

# UC Santa Cruz

## Oral History Collaborations

### Title

Antoinette Yvonne DeOcampo Lechtenberg interviewed by Olivia Sawi

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### Authors

DeOcampo Lechtenberg, Antoinette Yvonne  
Sawi, Olivia

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## Antoinette Yvonne DeOcampo Lechtenberg interviewed by Olivia Sawi

**Speakers:** Antoinette Yvonne DeOcampo Lechtenberg and Olivia Sawi

**Date:** May 8, 2021

**Scope and Contents:** In this interview, Antoinette Yvonne DeOcampo Lechtenberg speaks with Olivia Sawi, a member of the Watsonville is the Heart project team. Lechtenberg discusses her family background and immigration from the Philippines and Texas to Watsonville and later Aromas. She also discusses her experience growing up in a working-class, mixed-race family. She remembers her father's difficulties navigating the 1965 Delano Grape Strike as a foreman. Lechtenberg also talked about the effects of pesticides on her family's health and her turn towards herbalism and holistic medicine. She details her relationship with food as a product of her father's love for eating.

**Olivia Sawi** 00:01

Hi, this is Olivia Sawi and this is a recording for Watsonville is in the Heart Oral History Project for the UC Santa Cruz. Hello and thank you for taking the time to share your story with the Watsonville is in the Heart Oral History Project. Watsonville is in the Heart is a community initiative project seeking to uplift the stories of Filipino families that have lived and worked in the city of Watsonville and the greater Pajaro Valley. The project team is composed of faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates affiliated with the University of California, Santa Cruz; Roy Recio of the Tobera Project, and Amanda Gamban of the United Way. Our ultimate goal is to document your story, to preserve it, and to someday share it to others so that others may learn about our local Filipino history. We also hope that scholars may rely on your story to write richer histories of the Filipino experience in the Parjaro Valley. In the future, we also plan to have an art exhibit that will feature some of the oral history material that we're collecting. I've provided a consent form for you to sign, that you have, that consents to participation in the project. And so, thank you for sending that back to me. This also acknowledges your oral history as a gift to the Regional History Project of the University Library of UC Santa Cruz. The interview should take no more than two hours and you should feel free to take breaks, stretch, and refresh yourself as you need. I am recording the interview over Zoom. You should feel free to discuss your concerns in detail with me so that you can come to an informed decision before the interview begins. You are within your rights to ask questions, including what steps have been made to minimize the risk of physical, psychological, social or economic harm to you. You will have the opportunity to review this recording. I will share a copy of it within a week of this interview through a Google Drive folder. You may take as long as you need to review the recording. We want to ensure that you feel comfortable with the content of it. You may request to delete or remove any portion of it, like we've talked about before. And you can also choose

to withdraw from the project at any point in time, even after material is made publicly available. You may also request confidentiality and we can ensure your anonymity before our recording is preserved in the library. Sound good?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 02:22

That's good.

**Olivia Sawi** 02:23

All right. So what is your full name?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 02:26

My full name is Antoinette Yvonne DeOcampo-Lechtenberg.

**Olivia Sawi** 02:37

I have this right now [laughs] and do you have any names or nicknames that you prefer to be called?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 02:43

When I was growing up my nickname was "Tonette" because Antoinette was really long. My sister couldn't say it and it became Tonette. Her name became "Ica" because I couldn't say hers. But, Tonette. And then, as I grew up as Antoinette, it got shortened to "Annie" and it's kind of stuck that way. Yeah, so with my family, I still use Tonette and formally people will call me Antoinette, but I go by Annie.

**Olivia Sawi** 03:13

All right. All right. Thank you. And what is your birthday, just for the record?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 03:20

March 13, 1960.

**Olivia Sawi** 03:23

Okay, awesome. So, where were your parents from?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 03:31

My father was from Santa Domingo, Ilocos Sur, Philippines. And my mother, she was from Petula, Texas.

**Olivia Sawi** 03:46

Okay. Okay. You said Petula?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 03:53

Petula.

**Olivia Sawi** 03:54

Okay. And do you have any siblings?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 03:59

I do. I have an older sister, Veronica Marie Hernandez. I think Roy interviewed her yesterday.

**Olivia Sawi** 04:07

Yes, yes! I remember, yeah. [laughs]

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 04:10

And then I have a younger brother, Paul Phillip DeOcampo.

**Olivia Sawi** 04:20

Okay, so where did you grow up?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 04:25

I grew up in—I was born in Watsonville. For the first two years of my life I was living on San Miguel Canyon Road across from Rosser-Lazo-DeOcampo Ranch. And in 1962, my parents bought property in Aromas and we moved to Aromas, which was like four miles away.

