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Greg Tabasa interviewed by Una Lynch

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Greg Tabasa interviewed by Una Lynch

Speakers: Greg Tabasa; Una Lynch

Date: February 28, 2023

Scope and Contents:

In this interview, originally recorded over the phone, Gregorio “Greg” Dionisio Tabasa speaks with Watsonville is in the Heart team member, Una Lynch. Greg begins the interview by talking about his father, Jesus Torrente Tabasa, who immigrated from the Aklan Province in the Philippines to Hawai‘i and eventually to the Pajaro Valley where he worked as a labor contractor. Greg also discusses his mother, Rosita “Rosie” Dionisio Tabasa who also immigrated from Aklan and eventually owned and operated a restaurant in Watsonville. Her restaurant was first called Oriental Cafe and later Philippine Gardens. Greg explains the restaurant’s significance to the Watsonville Filipino American community. He describes it as a “gathering place” for the Filipino community to connect and eat together. Greg also discusses his parents’ roles as community leaders and their participation in organizations like the Caballeros de Dimas-Alang and the Filipino Women’s Club of Watsonville. He also reflects on the personal impacts of his father’s and how other Filipino men helped to raise him and his brother, Danny. He explains that after Jesus’s death Rosie continued community and restaurant work through the 1980s. Greg closes the interview by reflecting on a housing and public art project titled Tabasa Gardens that honors his mother and her impact on the Filipino American community. Tabasa Gardens is an apartment community located on Freedom Boulevard in Watsonville. Half of the apartment units will be reserved for farmworkers. In addition to being named for the Tabasa family and their restaurant. The complex features a mosaic mural depicting Rosie Tabasa and her eldest son, Jess Tabasa.

Una Lynch 00:00

Okay, cool. I am recording. Um, she just said the most important thing is that you are in a quiet place, which it sounds like you are so great. Yeah, this sounds really good. Okay.

Greg Tabasa 00:21

Excellent. Excellent.

Una Lynch 00:24

Awesome. So I think we're just going to start from the beginning again. Thank you so much for— for helping me with all of these kind of various issues. Um, but yeah, I think we're— we're ready to go. Um, so I'll just start by saying, my name is Una Lynch. And today's date is February 28, 2023. I'm here today with Greg Tabasa. And I am recording this from Santa Cruz, California. And he is in Honolulu in Hawai‘i. And so thank you so much for doing this interview with Watsonville is in the Heart. And we're just going to start with your full name and then your date and location of birth.

Greg Tabasa 01:16

My name is Gregorio Dionisio Tabasa. My birthday is May 11, 1952. And I was born and raised in Watsonville, California.

Una Lynch 01:25

Awesome. That's— that sounds great. Thank you. Um, I think we're gonna start maybe by talking about your family, particularly your parents and kind of their early life in the Philippines, and maybe anything that they told you about their early life. So maybe starting with your dad— do you know where he was born and where he grew up?

Greg Tabasa 01:51

As far as I know, my father was born and raised in the Philippines. I'm assuming it was also in the Aklan region of the Philippines as my mother was. —stand he emigrated to Hawaii and on to the West Coast, United States. I believe he started as— I think he was— his younger life, I'm not really sure if he had gone to school or went directly to your work. But it sounds from my— talking with other family members as he got into the labor contracting business, where I guess he contract— helped contract Philippine labor to work in the fishing industry, canneries in the fields up in Alaska and the West Coast all the way down to California. He ended up I believe in Salinas, California, continuing working in the agricultural field, again, as a labor contractor, I remember as a young child that he always had a regular set of men that he worked with in the fields— whatever they were working in at the time, it was a variety of agriculture. Lettuce, cabbage, could have been apples, berries, etc. And that's pretty much what I remember of my father. Always being a labor contract— labor— labor contractor. And I know— let's see, he passed away at an early age in his 50s. So we pretty much had a limited time on earth together. I can remember not having much of an interaction with my father because he was working all the time, day and night. Out in the labor field fields, with the crews, and at night we'd be at the restaurant with my mother. Yeah, that's— that's what I remember about his— some of his background other than his recreational activities, which he liked to golf. I mean, not golf, but he liked to gamble, fish, and watch sporting events. Yeah. Let's see, what else can I remember about him?

Una Lynch 04:19

Do you remember if he worked anywhere else along the Pacific Coast apart from Alaska, and then Salinas and Watsonville? Like, was there anywhere in between, or did he just go from one to the other?

Greg Tabasa 04:34

Yeah, I had no knowledge of that right there. I just remember him always working— working in the Watsonville area and he didn't follow the crops like a lot of neighbors did that go from county to county, state to state, he stayed primarily in the Watsonville area and worked there.

Una Lynch 04:58

Do you think that was because, um, he had a family or just because he preferred to stay kind of more stationary, or do you know why he did that?

Greg Tabasa 05:09

I think both— I think both because we had a rather large family. So my mother and him, you know, we're bas— my mom started and ran the Oriental Cafe, which became the Philippine Gardens. So he was pretty much there to help support her in her business there. And both of them were involved locally with the Filipino community with their various organizations. My father was occasionally the president, and one of the major officers of the Caballeros de Dimas-Alang which is the major Philippine Filipino for

male organization and my mother, likewise, with her own Watsonville Filipina Women's Club organizations, both of them were highly, highly involved with that. So they pretty much stayed in town, in the area because of that, as well as their businesses.

Una Lynch 06:07

I'm curious to hear about like, I guess, what your dad did as the leader of that organization. Do you know anything about his role in that?

Greg Tabasa 06:15

Yeah. My father was, he was actually a short, but stout-looking man, pretty strong looking, pretty much had a really keen sense of business like my mother. And he was a natural born leader, from what I understand and what I saw when I was growing up, because a lot of men— and women, you know— but primarily, the men of all nationalities came up to him. Whenever I was with him around town or at the camps or wherever they gravitated towards him. And they were always in heavy, deep conversation with him for a long time. A lot of men came to our home also, as well as the restaurant, and had these deep, long conversations with him. But many things— being a little kid, I would just hear bits and pieces of it. But yeah, he had that presence, you might say. I can always hear his loud, booming voice, he had a way about him where he just kind of commanded presence when he walked into a room, you know, I mean, my mother was identical for some reason. It was just amazing. I always thought that was a natural thing. You know, all families were like that being the little kid that I was. But other than that, yeah. I think people just valued his opinion, his decision making too especially. I mean he was— you know, once he was done he's done. And he would follow through to see that they adhere to whatever the decision was his. He was— he was pretty demanding I'd have to say. He was like that with us kids too. My mother— same thing. Yep. Pretty— pretty tough on us. Hope that answered that.

Una Lynch 08:07

Yeah, no, definitely. I'm curious to hear a little bit about your mom and when she also came to the United States, and kind of what that experience was for her if you have any knowledge of it?

Greg Tabasa 08:23

Again, back in the Philippines, I don't have anything there. It's like my father's background. But I know, it came to— I think they first came to the West Coast up in Alaska, then came down all over the Sacramento I believe, Stockton area when I think my mom was trying to finish school there. I don't think she'd finished high school. But she had ambitions to be from what I understand a reporter trying to be a journalist. So somehow I think I heard that through her limited schooling she found her way down to Watsonville. And I guess she was doing some reporting down there and met my father and from what I heard she never left. So I could have been— I don't know if my family was joking about that, but that kind of stuck to my head. So I know my mom was pretty ambitious— that's what they say— she really had a headstrong— like when she put her head down to the grindstone she is going full tilt 100% in that direction, whatever she wanted, you know, to get and she wasn't going to let things stop her. And it showed to me again as a young child that she— she and my dad had this drive and then that was just crazy insatiable, if you might say, you know, it's just like a "Look out I'm coming through. Here she is", you know, lead— lead, follow, or get out of the way! So, again, about what— what she did on the West Coast prior to meeting my dad, I'm sure— I'm sure she did menial jobs. They all did, you know, back in

the day, especially if you're an Asian woman. Opportunity was not that– not that much. So you had to pick or get whatever you could. But yeah, that's pretty much my mom right there, her background, I guess, and what she did for work. I know– I mean– I know when I used to watch her, and I used to talk to her and listen to her when she would be speaking to other people, and she would talk about her background. I mean, not her background, but you know, her struggle– uh, personal struggles. That she just couldn't– she couldn't let herself be defeated, you might say, you know, she– she– she had that self conflict in her. It sounded like– and when I got to understand that later on– she just would not say no to herself. She wouldn't deny herself. You know, people said, "You can't do that". "Oh, yes I can!" You know, but she wouldn't come out and say it, she would just go do it. You know, and she would be– even if it took 23 to 24 hours in a day to do something, she would do it. I used to see her staying up late at night. Her workday was long. You know, I remember she'd be gone early and come back at midnight. Sometimes a little after. And my father was the same way. It was amazing. But being a kid, you know, what would I know– I just wanted to go out and go play. That's why– I think even when I was growing up watching them, I hardly had any interaction with him. I could just watch them whenever they came in and out of the house, or even out of the restaurant. Like that, you know, it's kind of weird– weird growing up like that, but I thought it was the norm.

Una Lynch 11:59

Right, exactly.

Greg Tabasa 12:00

Next question.

Una Lynch 12:01

Yeah. If that's all you know, then that's totally understandable. It sounds like your mom had really long workdays. Is that just in the restaurant? Or did she have jobs in Watsonville kind of prior to when your parents opened their cafe?

Greg Tabasa 12:20

No, as far as I remember, that was their life. It was the restaurant and the field. That's what they did. And I know they didn't have any other jobs other than that, yeah. I guess– but I'd like to say it in terms of making money, my– being– my dad being a gambler, he gambled a lot. He made a lot of money from what I hear, so I guess, yeah. Gambling, working in the field with my dad, and the restaurant from my mom. That was pretty much it. Later on, eventually, she ended up working, I guess, for the county or the city of Watsonville helping senior citizens out. And that's another story. But to answer your question, it was pretty much the restaurant and field with my mom and dad day and night, get up early, work– worked all the way through to like midnight or so.

Una Lynch 13:23

Mhm. Um, so when your dad was doing field work, was that just prior to when they owned the restaurant? Or was it also kind of overlapping with owning the restaurant?

