had been just barely ten to fifteen years after they'd returned. Right. From the camps. And so you know, what-I just, I wish I had—because nobody talked about it nobody knew that there were any questions to be asked. But I kind of wonder what that experience was for all of those kids. But they all came at least in Watsonville they all came back as successful businesspeople. You know, they had they had they had a business.

Maia Mislant 1:33:56

Yeah. That's kind of surprising. Like, you're like your gone and then you're like, Oh, this is [indiscernible] It's like, how does how does the whole process like, work out?

Ruth Tabancay 1:34:07

Yeah, how'd that happen. And, you know, we didn't know what to ask that question. You know, cause we were [indiscernible] and nobody talked about it. No, but I know other people in other parts of the country like the Northwest where my sister-in-law told me that neighbors took care of, of Japanese farmers property. Yeah because, you know, it was the whole coast that [inaudible] Yeah. So yeah, I believe that that must have taken place here to

Maia Mislant 1:34:45

Yeah, yeah. It's kind of crazy to be like, I don't know uncovering like big histories and you're like, oh my god, it's actually so close to what home is and.

Ruth Tabancay 1:34:57

Yeah, if I hadn't grown up with kids, you know—I grew up—these are kids whose parents, you know, we're, have this whole different—you know, it just kind of hard to imagine now that, that this could be hidden from us.

Maia Mislant 1:35:13

Yeah, yeah. It seems kind of world shattering almost.

Ruth Tabancay 1:35:16

Yeah, yeah, it is. And but my own children learned about that in grade school.

Maia Mislant 1:35:20

Oh, yeah. That's kind of crazy to be like, you're so young.

Ruth Tabancay 1:35:25

Yeah, yeah, well, things at that time and still are, at least in this part of the country are pretty open. You know, I know, other parts of the country they're trying to squash you know [indiscernible]you know or take them out of school. With excuses so, but I think over here, we're still you know, we're still good.

Maia Mislant 1:35:52

We're still good. We still got it okay.

Ruth Tabancay 1:35:55

Yeah. So what did you need you to wrap up you just wanted to see if I had any second things. I was able to touch on that with you that growing up with the Japanese kids, because you know, there's no way there's no way for any of us to know now, I'm not going to, you know, a lot of those parents are dead now. And we were my mother's generation. And I don't know how much was imparted to the children. They could be my age now.

Maia Mislant 1:36:26

Yeah, they would have been so young if they even were. [inaudible] Yeah, it's kind of hard. It's like a problem that we like, I don't know, I guess problem is a hard way to put it. But it's kind of a difficult thing that we faced with like this project specifically. And I think a lot of the people that we talked to, it's like, you never know what to ask. And it's like—how do I say this—you don't know what you want to know. Until it's like much later in your life. Yeah. Which I think is I don't know, it's difficult. Yeah, I think this is also, I don't know, what I really appreciate about this project to is it's kind of like, inspiring from my own family. Because I'm like, I know what I want to ask. So it's kind of cool to see how everything unfolds kinda.

Ruth Tabancay 1:37:18

Yeah. Yeah, I think it's gonna add a lot more to how you view how you want to, how do you want to talk about your family history when you're my age. When is the art exhibition? When are these those exhibitions happening?

Maia Mislant 1:37:35

The exhibition is going to be in 2024. I'm pretty sure it's going to be in August, and that might just be a lie. I'm pretty sure it has an A in the name of the month though.

Ruth Tabancay 1:37:47

Okay.

Maia Mislant 1:37:47

But Christina, Christina is totally honored-she knows she knows everything. She's wonderful. I know that she wants to schedule a co-curation meeting with you at some point, just so she kind of like, okay, so her like what the project is going to be and like what we would like to include from your family. So I think you can look to some communication like that in the future. Yeah. And I'll definitely let her know about the butterfly sleeve. I think that's [inaudible].

Ruth Tabancay 1:38:20

I don't want to get into too much detail about it yet. But that's centerpieces.

Maia Mislant 1:38:27

[inaudible] you have to keep it yours for a little. Okay. Well, thank you so much, for .

Ruth Tabancay 1:38:33

Oh sure it's nice talking with you.

Maia Mislant 1:38:35

Yeah, I had a wonderful time. I hope you did to. And I hope that you have a wonderful day. And I'll make sure to get the recording back to you as soon as possible.

Ruth Tabancay 1:38:45

Okay.

Maia Mislant 1:38:47

But yeah, if you have any questions, any follow ups, if you want to have a follow up interview or anything like that, please let me know. My emails always open.

Ruth Tabancay 1:38:55

Okay. All right. Yeah.

Maia Mislant 1:38:57

And if you have any future shows, I would also I would love to attend any opening.

Ruth Tabancay 1:39:03

I'll put you on my mailing list for my next show. I don't know if you'll be here in the summer, but the opening will either be July 29 or a week after that. Okay. So that's what I'm working on now.

Maia Mislant 1:39:19

Very exciting.

Ruth Tabancay 1:39:21

Getting that show together.

Maia Misleng 1:39:22

Okay well, I'm really excited to stay tuned for it. I'm going to end the meeting now. Thank you so much. Have a wonderful day.

Ruth Tabancay 1:39:32

You too. You too.

Maia Misleng 1:39:34

Thank you.

Ruth Tabancay 1:39:35

Bye

Ruth Tabancay 1:39:36

Bye.