**Olivia Sawi** 04:53

Okay. Tell me a little bit about growing up in Aromas.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 04:58

Well, when I grew up in Aromas, there was a population of 408 people. There were two stores, a gas station, a school—went to school right there. Our farm was five acres, right downtown Aromas. So we were right downtown Aromas and literally there were no houses across the street from us and then there was a school. Until a few years later when people started building across the street. And we had a five acre farm. It was a very small town, not very diverse. There were a few Mexican families there. Three—three Filipino families that I know of, and the rest were Caucasian. But because we grew up there, that was it. That was it. 408 people and we all knew each other. So it was—it was community. It wasn't, you didn't feel—I never felt like an outcast in that town because we were right there. Right smack by the school. So, you know, our friends were our classmates. The other Filipino families that live there, the

Barbas, we spent time with them. But we all kind of worked in the fields. It's rare—we were farmers.

**Olivia Sawi** 06:34

And what types of—what types of activities would you do, like in the fields? What would you, how would you work in the fields? Tell me a little bit about that.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 06:43

Let's see. I think my first job was folding boxes in the garage because we had a little farm can in the garage, and I think it was like three or four. But, you know, we were always in the field. And then it went to picking up strawberry runners when the fields were strawberries. My sister and I moved irrigation pipes. We were up at dawn and outside; working, picking whatever we were growing at the time. We had green beans, strawberries, tomatoes, cucumbers—cucumbers we did for a lot of years. And then my parents had the farm out of the garage. So it would be to the field, to the garage, to whatever was necessary to get the boxes folded, get them ready to go. But we were just little and of course it was fun because, you know, we thought, okay—for me folding boxes was fun and got me what, five cents or three cents a box. And as you grew up, it got a little bit less fun. [laughs] Because it was hard work. And it was work. We worked every summer. Come home from school, you went out in the field and you work because it was necessary. Or you went—when we got older, we got work permits and we went to other farms. I mean, it was all agriculture around us. So there were blackberry fields. And we had other farm friends: this family, a Japanese Mexican family, they had fields. And we did raspberries and we were working at the orchards picking up windfall apples during the fall. And it was farm work. It was work.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 08:36

But it was a really—it was a simple life. So it was hard because we were so remote and I think that our parents really instilled in us from the time my sister and I were young to save our money and we got paid where we worked. And at like twelve, thirteen we had to buy our own school clothes. And hard work ethic was definitely instilled in us. But it wasn't always just hard work because we had our uncles and we had the aunties that came out to work and they were always fun. They loved us and there was always laughter and a barbecue in the field or, you know, hard work but a lot of good heart. You never felt—it was just, it was just work. It was hard. I wouldn't have wanted my kids to have to do that. But I think that's what my parents wanted, they wanted us not to have to work so hard. Because we got to go to school, right? School was like a block away so anybody at school—anybody that knew us knew we were in the fields, right? They could see us working. So that was kind of a little bit different but, you know, it's just the way it was. Sometimes our other friends would want to come and work and they couldn't. Just couldn't. They couldn't hang.

**Olivia Sawi 10:15**

[laughs] They didn't know what to do.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 10:19**

They didn't realize that, "Okay you have to pick this whole row and you have to do it right," right?

**Olivia Sawi 10:26**

[laughs]

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 10:26**

Right, this isn't like a game. Like you pick strawberry farm, right, you can go out and choose what you want to pick. You had to pick everything and do it right. And it didn't mean you get to go out for two hours and pick and stop. You pick until lunchtime. You stop, take a break, and—if you got to be the lucky one—go in and make that pot of rice at night before everybody else came in. Then you got to quit a little bit earlier than you had to go in and cook rice. So my sister and I learned how to cook rice by the time we were like seven, eight. No rice cooker. [laughs] No rice cooker or pot.

**Olivia Sawi 11:09**

So you said that you were working on these fields, who owned these fields that you worked on?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 11:17**

My father owned the field in Aromas. They had that property. My uncle's owned the Lazo Ranch. But I can't say that I really worked there, I more played there because I was young. The berry fields across the way—oh my gosh, I can't remember who owned them—but there would be other ranchers that would hire out and it was right across the railroad tracks. So if we didn't have produce coming in, we'd go over there. J.J. Crosetti was who he worked for in the apples, because my father was head foreman for J.J. And we had to have our work permits to work in the fields, because I think they had unionized by then. And, yeah, we worked for J.J. Crosetti. Well we worked for our Dad, but J.J. Crosetti, yeah.