Greg Tabasa 13:36

Yeah, it was overlapping. I mean, he was— well, yeah, he did work before during— it was constant, you know, like, I remember working out in the fields with some of the men that worked with him after he died. You know, and they were telling me, you know, whenever your dad needed money for the restaurant, like, there were lean times, he would just come out to the field to make his money, then he would go back to the gambling. For the later part of his years, he was pretty— years— he was pretty much— pretty much make— raking in the money gambling. That's what I understood from the gentlemen that— that I worked with, you know, all the crews. And— yeah I was always surprised about that. Because, again, I never had much interaction with my father. He was always gone. And to hear this second and third hand from other people— it's refreshing for me, but surprising at the same time.

Una Lynch 14:37

Yeah, how did it feel—do you think to, like I guess, learn more about your dad through other people than through knowing him with your own experience?

Greg Tabasa 14:46

Yeah. Yeah, it was kind of uh— at first, I didn't mean much, because I didn't have any actual emotional feelings for that, you know— you know, fourth grade dad died, you know, and that was it. Maybe I just saw him a few times. But yeah, when I started hearing these stories from him, he kind of made me think a little bit different about my personal feelings towards him. Because I used to think that my father was neglecting me a lot. Well he did, of course, what can I say? And I think— I think, because his interests and direction in running the family and his businesses and his gambling took much of his attention. I felt kind of sorry for him afterwards, you know what I mean, he couldn't have been the father that he should have. Because I had this— I had this image of the American family that I saw on TV, you know, "Father Knows Best", "Bonanza", this and that the father and mother all take care of the kids. They eat together. I always had that vision of our family, but it never came to pass. Matter of fact, I can just on a side note— I can honestly say our family never had a meal in our lives together at one sitting, as far as I remember. It's kind of crazy. But yeah, I think it's because at the time, all the men who had children— who had families, they were preoccupied with providing all the time. So they were constantly working. And I guess that was a accepted form of family living and during those times when I was growing up— so yeah, to answer your question, from resentment to feeling sorry for my father, and not making any other excuses for him or my family— yeah, I'm okay with things the way they are now that I'm a little bit older and seeing the full circle picture from his co workers, my friends, family, their families. It's a pretty interesting history for myself to know.

Una Lynch 17:07

Right. Yeah, definitely. Um, I guess, because your parents were so busy, what was sort of the family dynamic for you at home, like with your siblings, because I know you had quite a few siblings? Okay.

Greg Tabasa 17:22

Okay. Yeah, that's a good question. Thank you. The dynamics there, were, again, oldest son, you know, God, of course, the majority of the push for my family— "Hey, get out there and go to college, get yourself educated, and come back and help the community". The daughter, Francine the oldest, and Sue, they were primed for these pageants, these local Filipino pageants. Basically, like, you know, like in most Asian cultures, you have these festivals, these pageants where you just have these things. And

they competed in those, and of course, they– I don't know if it was rigged or not. But you know, they won some, they lost some. And that was where the focus– the focus of my older siblings, because they were– you know, the youngest sister Susan, she was four years older than me. And then me and Danny were only two years apart. So Danny and I became close. Might– we have actually, and I can speak truthfully about this, we have asked, you know, are the– actually zero interaction with my older siblings. They pretty much had their own lives as we discovered we could make our own lives– me and my brother, my younger brother. So we, my younger brother and I, we got involved in sports at a young age. So our extended family became our neighborhood kids that we ran around with and our fathers became our coaches. You know what I mean? We learned a lot of our manly things from them, as well as our friends among ourselves, whether– whether we like it or not, we just did. But my family interaction with my older siblings– my father, again, passed away in his early 50s and my older brother, while he was in college, say 22, graduated, he became the head of the household by default, and forced by my mother– and so he had not only a career to establish, but he also had to run the family. And it is kind of overwhelming for him. And then again, you know, my sisters– oh, boy– involvement with my mom– she pretty much focused her attention to them as well as running the business or the restaurant, paying the bills, so on and so forth. And then my brother Danny and I were pretty much left on our own. So at a young age, we grew up real fast. We knew– we knew what we could do, but through a athletic– athlete's eyes. And again, our– our fathers– surrogate fathers– were our coaches you know, who we just learned things from. And sometimes we learned things from our friends' father's, you know, or their families, we'd see things and all that. Or from the street. So when, I guess you might say the buzzwords, "street smarts"– yeah, we learned it real fast, real quick. There's no resentment there, between my brother and myself or between us two and our oldest siblings, because like, coming from where we were– and I can speak freely about this– from my brother, my younger brother, you know, we know what they were going through, we could see it. We could feel it, too. So we didn't– we didn't harbor any resentment there. We just figured out this must be the normal thing again, you know, nothing else to compare it by. So now, that's pretty much the dynamic. This is our family.

Una Lynch 21:12

Yeah.

Greg Tabasa 21:12

Strange.

Una Lynch 21:14

Um, did your older siblings also have to, like, help out and work at the restaurant as well? Or were they separate from that?

Greg Tabasa 21:22

Interesting you say that. No, I did not see them at the restaurant working because I remember age seven, when I started going, following my mom, you know, around and my day consisted of at that time, get up, go play. If there was nobody to play with at the school yard, or backyard or neighborhood, go to the restaurant with mom or go with dad, fishing, or gambling or to the cockfights at the labor camps. So that was my world growing up, and Danny was five years old. So yeah, he was pretty young. Anyway, long story short, I would go to the restaurant, I would hang with my mom all day. And then until a certain

time, it was maybe five, go home— three or five, whatever. But anyway, I was watching a lot of the workday activity at the restaurant. My mom actually put me to work, sweep— sweep floors. She had me throw out garbage, I cleaned toilets. I went to the market with her as she went shopping. So I guess I— I knew what to buy in case you needed anything. I'll go to the store and go get half a pound of pork or whatever. Even though I couldn't see above the counter, I just passed a note or I knew the workers and that — I would— I knew the workers. So I would tell them, they would get it for me. Yeah, I never saw my sisters working there at all. And I made seven all the way through high school, on and off. If I wasn't doing my own work and other jobs that I got. I helped out at the restaurant, you know, mom needed it. So there's a lot of other stories that will come from that experience from age seven all the way through high school. Yeah, it's pretty interesting. Danny didn't work there. And I know he didn't work there. He was out playing all the time. Trying to avoid work. Jess, of course, I guess, he has career going. You know, his marriage, his own family, whatever, Fran and Sue's schooling, and whatever else they did— their pageantry stuff, yeah.

Una Lynch 23:38

So it sounds like you were— oh, sorry. Yeah. It sounds like you were the most involved of your siblings in the restaurant. Is that fair to say?

Greg Tabasa 23:48

Oh, yeah, hands down. I mean, you know, I didn't know— I had this thing about me where I always thought, you know, I like hanging with my mom, my dad. But I was— Well, you know, my father was always gone more than my mom away from the restaurant, except for at night when he came back to the card room in the back of the restaurant that we always had to gamble. So I was always around my mom or my grandmother at home, so I always watched my mom. And from her, I know, I got my work ethic. And with my dad, I know I got my leadership skills. And both of them were pretty demanding on me. And I just took it because I figured "okay, well, that's what you got to do", you know? You're a young kid. Okay. So basically, we kind of— I grew up with that mentality. You got to work hard, you got to work long. You don't make excuses. You're always on time. You give it 100%, and you listen. [laughter] Those are pretty much the three rules that they gave to me. And in many ways— besides, you know, that I remember— really hard. Yeah, be on time. Listen. Give it 100%.

Una Lynch 25:11

Right.

Greg Tabasa 25:12

So, yeah, and at the restaurant, you know, I had to do that. Hey, there were times that I could take a break, actually I could take a lot of breaks, I would work fast. And then I would meet all these old Filipino men and they again, you know, tell me the ways of the world. [laughter]

Una Lynch 25:30

I'm curious about that. What kinds of conversations did you have with those older men in the card rooms?

Greg Tabasa 25:38

Okay, we call them the manongs. In Philippine culture– yeah, you're probably aware with the term, and it means "elder", or you know, "uncle". Anyway, a lot of these guys that came in, they used to show– they showed me pretty much what my dad should have showed me. They talked to me about women. They talked to me about family. They talk to me about drinking, smoking, cigars, hunting, fishing, how to play cards, of course, I don't know if I mentioned that. Basically, everything that my father didn't, they did. And it was kind of nice, because everybody had a different way of saying it. And all these men had different– different accents. So sometimes, I would misinterpret what one said, and then maybe later on in the week, or the day or the month, I would hear the same thing from someone else a little bit clearer. So then I would readjust my thinking on what that first person said, but that's in general what I learned from them. Yeah.

Una Lynch 26:47

Wow. Do you remember any specific stories? Like has anything, I guess, stuck with you?

Greg Tabasa 26:56

Ah, let's see. I think one was the uh, the chicken fights. So they were telling me I tell you, how, if you're ever the blade man, which is the guy who sharpens the blades that are attached to the chicken's feet, they showed– they would show me how to associate that way of sharpening it to the way you would sharpen your hoe when you're working in the field. And I thought, Wow, that's a pretty good lesson right there. I didn't know, you know, you could do that. That was one thing that they taught me. It was pretty interesting. You know, their work habits, it taught me– oh, you know, you're, if you're working out in a wet field, you might want to get these high knee rubber boots. It'll keep your legs from getting cold and wet and Athlete's foot. [Indiscernible] military– when a lot of them were in the military– how to load guns, clean guns, why they were pretty much segregated from other military people, you know? Of course, you know, segregation of course, in the military. He taught me– well, let's see– I don't know that's helping but they also taught me about sex with– with women. And that was kind of cool. They showed me these things in graphic detail. Women's anatomy and stuff like that and you know, how to have sex with women and where. What to do, what not to do. Haha, they also– you can imagine a variety of topics. I mean, a lot of things I mentioned stuck out in my head. Hey, a young kid and my mind is a sponge. I was ready for this kind of stuff, I think [laughter]. But overall, whatever normal things that a father would teach his kids– these guys, without me asking, for some reason, perhaps– I came across this thought that maybe they thought that since dad wasn't there and then he died early, maybe it was up to them as part of this fraternal organizations– "Hey, maybe we can shed some light on Greg's, you know, year". So it was pretty much that's what I thought later on in life after my dad passed away. I thought, "Gee, why these guys, if they aren't my uncles". I call them– because we do– you know, extended family– that, I think they're– they're trying to teach me something here because dad couldn't so they're picking up the slack. And I appreciated that. I really did.

Una Lynch 29:30

Right. It seems very like community based and sort of filling the gaps where they–

Greg Tabasa 29:36

Exactly.

Una Lynch 29:36

–See things needed. Yeah.

Greg Tabasa 29:39

Yeah, it's true like they would– they say, the world is just a village.

Una Lynch 29:44

Right

Greg Tabasa 29:45

One village basically. So that– that right there, you know, pretty much sums it up. I mean, you know, it's– they were always overlook– watching. They were watching, you know, like any culture. If you have a tight neighborhood, very close quarters, small. You know, and everybody– elders watching out for the young kids, youngins. And that's what these guys did you know, at the restaurant. A lot of them didn't have families. They came over as single men, a lot of 'em, if they were lucky, were able to marry and to have families of their own. But primarily, I'd say 99% of them didn't have families. And I remember seeing them all the time at the restaurant, and they were more than happy to– "Hey, Greg. What's– how you doing here? You have any girlfriends yet?" or, you know, "How's sports, how's your baseball team, basketball–". They were very interested in what I was doing. And I'm sure they asked Danny the same thing whenever he showed up at the restaurant, but since I was there a lot I was always in conversation with all of them all the time. And yeah, it's pretty interesting what I learned from them, and I don't regret learning it. Matter of fact, I welcomed it.

Una Lynch 30:57

Yeah, that seems really special. Um, so you said a lot of them didn't have, like families– did they ever talk about like family members at home in the Philippines? Or did it just seem like they were completely having a new life now?

Greg Tabasa 31:15

Yeah. That's a good question. You know– they did– they actually– a lot of them didn't talk about families back home if they had any. Because I believe in my heart, the way I watched them talk about themselves, even among them— themselves if not to me, it sounds like they were single all their lives. You know, no matter what. I have a feeling a lot of them were married. In fact, my uncle at the restaurant Dominador who was our cook, the first cook I ever knew, he had a family in the Philippines. But when he came to America, and started working for my mom, he never brought that up. And I don't know if he ever sent money back there or not. But I heard this from my auntie here in Hawai'i. Sh– she told me that, and I never knew that. He had passed away I guess in the 70 after I left California to come to Hawai'i. Yeah. She told me that he had a family back in the Philippines. And that was that. He never went back. So I'm sure most of the men, you know, they normally look for single men for labor. But I'm sure some married men snuck over too, with a group that came to become laborers on the West Coast for my dad and for all the other growers. Yeah interesting. But they never spoke about their family life back home. Because I think either– well, the Philippines is basically really hard, right? You either rich or really poor. And so you can see where the– I'm going with that. I mean, those that were very poor and

that they had a lot of families, who knows if they really wanted to go back to that life. You're poor, you're in America, you know, streets of gold, San Francisco. Anyway—

Una Lynch 33:07

Right. Um, earlier, you were talking about how sometimes it's hard to pick things up because of accents. Did they ever like speak other languages? Or did they mostly speak English with one another?

Greg Tabasa 33:22

Yeah, you know, the Philippines there's many dialects there, there are many islands. So that's why that it's really hard for Filipinos of different provinces to really get— get together and come to an agreement in a lot of things. There's always a lot of arguing, bickering, you know, and "I'm better than your— you guys", whatever, competition, you might say. In the Philippines— the Philippine Gardens, the restaurant in Watsonville., I'm sure there were a group like that— groups like that, that came in and they stayed in their groups talking among themselves, you know, continuing the values that they had back in the Philippines. And when they came to the gardens to eat, you know, to hangout and all that. Yeah, you know, it's interesting, they kind of melted, they blended, and it was— and I could— I could pick up those accents, you know, I could pick up, uh, certain words that didn't come across in a conversation with these other group guys. Like when they're playing cards or talking about sports or fishing or whatever, as I'm serving them, and I could hear them, you know, talking to you, the different dialects, but they never there never was an argument among them in the Gardens in the Philippines, that my mom, uh, at The Philippine Gardens. They just lived harmony— harmoniously, you might say, you know, I'm sure hopefully out in the fields, it was the same way. But usually the crews tended to stay together that spoke the same lingo— language you know what I mean, it was easier that way. Just to keep— keep the business flowing, keep the crews going. And in Hawai'i, it's the same way. Same thing. But anyway, yeah.

Una Lynch 35:15

Right. So it sounds like you're saying there was no like conflict or anything like when people would come to your restaurant, it was just like—

Greg Tabasa 35:23

Yeah.

Una Lynch 35:24

—Positive and sort of amicable I guess.

Greg Tabasa 35:27

Yeah, definitely. Definitely. A lot of 'em— oh boy, they can reminisce together. You know, you play a certain song and a jukebox, and all of a sudden, you can see their eyes get misty, they'll stand together arm in arm and just start swaying and singing love songs that brings them back to thoughts of the old— of the islands, you know, and— or some would sit there quietly looking down, you know, just smiling or shaking their heads, but there were late night sessions like that, when I'd be there cleaning up. I would see guys doing that, you know, and that and I know for sure they were from different provinces and areas because they would talk about that. Yeah, it was kind of cool to see that. And it made my heart

you know— oh, wow, take a pause because I can see there's a lot of love there among them. And even though they weren't home, they were definitely homesick. And I can see why they came to the restaurant to— just to get that feeling, food, camaraderie, love, help. It was pretty cool. No competition. No arguing. Yeah.

Una Lynch 36:41
Right.

Greg Tabasa 36:42
And laughter

Una Lynch 36:43
Yeah, it sounds like it. Um, I'm really curious, like, what do you think it was— you talked— one thing you talked about was the music like, what about Philippine Gardens do you think really reminded people of home in the Philippines and like made them kind of help with that homesickness?

Greg Tabasa 37:00
Oh, yeah, well, yeah, it wasn't only the food because I think in the Philippines, different regions cook food differently. So a lot of them, you know, the food was one, the other one was the camaraderie among themselves. Talking with our waitresses, we had a— we had an endless supply of waitresses that were of all ethnic backgrounds from Caucasian to Mexican to Filipina. It was interesting, you know, and when the canneries were close, and the ladies needed work, mom would open up the restaurant, the ladies could be there and it was great for them— the men— to converse with these women of different ethnic backgrounds. The music though— oh, they'd loved to play Tony Bennett, you know, Nat King Cole, Bing Crosby. Anything that had to do with like the holidays or songs of love, you know, things— songs of going back home to wherever, you know. They— they had the lyrics down and, yeah, you give a Filipino microphone you're gonna have to rip it out of his hand. If they had karaoke back in the day, boy, they'd be— the Philippine Gardens would be the most popular place in town! Yeah, you know, what also brought them and reminded them home was like, my mom sponsored a lot of community dances, not only in Watsonville, but all —whole Monterey Bay area. So she had posters that had pictures, you know, and the musicians that were going to be playing and that would really fire up the old crews, you know, to "Oh, we got to get ready for Saturday night!" You know, "Got to break out my suit, you know, and get it pressed and be ready to roll. Get— bankroll my check". And, you know, I— things like that made them feel really good about themselves, but it also made them feel homesick. Yeah. I could just see that and think about right now these guys come in there with their cool outfits, their hats, with cigarettes, or cigarillos, as they called them, and dressed to the nines ready to go out, you know, and talk about "Ooh, back— back home I was like this at the pool hall!" You know? It was just great to listen to them talk about back home like that, especially when they were dressed in their finery and ready to go.

Una Lynch 39:36
What did these outfits look like? That were— kind of their going out outfit?

Greg Tabasa 39:39

Oh boy. Well, they had a certain name. There was a tailor in San Francisco. I forget his name offhand, but each one of these guys had one. It is not really a zoot suit, but it could almost be called the zoot suit as— I called it "the gangster look", you know, now. But, matter of fact, you may have a picture of my father and mother dressed in that outfit leaning against a building. But they were— yeah, oh, it included a top— a hat. But it was a very tailored, specified suit from this one particular tailor in San Francisco and— and every Filipino in Watsonville had one, that's for darn sure because I could spot that scene right away as they came to the door and I'd be serving food or beverage. Oh, this guy's going out on a date tonight! I can't remember the name but I'm sure some of the other Philippine organizations and people remember or have their suits still. Yeah, the dynamite— the women— woo, boy! They used to dress like, great— whatever the fashion at the time, you know? Yeah, the wives of men were able to marry knockouts. They were beautiful handsome couples coming in and out of the restaurant, who were going to the dances or the pageants. Oh, outstanding. Really great. Made me feel, I gotta learn how to dress better!

Una Lynch 41:05

So I guess was the restaurant sometimes a place that people would go to kind of before after like a big event was happening in town like the pageants or like a dance or something like that?

Greg Tabasa 41:18

Yeah, yeah. Before or after, they would show up at the restaurant for, you know, not to really show off, but just talk about, you know, what happened, have cup of coffee, see if anybody's still playing cards, you know, bring the lady— the wives along, so that they can all hang out and talk, you know. They didn't— they didn't necessarily, I guess, go into any other areas in Watsonville because a lot of it just— they may have— they may have gone to like, you know, various bars. But I primarily saw a lot of 'em back at the restaurant, you know, finishing out the evening. I'm hoping they did go to other bars because like why not? You know, I didn't know any better. I figured everybody did. You know, just for that little— that last minute cocktail, that late night drink. But yeah, coming to the restaurant, I'd would ask "Hey, how was the evening? How was the band? How was dancing Uncle, you know, and Auntie?" Oh boy, they had a big smile on their face. Or sometimes there'd be a scowl, like they didn't dance enough. I can see some of the ladies were dressed in their finery and wanting to dance more. But, you know, the husband says "Oh, I'm too tired. My shoes are too tight!", or whatever. Anyway, it was all good, humorous fun, you know, they would be ripping their husbands, you know, but oh yeah. Yeah, you could see them at the restaurant again. Just— just a good way to end the evening.

Una Lynch 42:55

Um, I heard you also said that your mom would sometimes like sponsor the dances. What exactly does that mean for her?

Greg Tabasa 43:03

Yeah, basically sponsoring, you know— well, she'd paid the bills, get the— secure the hall, get— get the band ready, you know, organize everything. She was the organizational thing on that end, she made sure things ran smoothly, things are ready to go on time. If there was a time limit, she'd be out there ushering you know, people to get the crowds going, getting ready to leave. And she basically would, you know, get everything together, pay the bills, if they weren't met, she did a lot of that. Because I

remember she'd be going— poring over the bill— the receipts that had to be paid for that particular event. I'd come across it every now and then, you know, at home or at the restaurant. I just happen to see something. And I thought "Wow, Mom's paying for that? I didn't know that". Yeah. So yeah, she was— she was— she wanted everybody to have a good time to forget about your worries, you know, and just enjoy yourselves. You work too hard for too little for too long. And why not have a— an evening to blow everything out and just let yourself go and not worry about the care of the day? And I remember seeing that look on my face and she knew things were going really good. And it just made me feel proud. I would just take a breath, you know, and just think, "Wow, you did all this just for a few hours of entertainment and pleasure for others. And you're still working in the background, Mom. You know, you're also the MC, possibly. But you're in the background all the time". And you know, my dad was the same way, you know, they were always hustling around the background making things— when he was alive— together, the duties were split up so it was easier. But then when he passed, my mom took on a big, heavy duty burden. And I applaud her for that. Now, it kinda ties into with my brother having to be head of the family, he had to start assuming a lot of other roles that my mother needed to be done. But she had to take care of this stuff. So there you go.