**Olivia Sawi 12:14**

So I know that you and I talked about this previously but, for this interview's purpose: How did your father come to own this property? Because that was pretty rare back then.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 12:26**

It was very rare back then. Previous to the ranch in Aromas—the farm in Aromas—my father owned part of the Rosser-Lazo DeOcampo Ranch on San Miguel Canyon Road. My Uncle Johnny Rosser, my father, Reyes, and my Aunt May Rosser—who was a white woman that could own property. And, you know, as a Filipino, you couldn't own property. And so that partnership with her owning the major part of the property I think they were finally able—my uncle and my aunt were able to get married. And my father's name was on the deed. And he was able to purchase the property in Aromas. That was after my father went to an internment camp. When the Japanese were rounded up, my father didn't have these papers and he was in an internment camp. And he lost everything at that time. And I don't—he didn't really talk a lot about that time. So I have a lot of holes about where he went. I think Manzanar and I'm going to do a little bit of research on that. But I know in the late part of his life, he told us stories about being there and he was treated a little bit better because whoever was in charge realized he really wasn't Japanese.

**Olivia Sawi** 12:54

Hmm.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 13:05

So he was Filipino and he got a better job there. And then when he got out, he went to Santa Maria where my Uncle Leon DeOcampo—I have two Uncle Leons so I get a little confused, I get them mixed up sometimes—to San Luis Obispo, Arroyo Grande area, and then came back up here with my Uncle Leon. And after he married my Mom, that's when they bought the ranch out there. So it may have been—that may have been part of it, I'm not really too sure. But I know by then they were able to marry and own property. And that was in 1960. Yeah. It was after—[audio cuts out]

**Olivia Sawi** 15:04

So you said that your mom is from Texas, how did she end up in the Central Valley?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 15:13

My Mom, she was in Texas. Brownsville-Petula, Texas. And my grandfather lost the ranch in the Depression. He was a cattle farmer, or cattle rancher, and they lost the ranch. And they migrated up to Michigan where they picked cherries and then to Washington where they picked apples. And then to California, to the Valley in California for a short time and then to the Pajaro Valley. And that's where my father met my mother. My mother was working for my Uncle Leon Lazo in the green bean fields. She was checking the cards that—if you picked a bushel of green beans, you had this card that they check to see how many bushels you picked in the day—you're paid by the bushel. So she could speak Spanish, she could speak English, and she could do the books. And so my father married her.

**Olivia Sawi 16:24**

So—

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 16:28**

She was a lot [audio cuts out] my father

**Olivia Sawi 16:31**

Say that one more time.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 16:32**

She was a lot younger than my father My father was about—I think he was like 48 when I was born.

**Olivia Sawi 16:43**

So how much—how old do you think—how much of an age gap do you think that was?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 16:51**

Twenty . . . I could do the math [both laugh] thirty-two and—twenty-two years.

**Olivia Sawi 17:02**

Hmm. Okay.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 17:03**

Twenty-two to twenty-five years. We never really go—he was either born in 1909 or 1910. Then my Mom found out she was born at a different time, so I'd go with that.

**Olivia Sawi 17:19**

So how did your dad end up in Aromas or Watsonville?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 17:27**

Well my uncles, the Lazos, were in Watsonville. My father left the Philippines when he was seventeen—I think he was 17. It was an arranged marriage. He was going to have to marry a woman he didn't like. And so he packed his—as he says, "I packed my two pairs of pants, my T-shirt, and my money" and he stowed away on a boat. So when he was found on the boat, he wouldn't have ridden up over the ropes and the ropes were all coiled up. When he was found on the boat they put him to work. And he was a good worker so it ended up being okay for him and he came to San Francisco. And then he followed my uncle, his brother, up to the Arroyo Grande-Santa Maria area. And I'm not really sure how they all came back to the Pajaro Valley.



I'd like to do some research on that. I don't even know if my Uncle Johnny knows. But he might know the story because he's a lot older than me and the older you are the better you know the stories.

**Olivia Sawi 18:49**

Um-hm. So I'd like for you to think about your childhood and what growing up in your community was like. So, how would you describe your family as a child growing up?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 19:17**

Our family, well we were farmers so it cycled around the farm and work. Also around—a lot of it—around the Catholic Church. My Mom had catechism classes out of our house. We would go into Watsonville to church and catechism there on Saturdays, and then to church on Sundays. Groceries on Saturdays. And we played with the kids that were on our street or in school and it's a small town. It was very rural so, you know, what did we do? We played outside. A lot. We didn't have a lot of the—well we lived so rural it's kind of weird to say—we didn't have a lot of comfort. I mean we didn't have TV, TV was like two channels. And living a farm life it's like: you went to bed early, got up early, went to school and you were—you had to go to school. It was very important for you to go to school and to get good grades and luckily in Aromas there were small classes and you knew everybody because you were in that community and so going to school was great. Going to school was fun. And my friends in that community consisted of my classmates, but I had a best friend. Our birthdays were two days apart, our fathers were both named Paul, and they both raised apples and they were friends. So we had a little community there with them. But we were very rural. And we had a lot of interaction with my Uncles: Leon Lazo and my Uncle, he's my godfather, but they call him Shorty. He'll come up somewhere in this story, they call him Shorty.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 21:26**