Una Lynch 45:31

Yeah, how was it for your mom kind of being the only parent? Like how did— do you feel like it changed kind of what she had to do or how she acted? Or those kinds of things? Like, how was that taking on this huge role?

Greg Tabasa 45:47

Well, I know my mom did the best she could. She knew what she had, what was facing her and one was— one was— I'm— I know, my father racked up a lot of gambling debt. So she had to work— she had to work extremely hard at the restaurant to keep that running, so that she could pay off his debt, which she did. She ran the restaurant, she also had to make sure her kids went to college— went— or performed in community events, or whatever that might have had to be like in pageants or competitions for scholarships for school, so on and so forth. She was really constantly gone doing that, making sure the older siblings were doing what they had to do to succeed. And then— so every now and then looking over at my brother, Danny and me, you know, but basically, we just told them what we're going to do, oh, well, we're going to join this sports team, we need this thing signed, or whatever, you know. So it kind of got to the point where for myself and my brother— my younger brother— my mom was just an endorser. She signed the check. And that was that. We kept her abreast. But she didn't really have that much interest in what we were doing. If she did, I didn't hear it, you know, but she was okay, it was okay with us. We're just like, "hey, we got these teams that we joined in junior high and high school, and so forth, and college". "Great." My sisters were her priority. My older brother, of course, as you can see. And if she changed? No, she always kept working, kept work— head to the grindstone. Since I didn't know any better, and I've seen that, from my young age, of her constantly working out of the house, it didn't seem like I missed any missteps to me.

Una Lynch 47:59

Right, like things at home didn't change that drastically.

Greg Tabasa 48:03

No, not at all. Matter of fact, it seemed like I had more freedom— or to continue— I was able to continue my freedom with growing up the way I wanted to. And yeah, I don't think anything changed now that looked back at it. No, because my personal feelings towards my mother was— there was a period of time where I kind of resented that— especially when I moved away from California and came to Hawaii and was on my own, being my own person I started realize that "Gee, I wonder if Mom did enough?" I wondered why my life didn't turn out to be like that, you know, like somebody else's, I'd be comparing myself and I had to remind myself: Hey, Mom did the best she could cause she was alone, she had all these community activities and events and people to take care of, or what— however way you want to put it, you know, she was responsible for. So I should get fortunate that I had food on the table and a roof over my head. And I was able to grow up and be my own man and you know, be my own person without any restrictions. So that was kind of second balance in myself and kind of an afterthought of my mom and my father. But then after I constantly kept checking myself on that resentment feeling, I thought, I don't have to feel like that. Wow, I gotta remember. She was dealt the hand and she took advantage of it the best way she could and I got no problem with that now, you know, I always— I always say that to myself now. Whenever I get those feelings when I see other people, other kids, my peers, children younger than me, and so on and so forth, I say, "Wow, you know, you have a good life". And then I would get a rude feeling in me, you know, and I said "Nope, no things are good. Things are great here." Yeah.

Una Lynch 50:19

Right. So do you think it like, sort of took you moving away and getting a little older to be more— or have more empathy for your mom's kind of position?

Greg Tabasa 50:29

Oh, yeah. Yeah, it did. It did. Because I had my own struggles, getting my own career going here and going, you know, putting myself through college. And that was the interesting thing, too, even though I didn't hold my parents any disrespect or anger about that, I mean, I know they— my parents to help my older siblings through college, my younger brother and I put ourselves through college, which I thought was a great accomplishment. Yeah, we did that for ourselves. And that was pretty cool. And so there's no resentment there. I'm just glad we did what we did to do that part of our lives, and then go through and raise ourselves and have our careers that we have. And it was all good. Yeah.

Una Lynch 51:23

Right. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Um, I guess, did your mom always have this sort of entrepreneurial spirit? Like was it her idea to open the restaurant? Or did it she just kind of fall into it? Like, how did all of this happen for her?

Greg Tabasa 51:43

Yeah, you know, from— from my information from my eldest brother, and then from my mom herself when I actually talked to her— she— she always had this drive to do something that involved community. And I asked her about the restaurant, you know, I mean, we've had so many restaurants, and even pool halls, and a ranch, you know, I mean, wow, with all these businesses, you know? And here it is, she stuck with the restaurant and the thing that she said to me was that the boys— because, you know, that's who primarily came to the restaurant— they have to have a place of home. I want them to have a

home. Because she said that they have nothing when they come to California, when they come to Watsonville. They don't have anything, that there's nothing that they have that they can say is their own. They need to come someplace where they can be themselves. And I thought, "Ah, so that's why a restaurant!" They can eat, they can listen to music, they can talk among themselves. They can play their games and rummy. Yeah, I can see why she wanted to do a restaurant. So apparently, she— she got— she left her idea of being a journalist and working from her uncle's newspaper up in Stockton, and decided upon herself this is the best way. Not only that for them, but to help her too, because she is a— she's a— my mom and dad, I think were partiers. They liked giving— they like giving parties, they liked a big house, they liked having large gatherings. They're like, hey— dances and also, when I think about it, I think they were definitely people who liked to entertain. And I think that helped decide for my mother what she wanted to do in life. Like, what a great way to do it. You can have a party every day at the restaurant. Yeah, somebody's gonna come by and want to drink coffee or drink beer. Or eat. Spend some time talking. So yeah, she's always had that drive in her, there was— there's never— I never heard my mom say "no" to anybody. Or my dad. I never heard them say that. It was— it was a can-do attitude all the time. And I think that's where I got it from, too. You know, you don't want to make excuses man, if you can help you can. If you can't [indiscernible] you know. I myself can't but I do know somebody who may be able to help you.

Una Lynch 54:26

Right.

Greg Tabasa 54:26

And that's what I learned from my— the lessons that I learned from my folks, you know, it's like, "Hey, can you help? If not, who can?" You know? It doesn't hurt to share information.

Una Lynch 54:39

Right, so it seems like she was kind of filling a gap that she saw in the community of like, having a gathering space for everyone.

Greg Tabasa 54:49

Exactly. And both my mom and dad had no problem with people of any color. And that's what I liked about the restaurant and a lot of people came in and out of there, you know, to play cards or to eat, or to say hi, or to go grab a ticket for the bus to go to Reno because my mom also— she did that on the side at the restaurant because it was a big— lot of people came through. She had an opportunity, she took advantage of it. Hey, you want to go to Reno? You can catch the weekend bus from the Philippine Gardens, buy your tickets here, so on and so forth. Another way to get community involved.

Una Lynch 55:26

That's really interesting. I didn't know about that. So did she like coordinate the bus?

Greg Tabasa 55:33

Yeah, it was— a there was a casino in Reno that contacted my mom [indiscernible]. And they said that, "Hey, look, you know, we understand you're— you're locked in in the community down there. We'd like to— you to sell these tickets— these bus tickets for our casino. They could stay for the weekends and

gamble and come back on a Sunday, leave on a Friday, come back Sunday evening". So my mom did that for years. She had all kinds of people coming in there who didn't have cars, or did, they didn't want to drive because you know they'd be drinking and driving and playing gambling. And my mom ran that out of the Philippine Gardens. Yeah, it was pretty cool.

Una Lynch 56:21

Wow, I can't believe— I can't believe how many things she does!

Greg Tabasa 56:28

I know she was so involved and stuff again, like I mentioned, just— that was one of the things. And she also worked for the county. You know, assisting immigrants with their problems, you know, no matter what it was, if it was immigration visas, if you had a problem in court, if your family died and you don't know which funeral house to use, if you don't know which community— which government agency to see for certain things. My mom was a one stop shop. She worked for that community service in Watsonville for that. Yeah, she— she got a lot of awards for those— that type of community service. And it kind of helped her stay locked in doing what she loved doing, which is helping others. You know, if she couldn't help her family, she could help others. But we grew from that experience knowing that that's just the way we were, that's part of our family dynamic. You know, you look to help others first, which is similar to what the Philippine culture is, you know, it's something like if you— if you help me, I can never do enough to help you. So I would always be in debt forever. I would help you forever, as best I could. So yeah, it— my mom was forever helping. [laughter]

Una Lynch 57:47

Right. I mean, she sounds very impressive. Like, these are so many disparate things that she's doing for the community.

Greg Tabasa 57:56

Yeah, carried over to my oldest brother too. He— he became that way of course, as you know, and then my oldest siblings became teachers themselves. They helped individual communities also, wherever they lived. Now, my youngest brother, Danny, teaching English as a second language in Taiwan. For 20 years.

Una Lynch 58:16

Very cool. That's really interesting. Oh, I just— Yeah. Um, I heard you were— you were also just mentioning your oldest brother, Jess Tabasa, and his kind of community involvement. I know that he was somewhat of a historian of Filipino American history. Do you— yeah— do you have any, I guess memories with him about that, or how he felt about doing that historical work?

Greg Tabasa 58:48

Oh, yeah. He was always involved with that. I think during his last few years of teaching at E. A. Hall junior high in Watsonville, he ended up continuing the work of my mom and dad. You know, people started coming to him, from what I understand when I spoke to him, he said that, "Yeah, all of a sudden I got pinpointed as a resource for Filipino activities and organizations in Watsonville". And then— then his interest in that— because he had to find answers for people— he started reaching out for other

organizations and assisting them and they asked him for help. And all of a sudden his knowledge was just growing in how the people– the Filipinos in Watsonville and those that immigrated to the United States– impacted a lot of other organizations throughout the state. Filipino organizations, because they were coming to Watsonville to find out about how could they start their own organizations, who should they contact, or, you know, not only locally but politically, and my mom and dad were tied in politically in the local scene in California. And that was a natural step for Jess and it just ballooned from there. He said, "Wow, all of a sudden I was in demand asking– giving presentations– here and there, and out of state also. I guess I found my calling". So it was a really good calling for him because, you know, just being a teacher, he already had the presence in classroom activity. So it was a natural step for him in progression to go into the mainstream and to start telling people what they needed and wanted to know about Philippine culture and history, and educating other Filipinos that came over, too, from the Philippines, because a lot of them came over as other generation that knew nothing about struggles of the Filipinos in the West– Western states in the U.S., and then they got educated through Jess and his program. And a lot of the programs that Roy Recio– or some people call it "Rey-cio", but its "Rey-shyo", however you want to pronounce his last name– Yeah.

Una Lynch 1:01:23

Right.

Greg Tabasa 1:01:24

His– his father was a frequenter at our restaurant. I knew him quite well. But anyway, long story short is that he's got– you guys got a good activity thing going and you're pushing everything to the limit. That's great.

Una Lynch 1:01:41

Yeah, definitely. Well, that's great to hear about what he was involved in, and it's interesting to hear that it sounds like almost all of your siblings sort of went into teaching in some form. Do you feel like that was informed by kind of your parents? And wanting to help people?

Greg Tabasa 1:02:01

Yeah, I think– I think because I just got involved with teaching and then my sister, Francine, the oldest girl– but she's blind– and she became a teacher. I guess she's probably influenced by Jess in that area. But also because, yeah, my mom and dad being the way they were, community oriented, always being informants, or helping others. I think that's what my– both my sisters wanted to do eventually. My sis– my youngest sisters– not my younger sister– oh, my third sister she's– she's a Special Ed teacher. And I think she got that because of Francine– that, indirectly, you know, Francine being blind. My sister saw that as, "Oh, gee, I should be helping like this". This area since Jess is doing regular education, Fran is doing education, I could do Special Ed, and then Danny, the youngest, English is a second language– perfect. Why not help those that want to immigrate elsewhere to the U.S.? Why not learn how to speak English from someone who is English speaking, yeah?

Una Lynch 1:03:17

Right.

Greg Tabasa 1:03:17

Yeah, it's pretty interesting.

Una Lynch 1:03:20

Yeah, definitely.

Greg Tabasa 1:03:23

Myself, I always said I would never go into the restaurant business. Or teach. And here I am. 30 year veteran of flying for United, serving food and beverage. Restaurant in the sky.

Una Lynch 1:03:36

Yeah, that's true. I guess that like being a flight attendant is sort of related to that.

Greg Tabasa 1:03:42

Oh, gosh, yeah. It was a natural progression for me. Easy. But yeah, that's pretty much a nutshell in our family life like that. But I don't know. I know you got more questions. I'm happy to answer anything.

Una Lynch 1:03:56

Yeah, I guess I'm kind of going back to the restaurant a little bit. I'm curious when it opened because it sounds like there were maybe a couple— like it had a couple of different locations at one point and it sounds like it had a few names, like it used to be called the Oriental Cafe before Philippine Gardens.

Greg Tabasa 1:04:16

Yeah, okay. My parents got married in the 30's. I think so the restaurant probably opened up not too long after that. There was, in Lower Main by the Pajaro bridge there, there was 1, 2, 3 locations there that I remember. And then, as I mentioned last time, in 19— geez— it might have been '63 or '64, uh, the restaurant became the Philippine Gardens that was on First Street, 14 First St., that's when it turned— the name changed. And then I think, gosh, maybe it was the late 80's when the final reincarnation was over behind Ford's department store. It was in the Appleton Hotel near there, or it was the last restaurant. It wasn't really a restaurant. It's mostly just a coffee donut place where— and card room, where the guys, the crews could go to hang out. The old timers wile away their hours. But that was it right there. Yeah. So I think from the 30's, up until the late 80's, boy, Mom always ran some sort of business rest— type— restaurant. Gathering place, you might say.

Una Lynch 1:05:47

I guess, when you were growing up, where— what was the kind of primary location of Philippine Gardens when you were growing up and you are helping out or working there?

Greg Tabasa 1:05:57

Oh, that would be— that would be the Lower Main restaurants, the three and plus the Philippine Gardens on First Street. That would be the primary locations where I helped out and you might say, earn my oats, in the restaurant business. Yeah, I'm sure my mom — all child labor laws, but [laughter] when your bills are— Those are interesting restaurants too. Because the first one that I remember had an upstairs-downstairs place where you can eat, and Jess verified that. I— I was so young, I didn't even

remember that. Before, because I never could go up stairs, I guess too small. Then, yeah, then we had another location, right where this intersection sign at Riverside and Lower Main Street is. That was another restaurant that we had that had the probably the biggest counter I ever saw that in all our restaurants. It was a horseshoe type.

Una Lynch 1:07:01

Oh, wow.

Greg Tabasa 1:07:02

The back was a really low. Yeah, all our restaurants had either a pool hall connected to it, or a card room or both. And that had a really large card room in the back also. So that was the biggest one I ever saw. Then, going across the street to that. But that's to where the Universal Barbershop used to be. That was a restaurant, one of the— one of the older restaurants that had a proposed— Mom wanted to import and sell Philippine goods there because we were approached by various Philippine establishments that wanted to sell their product in our restaurants. And my mom and dad had set up an import shop, you might say right there, next to the restaurant or within the restaurant to sell these goods. So it's really— that in one building, along with the restaurant and a card room. That's crazy. And then from that, it moved to the Philippine gardens on First Street where that was the smallest of all that I remember and worked at.

Una Lynch 1:08:17

Right? When it was on Lower Main, sort of what the surrounding area looked like? What were some of the other establishments? It sounds like there was a barber shop nearby?

Greg Tabasa 1:08:29

Oh, yeah. Right next to our first restaurant that I remember was the Chinese restaurant that— probably the best one in town at the time— it was the China Cafe. And that was run by a really, really entrepreneurial Chinese family who lived in the back house back there. Across the street were Mexican restaurants and also various Philippine barber shops as well as dry cleaning establishments. You know, the Asians and pretty much all the minorities had businesses in the same three block area. We all knew each other, we all work together, we all patronize each other's businesses. So it was pretty good even though, even though oriental store markets were down there too. It was great. Those are the types of businesses that were nearby our restaurants, things that offered services and products to us for our restaurants where we pretty much had a restaurant that wasn't that far of a walk.

Una Lynch 1:09:40

So it sounds like it was a pretty, I guess, like close community or like everyone sort of knew everyone in that area of town.

Greg Tabasa 1:09:50

Oh, yeah. You know Una we— we grew up with all the kids who also, like us, like me, you know, they worked in their family market, dry cleaning, barber shop, restaurant, they all were just like I did. And yeah, it was a very tight knit community. Like you said, we knew one another. We always looked over, watched out for one another, parents did that. We also all lived in the same pretty much area too, that

area around Watsonville High School. The Lynn Scott area, that Bridge Street area, Pajaro Yeah. Pretty much lived and worked and ate in a pretty much the same pretty close, close proximity. Very interesting. The dynamics of that. Hmm.

Una Lynch 1:10:38

Um, so then would you say that I guess the people that you lived around were more business owners than the— the people that were farmworkers and who kind of came to the restaurant?

Greg Tabasa 1:10:51

Yeah, the people that I was exposed to a lot were both actually— I mean, these are like, people who— yeah, exactly that— both. Hardworking people who wanted to break away from the agricultural aspect of the field work and come into working their own businesses, their own, like barbershops, dry cleaning, owning a grocery store, shoe repair shops. Those are pretty much what I remember. A lot of the Asian businesses around us that we frequented, grew up around, and lived with. And of course, the farming community, of course, you know, it was a pretty interesting area and time to grow up at. Things are exploding quickly. I mean, you had a lot of the people and the kids trying to become Americanized right away, you know, like, "Let's move up town. Let's make that uptown move", you know, whether it was business-wise, or living-wise, moving our home— our family home. Let's make that dollar and move up the ladder. Pretty interesting. It was really exciting.

Una Lynch 1:12:02

Yeah. Did you feel that pressure to like, try and become very Americanized? Or were you interested in kind of, like learning about Filipino culture? Or I guess, how did you balance those things?

Greg Tabasa 1:12:17

Oh, myself, you know, since we grew up in a mixed neighborhood of all different types of people, and then went to school— you know, elementary, junior high and high school— we knew pretty much all the kids in town, from all ethnic backgrounds and all the economic backgrounds. We knew where they live, we knew them through sports and through, you know, just school. And so I never felt any kind of pressure to like, "Oh, I gotta keep up with the Joneses". Or "I don't feel good because I'm brown and I have an agricultural restaurant, uh, background— athletic background". I didn't feel any of that, you know, we fit like a glove with everybody, and they fit like a glove with us. So it was it was interesting you would ask that. You would think there would be a lot of kind of racial under— overtones. But in my generation, when I grew up, we didn't see that. I mean, I didn't feel it. You know, I didn't see it. As from my other friends, I probably say they didn't see or feel it either. Because we never talked about anything like that. Course, you know, we— we always made fun of one another, but in a funny, easygoing gesture, but it didn't mean anything derogatory really, that would hurt people on purpose and all that. So I never felt any pressure or any negatives— it is more of needing to try to upgrade myself during [indiscernible] I had a program I wanted to do for myself, which might have been narrow minded and selfish, but I knew I wanted to find something better for myself. Because I just didn't feel like working in the fields too much. And I didn't feel like working in a restaurant. I knew there was something else out there I wanted to do. I didn't know what. But I think I better keep going to school, and maybe it'll help figure it out later on in life. So for myself— and not speaking for anybody else— I knew I had to leave town because if I hung around Watsonville too much, I would probably not get out there and I wanted more. So I pushed

myself to make some money, make the move whether I was ready or not, take the chance that, you know, I'll find it out in Hawai'i. I never— I never thought of failure. That's the one thing that you know, I can say with my family, we never thought of failing. You know, we never thought of, "I'm afraid to try this". Uh-uh, it was like if you don't try it, you'll never know. That was a cool— that was a cool thing about watching— listening to my mom and dad say that, you know, even though they never would show us and— and hand-by-hand how to do it. Hey, go out and try it. You burn yourself? Well, you'll know not to do that again. So yeah, self driven is pretty much what we all— I can see that all the siblings became and leaving Watsonville I had to do that for myself. Everybody else it was up to them, you know if they wanted to or not, but I guess it's okay to be selfish.

Una Lynch 1:15:48

Right. And then— oh, sorry.

Greg Tabasa 1:15:55

No, go ahead.

Una Lynch 1:15:55

Um, how did you end up in Hawai'i? How— like, how was that choice made?

Greg Tabasa 1:15:59

Oh, glad you asked. That's a good question. My junior year in high school, my sister Sue. The one above me four years older. She said "Hey why don't you come out to Hawai'i? You know, you're working and all that, spend the summer", so I did. You know, I— I'd saved up all my money— I've always worked— and came out to Hawai'i for three months. And thought, "I've always thought of going to someplace sunny and warm, but a lot of sand. But I never pictured Hawai'i", you know, in my own mind, but here I was, had the opportunity. So I ran to it. I did everything I wanted to do there because I did. I was used to doing my own thing anyway. So I grew up over there that summer. And when I came back from a junior year in high school— my senior year in high school I knew already I was going to— I was going to live in Hawai'i. I didn't know why. But it sure felt good surfing every day and meeting girls every day when I wanted every day. Seeing the tourist market, see famous Waikiki and surfing out there. Oh, that's great, you know, seeing the island life and what brought me out there also is that, wow, look at this. There's no majority here. There's a lot of brown people. I mean, you know, of course in Watsonville there is all types but primarily, there was a lot of Asians out here. There's a lot of Filipinos, a lot of Japanese, Chinese, Asians of any nationality. And, you know, there— there was no majority out there. It was kind of cool to see that. It was just a wide awakening, and seeing them in different capacities, you know, different jobs, so on and so forth. That kind of sparked my interest in that, "Hey, I can drive a bus, I can be a hotel manager, I could work in a radio station. I could do this. Wow!" You know, it's— it was kind of interesting. It is the perfect time in my life to see that, to expose me, to get me ready for college life later on. So that was the impetus right there for me. Moving to Hawai'i, and I— I never told my friends that until the time that I actually came over on vacation to my friends and they went back and I stayed. It shocked everybody. Yeah, it did. I mean, I told my brother that when me and my two friends were leaving, and I said, "Hey, Danny", I didn't tell my mom or anything like that. I just told him, "Here's my keys to my car. I'm going to Hawai'i. I'm not coming back. I'm going to try to make a go of it". And he was just stunned.

Una Lynch 1:18:53

Wow.

Greg Tabasa 1:18:54

And then that— that was that. I got up and left. Went out the door, jumped in the car with my friends. And off we went.

Una Lynch 1:19:01

Oh my goodness.

Greg Tabasa 1:19:02

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, you know, I came back a few times to visit and all that.

Una Lynch 1:19:08

Right.

Greg Tabasa 1:19:09

But it got infrequent. And yeah, so that was— that was me, you know, put myself through college, worked three jobs to get myself out all these— got all these financial aid, paid it off. You know, with it before the tenure time you're supposed to. I graduated in three years in college, I felt— I felt like I was behind my classmates because I took about a year and a half to two years off just to, you know, frolic, surf, hang out, do all this degenerate stuff. I wanted to, you know, do all that stuff. And then I got that feeling "Oh, I better get— hurry up and graduate" so I graduated in three years, overloaded. Yeah, I graduated at 3.6.

Una Lynch 1:20:02

Wow! Good for you!

Greg Tabasa 1:20:05

Thanks. Thanks. Because— you know my mom never knew I even graduated. I never did tell her. Nobody knew in my family. Everybody thought that I just went to college you know and then flunked out. But, no.

Una Lynch 1:20:17

Oh, they didn't know you— you finished?

Greg Tabasa 1:20:20

Yeah, nobody knew. Even my sister Sue. I'd say about 10 years ago, she asked me "Did you graduate from college?". I go "Yeah, my degree's— my degree's on the wall", you know, it was in a box, and I never put it up. You know, the one thing about— this is one thing that's interesting about my family. A lot of us never put our accolades out on the wall except for Jess. Jess did. You know, he had a certificate for this and that, but Fran, I don't remember, Sue no. Danny, you know, I don't remember our trophies

for sports, you know, anywhere. We might have had 'em in our room. But that was about it. But all the other awards we got we never showed them anywhere in our homes.

Una Lynch 1:21:01

Interesting. Do you know why that maybe was?

Greg Tabasa 1:21:05

Well, my feeling— that's a good question. My feeling is that notoriety— I call it that— didn't mean that much to my family, because we were siblings. We just work to help people. You know, once we got to our chosen profession, it was like the thing to do. You're a hard worker. People like it. You see good results from them. They're happy. But that's good enough for me. Right now. We—we didn't need that acknowledgement. Even my mom. Yeah, I remember her telling me that, "Oh, wow. I have to go to this banquet. I don't know why". Then the next day, she'd come back. Said, "Oh, they gave me an award". You go "Oh, okay". But then she wouldn't even think about it. It's like she'd show it to me and then she would just like toss it in the bag and then just go to work. Yeah, I mean, you know, it was— it was like, oh okay, I guess it's not that big of a deal, but— so I grew up assuming ah, it's the thing that happens, you know, you work hard, you go to a banquet, you get a certificate, put in the back. That's what I grew up with.

Una Lynch 1:22:13

Wow. Very humble.

Greg Tabasa 1:22:17

Yeah, yeah. I don't remember any of us, tooting our horns or anywhere like— or walking into a— walking into anywhere and sayin, "Hey, man, I'm a Tabasa! Do you know me? You know me!" You know, you don't hear that. You don't hear that from us. Right. But, yeah, so— yeah, I'd say pretty much humble was what— was a pretty good description for like me and my siblings. Yeah.

Una Lynch 1:22:51

Mhm, it seems like it. Yeah, definitely.

Greg Tabasa 1:22:54

Yeah.

Una Lynch 1:22:55

Um, I know, in a— in a previous conversation we had you talked about something that you did in college called Operation Manong?

Greg Tabasa 1:23:04

Oh, yeah. Good question. What happened was that— now that was fortunate. It was a seminal program that was probably copied throughout the United States after that, all the major colleges, if not junior colleges. What it was was a melting pot of students at the University of Hawai'i, graduate students and undergraduates of all nationalities who banded together to assist immigrant students with college opportunity programs. Because there was a lot of the schools, the high schools, junior highs, parents,

families that did not know the opportunities that were available for their children to go to college. So that was because since people were immigrating in the 70's to the United States to Hawai'i first, and they all wanted American Pie, well, what's the first step that you got to do? Well you got to get educated. So we showed them how to, you know, get educated, where you had to go with government agencies to get your passports, your visas, where you sign up for Social Security, how you get your Social Security card. When we came to college, to junior high, and elementary schools, we were there to facilitate. We taught the— we assisted teachers in the children's native language. We showed them movies. I was an audio video specialist. My major was Communications. So I was right deep into it. I showed them, you know, the American way of— what was out there for you if you go out there and go get it. It's not yours on a silver platter. You got to go out and get it. So you got to go backwards and think about what's the first steps? So through TV shows, through movies, through radio programs, through learning to read, to use the library, we facilitated these kids on how you can become confident in getting an education for yourself. And also at the same time educating your family.

Una Lynch 1:25:25

Mhm.

Greg Tabasa 1:25:26

Because a lot of parents came over not speaking English, if they did it was very limited, but the kids were picking it up fast. So that's where we were. We concentrated on the elementary, junior high, high school and college level. And we were very successful. We_ a lot of it was voluntary in the beginning. And then, eventually, we actually had a paid staff that was able to work it. I was, of course, since it was seminal, I was a volunteer, it was part of my college work-study program that I got involved with. So it was great. It was a great experience for me and for others. And like I said, being a Comm major, I was right there watching this thing evolve. And a lot of our— a lot of our workers— our students— that assisted went on to bigger and better things politically here in Hawai'i. Yeah. One I actually became Governor.

Una Lynch 1:26:29

Wow! Oh my goodness.

Greg Tabasa 1:26:32

Yeah, one also became represent— uh, see— a state representative in Congress now, I mean, there was— it was really interesting. A lot became— a lot became celebrities in the public media, so on and so forth. It's pretty outstanding. So we, we had a hand in helping develop a lot of today's leaders without realizing it. But you know, to us it was just: Hey let's just get these kids educated, you know, let's get these families organized, let's help them out, give them a helping hand. So that was Operation Manong. And I concentrated on— in the Philippines areas, of course, but I was also thrust into working with Vietnamese, Samoan, Tongan, a lot of Pacific Islanders, you might say. And it was great. It was a great experience. Yeah. I mean, you know, here they were, coming in, learning a little bit about America through movies, and then they actually come to America where they're actually talking to Americans. Yeah, it's great.

Una Lynch 1:27:43

That's really interesting. Yeah, it honestly— it sounds— like it reminds me a little bit about what you were saying about your mom also helping with new immigrants that were coming to the Watsonville area. And it seems like sort of a continuation of that kind of giving back.

Greg Tabasa 1:28:03

Exactly. And in fact with the Tobera— Tobera Project is too. You guys are doing the same thing, pretty much.

Una Lynch 1:28:10

Yeah, I hope so! That's great. Um, I guess I have just a few more questions as we start to kind of come nearer to the end. I am curious about when— I think this was— if I'm correct on the kind of chronology, this was after you were in college when Philippine Gardens finally closed, like the final iteration of it.

Greg Tabasa 1:28:37

That's right. Yeah, it did. It did close. It was— I think it was in the 80s, yeah, late 80s. Yeah, it pretty much was— ended up being just like the place for the gather you know, it's like a community hall in there. Coffee, donuts, you know, a cardroom. A place you can just sit back, feel the sun on your face, talk story basically with one another, you know, whoever was left of the manongs. You know, they pretty much faded— faded already.

Una Lynch 1:29:10

And is that—

Greg Tabasa 1:29:11

Passed on and all that.

Una Lynch 1:29:12

Right, is that why it closed just because less people would come?

Greg Tabasa 1:29:17

No, actually my mother, I think she sold the rights to it. Sold the building, sold everything, because you know, they were ready to retire and move back to the Philippines for about 10 years.

Una Lynch 1:29:31

Oh, your mom?

Greg Tabasa 1:29:32

Yeah, my mom— my mom and my stepfather eventually retired and moved to the Philippines for 10 years. And my— my mom passed away while she was there. We brought her body back and she's buried in Watsonville. My stepfather passed away and he's buried back in the Philippines in his home province and uh, yeah. So, you know, their plan was to retire in the sunset years of their lives in the Philippines, you know, back in Kalibo. And they did, they built their home there and lived there for the last 10 years of their life together. And then when my mom passed, my father came back to California, and eventually went back and he died here and was buried in the Philippines.

Una Lynch 1:30:28

Wow. Um, do you— do you know how your mom enjoyed those kind of last years in the Philippines? Like, was she really looking forward, I guess to going back?

Greg Tabasa 1:30:38

Oh, yeah. Yeah, matter of fact, it's— Mom actually started he— she never stopped working, never not working. She started this group called the Pioneer Women's. And what it was basically it's the same as her Philippine organizations in California. She organized a lot of the local residents there doing whatever they do, you know. So it was probably an informal— informal informational social group, kind of like a senior citizens group. And my father, my stepfather, you know, he had a taxi business, basically, he kept working too. He had jeepneys, and motorcycles that he rented out to the workers, you know, and they raised pigs, so that they could, you know— for families who wanted to have festivals during Christmas and all that and they needed— or graduations or whatever— they needed a big meal for, you know, roasted pig. He had a pig farm going. Yeah, they never stopped working, those two. That was it to the very end, never not working.

Una Lynch 1:31:49

Yeah. Um, do you know kind of what the community reaction was to Philippine Gardens finally closing?

Greg Tabasa 1:32:00

Oh, yeah. From what I heard that— it was— some of them— some of the senior men that I did happen to see, maybe one or two times I went back home just to look around, I'd see them at the park, the plaza in Watsonville. I'd say "Hey! What's going on?", you know, and they're telling me, you know, "We— we have no place to go now. We come to the park, we come to the plaza". And they sit, they sit in the sun, and they're dressed in their finest sometimes, you know, because that's what they did at the Philippine Gardens, they dress in their whatever— whatever they had for the day. It was clean and pressed. And they would just sit there, talk story among themselves, have a— you know— have a cup of— well I don't know if they drank any coffee out there, but they were always there like talking mostly. And if there was any place to go, I don't know if they did have any place to go at all. I know there's a community hall out on Freedom Boulevard, but that's probably rented out for events. So I'm not sure what the new generation of Filipinos in Watsonville are doing for the old timers, for the manongs, and I don't even know if they have an interest in doing anything other than maybe getting scholarships for kids. But hopefully, whatever they're doing, it's all good. You know, I— I'd like to believe that. Like the manongs that I've met— and there— I'd say is maybe one or two or three that I saw. Yeah, they just out at the plaza out there. You know, sitting around, talking story, smoking cigars— cigarettes. And it's— it's nice to see them there still hanging out if possible, yeah. Wow. Yeah, that's pretty much what I'd say about those guys here. But I know they miss it. Because they— that they still think about times past. Wow, kinda leaves like a dagger in the heart. Yeah. Wow. Is— it was there but it's gone. So, you know, next generation could uplift them in some other way. I never told you, my mom used to import films from the Philippines and play them at the local theaters in Watsonville.

Una Lynch 1:34:26

Oh, really?

Greg Tabasa 1:34:28

Yeah, she— that was another thing she did on the side for them. They used to— there's nothing about the home that they can see on TV shows or anything like that. So my mom— boom! Jumped right on it. I used to be there bringing the movies from the post office when they would get mailed in, I'd have to go get them, bring 'em down to the either the century theater. That's the one that— it was right there on Lower Main and she— my mom had an agreement with a guy there. Hey, she can fill this place up. You give us a day, a weekend, we'll fill it up. And she did. So every Wednesday was Philippine Night at the Century Theater. They would take down the marquee, put up the announcements, and that place was packed. All the guys, all the old timers and their families from the restaurant, they'd be over there. After dinner, they'd be going there to go watch the movies and come back again for their late night snack or coffee or beer or card game. And their families would join them as well as other people, you know, but it was always full house on Wednesday nights.

Una Lynch 1:35:36

Wow.

Greg Tabasa 1:35:36

And that was kind of cool. Yeah, that was a great thing my mom did. She — she also had this thing every summer in Bolado Park. I don't know if you're familiar where that is. Towards San Luis, out that side. But there would be a picnic around where their Watsonville community and women's clubs threw a picnic for all the Filipino communities to attend. Yeah, it was great.

Una Lynch 1:36:04

Right, I know, you—

Greg Tabasa 1:36:05

It was the highlight of the summer.

Una Lynch 1:36:07

Um, I know you were saying that your mom was involved in the Filipino Women's Club? What was kind of her role with them?

Greg Tabasa 1:36:17

Oh, she was like the president.

Una Lynch 1:36:19

Oh, wow.

Greg Tabasa 1:36:21

Yeah, like my dad was too, they were both Presidents a number of times, I mean, it— but they would always play a prominent position. You know, whatever. The— I know, they didn't— they didn't lobby for it. I know that for sure. Because they'd be surprised I can hear them when they come home. "Aww, I got to do this as— as maybe sergeant of arms or vice— or secretary or whatever. Oh now they want me to be

president again!" And it's like, well, gee, why didn't you take it by the horns? And they would, they would take it, and they would run it. But they would— they really wanted to encourage others to take the step. You know, get out and get your feet wet. Show us what you can do. You know, that's— that's what I remember them doing and saying, like, when— at night, when they would come home after midnight and I would just say "Hi, mom and dad, this is what I did today". And of course, they would ignore me. I would hear them talk about, "Well, I'm trying to push so-and-so to be this or that or whatever. What do you think?", you know, they would like have their informal meetings about how they could come help promote one another's, you know, people that they feel would help out. Because they really wanted more people to get involved. They didn't want to just to be a Tabasa-run community. Even though that's what people wanted. They wanted other people to get in there to get— they want other people to— Show what you can do! You got leadership qualities, you can do it". You know, "Come on! Let's hear from you". And, you know, some— I guess you might say silently, that's what they were conniving. They wanted other people to start spreading their wings.

Una Lynch 1:38:13

Yeah. Well, it sounds like even after working all day long, coming home at midnight, they're still working even when they get home.

Greg Tabasa 1:38:22

Never not working. That's them. You know, like I said, I would wait up— I used to always wait up at night because I wanted to see my mom, my dad, you know, and that's probably how I developed a late night habit of staying up so late, getting up early, and not eating well. Anyway, yeah. These things kind of pop up in my mind. But uh— good questions. Those are good questions.

Una Lynch 1:38:49

I guess one other thing I'm curious about is, sort of, if you would be able to sort of paint a picture about kind of what it would look like for someone who's never has been to Philippine Gardens, like what it would look like when you walked in? What did kind of the cafe versus the card room look like? Just kind of like a visual description.

Greg Tabasa 1:39:12

Sure. Sure, I mean, once you open the door, you're going to hear music, of course. At nighttime, we'll hear the love songs playing. You'll see the— the kind of full of people just eating their food, the smell, the aroma of the different dishes that my uncles would cook would be there. You also see the variety of pies that are in the pie refrigerator right there that were available, because Filipinos like sweets galore. The donuts that were available. The tables you would see people there, sitting down, reading the newspaper, or eating or drinking their beer or coffee and laughing. You know, or comparing competitive [indiscernible] whatever. But in the background, you would also hear the cards, the TV in the background, you would see men shuffling left and right. Moving— uh, "I'm next in line to sit down to my game of Rummy", where you'd see people going in and out of the front door, out the side door in the back cardroom, jockeying for position on a seat to watch TV, because maybe they didn't have television in their hotel room where a lot of them lived, or at the house where they were renting with other coworkers, you know, they would rent houses together, or a room. And you'd hear it would be bustling all the time at night like that. In the daytime, it would be a kind of a slower pace, you know, because

everybody was at work. But you can still see the people sitting down, again, you know, talking among themselves or reading the paper, eating here in there. The cardroom was constantly going though. Always— always making money. And that TV was always going. Yeah, you would— you would hear most of the activity in the evening time, of course, because that was their social hour time. Yeah. Yep, that's what the Philippine Gardens was, you know, a gathering place for any and all. Whoever wanted to swing by for a warm meal, good conversation and taste of life back home.

Una Lynch 1:41:26

It sounds very lively.

Greg Tabasa 1:41:29

Oh, yeah. Yeah it was, especially on the weekends. Yeah.

Una Lynch 1:41:32

Um, you were talking about some of the food that would be there, were there any, like, most popular or signature dishes that would be at the restaurant?

Greg Tabasa 1:41:41

Sure. Sure. Of course, you know, they had dinuguan, which is the blood stew is made of pork, very popular. Pork adobo— adobo, pancit. If you had fresh fish, that a lot of them did— fish, you know, they'd go fishing, they would bring it to the restaurant, my uncle would cook it for them— the dish that they particularly like, because, you know, if it wasn't on the menu, he'd cook it for them— you bring your fish over cook, it for you, and they would bring more, you know, so that we would have some for ourselves, you know, people wanted to buy that dish. So it was kind of — you know— "Hey if you cook this for me I'll give you some fish or vegetables for your— lettuce or cabbage or whatever". My mom had a little side thing going on with a lot of the workers who couldn't pay for their meals, but made a lot of, you know, they had a lot of responsibility in the fields, so they were in charge of whatever or they fished good. So they would pay for their meals that way, by giving the product, and my mom would in turn, you know, help them out that way. Oh, she would even— I think— I'm not sure, but I would think that since we had an abundant supply of, you know, vegetables, fish coming in from them also, I'm sure she probably would— if she knew people who wanted buy she'd probably sell it for them. Yeah. Because our refrigerator— our freezers can only hold so much food.

Una Lynch 1:43:16

Right. Yeah, I can imagine.

Greg Tabasa 1:43:18

But she was always looking for a way to wheel and deal for people to make money as well as herself, you know. But yeah, what else— the dishes, there you go— pancit, dinuguan, the adobos, whatever dishes that we had the ingredients for they would make you know. A lot of things weren't on the menu because a lot of ingredients weren't available. But when they were booming, my uncles would be right on top of that. I mean, their memory on how to make these dishes is just unbelievable. It was like common in the Philippines. You pretty much had similar dishes all around. But since it was regional food made different from different regions. It's kind of fun is to try those made different ways. Yeah, I

had really good uncles as cooks. They were fabulous. I gotta say, I know only two them [indiscernible]. Outstanding. That was really outstanding.

Una Lynch 1:44:26

Wow, that all sounds great. And it's nice that your mom sort of, I guess made ways for people who couldn't afford to pay for the meal in a kind of conventional way to still be able to come and contribute something.

Greg Tabasa 1:44:41

Yeah, I think that came in her thinking, you know, that was "Well, they gotta eat. They have to provide for their family. You know, what if they don't have a stove at home?" and a lot of them didn't, they lived in hotel rooms, you know, because they were migrants. They were in and out all the time. So—

Una Lynch 1:45:00

Right.

Greg Tabasa 1:45:00

—Oh, yeah. You know, eventually those— I came to understand that the older I got, you know, I got to put things together. And then I got to watch them. And I'd ask them, "Where do you live at?" "Oh I live at the such and such hotel" and then I would know those hotels, those are just single rooms, nothing else available, you know? Yeah. Hardships galore. But you make best of what you can. Yeah. No excuses. Filipino way, Filipino culture.

Una Lynch 1:45:33

Yeah, definitely. I guess I have sort of one final question kind of moving ahead in time quite a bit. Your family is currently being honored in Watsonville through the creation of Tabasa Gardens, the sort of low income housing project and along with the mural that's going to be the building honoring your mom. And so I was just wondering, kind of, what you thought about this and what it means for you and your family, as well as sort of the Filipino community? Yeah.

Greg Tabasa 1:46:09

That's a good question. I talked to my siblings about that. I even sent them the article that Roy had sent me. And so I told him this is a good opportunity for everybody to put input in right now. Before it's too late. And so I'm not sure how they're— if they're all going to respond or not, you know, I'm not wanting to force them if they're old enough to make that decision on their own. But for myself, I think I looked at some landscaping there around it because my mom— my mom liked roses and trees, where the people could sit under and talk and hang out and you know, feel the sun on their face. Roses were her favorite. I hope that's going to be available around there. But the mural itself, yeah. What— what would I like to see in it? What does it mean to me? Oh, my gosh. Was, you know, in Watsonville, a lot of people had names— their names put on the buildings for— because they lobbied for it. And I'm not sure they did anything politically or community worthy. Community worthy of it, their having a name on there. And my mom— I know, people have always talked highly of my dad— my mom primarily because that's who all that— who, you know, did the community work mostly. It's humbling, it's very humbling. I really have no words on how to describe my— my feelings other than that, I'm just really humbly honored that they

think of my mom that way, my family, you know, I don't know what could be included in that other than I hope it incorporates something that has to do with the Philippines. But I don't know, the Philippine flag, the California flag, an American eagle, a California bear, you know, a bright yellow sun shining over a green valley. Because Watsonville is a very special place, and I know it meant a lot to my mother and my father, that living there that they can raise their family, because it was a fresh start for them to really put their roots down and say, "Hey, this is— this is ours". Because they left the Philippines, and, you know, whatever reason why they left, their new beginning was right there in Watsonville, the Pajaro Valley, and to have their family grow up there— really, and for them to do such community activity, to me, it is saying that, wow, this is home, man, there ain't no other place. This is— you put your hands in the dirt, you know, you raise something, and it's a family. And it's a community you're a part of. This is it. This is— there's no other— no other place but home and I'm going to make this special. So out of that stuff that I mentioned is kinda out there. Yeah, I'd really like— it's so heart stopping right now, as I say it. I think— I think the family would probably be honored that— it doesn't have to be splashy, you know, bright colors, or something like in a big sign going "Tabasa Garden!". You know, it doesn't have to be like that, but something impactful, lowkey, yet when people walk by especially the Filipinos, they're gonna say, "Wow, let me tell you the story about this particular family", you know, more of a community activist type thing.

Una Lynch 1:50:07

Right.

Greg Tabasa 1:50:08

That they can be proud of. You know that. Yeah, this is part of where the— this is a fabric of our community right here. Filipinos and people of color. This building represents. You can come here. This is your home. Feel free. We got 53 units here. Come on, come on down and sit in the sun. Sit under the shade. Talk story. Enjoy the roses. Come on. Let's make it home. You're home now. Yeah. I don't know if that means anything. But it's pretty much what I— how I feel.

Una Lynch 1:50:44

Yeah, no, I think that's a really lovely, wonderful response.

Greg Tabasa 1:50:51

Thank you.

Una Lynch 1:50:53

Well, I think that's such a great way to kind of wrap things up and end on a really lovely note. So thank you so much for—

Greg Tabasa 1:51:03

I got one last thing for you.

Una Lynch 1:51:04

Oh yeah, of course.

Greg Tabasa 1:51:06

I got one last thing for you. Okay, I found a bunch of pictures of my mom, my dad, my brother. Their history. So, thank God Jess sent this information before he passed.

Una Lynch 1:51:22

Yeah.

Greg Tabasa 1:51:23

To me. I didn't know what to do with it. I was just gonna, you know, chuck it. But then all of a sudden I thought "This is great. I'll give it to you". You guys there can digitize it. And do whatever you want with it. Because I think it's very important for your research. And you don't have to send it back to me because I will have no need for it. I can always look it up digitally, through you guys. But I'm gonna send it to you, and you have free reign over it. Okay?

Una Lynch 1:51:53

That sounds great. Yeah, share with us whatever you would like to and feel comfortable with. We definitely love all of those photos and kind of family mementos and those kinds of things. Yeah.

Greg Tabasa 1:52:08

Yeah, you can— you can, you can have it all. Keep it all because I think it'd be better for you folks to have it in case anybody else needs to do more research or whatever. But yeah, that'd be great. I'm gonna put it in the mail probably tomorrow. And you should get it within the week.

Una Lynch 1:52:27

Oh, wow!

Greg Tabasa 1:52:28

And thanks again. Yeah, thanks again. It's newspaper articles from the Santa Cruz Sentinel, the Pajaronian articles that people had written, pictures from all over the place. So yeah, it's a treasure trove. You hit the jackpot there. We know.

Una Lynch 1:52:48

That sounds great. Um, do you know where to send it?

Greg Tabasa 1:52:54

Let me see, I'll take your address. Go ahead.

Una Lynch 1:52:59

Okay, well, you want to write it down right now?

Greg Tabasa 1:53:03

Yeah, or you could email it to me.

Una Lynch 1:53:05

I could email it to you. That might be easier.

Greg Tabasa 1:53:09

Okay, that'd be great. And I found it all last night. And I thought "Aw this is perfect!" So, great. Thank God, you're a lifesaver. And I'm glad you could use it too. Tell everybody, give them my heartfelt thanks for this opportunity. On behalf of my family, really, thank you very much. Appreciate that.

Una Lynch 1:53:29

Yeah, of course, I will tell all my team members about our interview and all the things that we talked about and the— the things that you want to share with us via— or in the mail, I guess. But yeah, thank you so much for sitting down and taking the time to think about your family and particularly your mom and just kind of reflecting on all these things for us.

Greg Tabasa 1:53:56

Sure, if you guys have any more questions, if you want to call or if you want to, you know, email, whatever, I'm wide open, you know, I've got a lot of time on my hands and I'll get back ASAP.

Una Lynch 1:54:10

Yeah, that sounds great.

Greg Tabasa 1:54:13

I have one more item, too. You're gonna see something in there about my uncle, my mom's brother, John, John Dionisio. If you folks— let me see— if you need to get a hold of more information on him, because he is related to a lot of the stuff that we were talking about, about the Watsonville et cetera and then workers— his three kids are still alive and they're here in Hawai'i. I'm waiting for them to give me the approval if I could give them contact information. So— but anyway, you'll see the article about him. John, Juan Dionisio. He's in there. They might— might help in your research also for other things. About Filipinos in Watsonville.

Una Lynch 1:55:03

Very cool.

Greg Tabasa 1:55:04

Will be included in that informational packet for you.

Una Lynch 1:55:07

Yeah. If you ever know more people that are interested and want to send over their contact information, we always love to kind of get more people involved, reach out to more people. So definitely that sounds great.

Greg Tabasa 1:55:23

Okay, you've got it that would be included. Thanks again.

Una Lynch 1:55:27

Yeah. And so what you're sending me is that just like photos and kind of cutouts of newspaper clippings, that sort of thing?

Greg Tabasa 1:55:33

Yeah. And a lot of it might be readily available with you there. I'm not sure. But some stuff here I know you don't have. So yeah, it's going to be included with pictures that were recent and some were like, you know, newspaper articles, etc. And I think you'll be pleased with the information that was found because I was just sifting through it. Last night and this morning, I got edited down to the perfect amount that should go for your research that's not too family personal. But more public oriented.

Una Lynch 1:56:10

Right. Nice. That sounds great.

Greg Tabasa 1:56:15

Thanks Una. Thanks very much.

Una Lynch 1:56:17

Of course, I had such a lovely time chatting with you today.

Greg Tabasa 1:56:22

Great, me too. And I hope to hear from you and your project again.

Una Lynch 1:56:26

Yeah, I'm looking forward to that.

Una Lynch 1:56:26

Yeah.

Greg Tabasa 1:56:26

And hopefully the— the mosaic and all that— the mural will be, you know, they'll do good things on that. I'm sure they will.

Greg Tabasa 1:56:37

If you could forward any information. Yeah, let them know.

Una Lynch 1:56:39

Totally. Um, yeah. And then relatively soon, I will also be sending you an audio recording of this interview so that you can listen to it as well. And that's kind of an opportunity for you to just sign off on it and make sure like, because sometimes people say things that they then realize they don't want to be public. And then we can take those out and just make sure that you are happy with the recording and all those things.

Greg Tabasa 1:57:12

Oh, okay. Well, actually, you know what, I pretty much rehearsed this stuff. already.

Una Lynch 1:57:16

Oh, really?

Greg Tabasa 1:57:17

Yeah. Yeah. Being a Comm major. I knew what to prep for. And I had a feeling you were gonna ask similar questions like that. So in my mind, I had a prep. So they first heard about your interviews. So for years now it's been that's kind of why it was easy to flow, you know, by talking about it.

Una Lynch 1:57:35

Yeah, you definitely were very articulate about everything and had great responses.

Greg Tabasa 1:57:41

Yeah, it was just something I was preparing for anyway. So yeah, you can pretty much go with everything there. It's pretty much 100% Truth.

Una Lynch 1:57:51

Right, I imagine. Yeah.

Greg Tabasa 1:57:53

But thank you. I appreciate that. Yeah, listen to everything later on, too. And again, if you have more questions, feel free to call.

Una Lynch 1:58:00

Right. Yeah, we often do follow up interviews, so that that means that may happen. Yeah.

Greg Tabasa 1:58:08

Okay, sounds good. I hope you have a really good day though, Una. Thank you very much.

Una Lynch 1:58:12

Yeah, you too. Have a great rest of your day.

Greg Tabasa 1:58:16

Thank you. Take care.

Una Lynch 1:58:17

Buh bye.

Greg Tabasa 1:58:18

Oh!

Una Lynch 1:58:19

Oh, yeah.

Greg Tabasa 1:58:19
Bye bye.

Una Lynch 1:58:23
Bye.