It was—if we weren't working, maybe Mr. Barba would call up and say, "Hey, I'm going to go get some—I need to go get some food for the goats." So we would go. He would load Frank and Randy Barba and my sister and I up in his little Jeep and we would go to the agriculture field and we'd load the thing up with lettuce or cauliflower or whatever there was. And we'd have innertubes on top of that and then he takes us to the beach and he'd fish and we'd play in the ocean. It could be really cold, but that would be like our, you know, that was like our entertainment. We go to the ocean, but first we have to pick all this stuff in the field. And then when we came home freezing cold but we didn't care. Then we would feed the goats and played with their goats, because they had goats. And it was very rural, it was very different. That was like the big thrills, when you see goats. And they lived maybe a quarter mile away from us. So it was the Barba family, the other Filipino family, and I remember there were—

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 22:32**

Mrs. Barba was so proper, so proper. Sometimes it was like I didn't know what those manners were because she was really proper—different part of the Philippines. And sometimes I would go to my other uncle's house where it was always just, you know. My Dad would take me and my sister and it would be like a barbecue or he would just be checking the ranches. Or he'd take us and went to Uncle Johnny's house where it was very different because that was a white family. That was a white part of our family. But my Dad was very close to the Rosser's, and so many people. I have really good memories of going to their homes and everything was different. Like there wasn't rice on the table, it was white bread. What do you do with that? It's like, I had to learn different things. Like I never had a peanut butter and jelly sandwich until my Aunt Betty offered it to me all like, "Which would you prefer?" And I didn't know the word "prefer." Because you didn't get a choice what was on the table you got home. And "what would you prefer?" I don't know! Peanut butter? I didn't know and I never had peanut butter and jelly sandwich before. So that was kind of like a big moment in my life where I went, "Wow, people eat differently." You know, different places. That was very, very different.

**Olivia Sawi 24:00**

So it sounds like this is one of those times that you realize that your family was a little bit different than others. Can you tell me about some other times that you realized that your family was different than others in Aromas or even in Watsonville in general?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 24:18**

Well, okay. In Watsonville, my family was very involved in the Filipino Catholic Community and Assumption Church and they always had these big barbecues and so they'd sell the chicken barbecue chicken plates and everybody came together. It's like a three day event to get ready. And the difference was is we didn't know very many of the kids in Watsonville and they did very different things than us. So I was always on a little bit of the outside. But, we didn't live in town. It was very different. Like some of the kids were kids of the people that owned the cleaners, so their life is going to be a little bit different. Clothes might be more important, right, to them than it was for us. For us it was like: name brand, you just didn't get it. You got what you got until you got old enough to buy what you wanted. And that was different. And then, you know, the white families were different, the food was different. The Japanese family we were very, very close to was VERY different. And then the Mexican side of my family was very different. It was different. Everywhere you went it was a little bit different. But my grandmother had a house in Watsonville and my cousins on the Mexican side of the family, they would be there a lot. And there were a lot of differences, it was just the culture, the way—I mean, people in town they went to the movies and they went to the library in Aromas. But they preferred—they had different activities than we had

**Olivia Sawi 26:11**

So yeah, what were some of your hobbies and what kind of music did you listen to? Tell me about that.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 26:17**

I think, I think we listened to a lot—we grew up with the Styx. There was a lot of country music around and rock. My cousins were always older than me. I was like—I'm like the youngest. My cousin Donnie and I are the youngest of the group. And we kind of listened to whatever they listened to. But it was the early rock days and that all kind of melded together. My father, I remember Saturday nights with—oh my gosh—Lawrence Welk. Lawrence Welk my father would sing all the time. My father really loved music and he loved to sing. And he knew so many of these people in the Filipino community that played in bands and he could dance. And I do remember my Mom and Dad both did dance very well. So they like, you know, whenever there was music it was always a fun time.

**Olivia Sawi 27:19**

Besides hanging out with your friends, did you have, like, what kinds of other—was there anything that you were able to do for fun?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 27:27**

You know, we would go to Bolado Park in Hollister and swim. But that was an Aromas thing because Bolado Park was towards Hollister. And we could go to the high school in Watsonville and go swimming. If we went with recreation, which would take us on the bus, and we would go to the beach with Mr. Barba and we didn't take a lot of vacations. My father was a workaholic and when you have a farm you are working all the time. Yeah, so there weren't a lot of vacations.

**Olivia Sawi 28:12**

Okay. So you mentioned a little bit about school. Can you tell me some stories about going to school?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 28:19**

Okay, school was easy in Aromas. I mean there were small classes and you knew everybody because you grew up with them. And Aromas school was easy. I was always at the top of my class. It was easy. It was easy. I knew everybody, it wasn't a problem. I mean it was like: you walked out the door and around the corner and you were at school because we lived right by the school. We played at the school all the time. If we played with our friends we were playing baseball at the school. We roller skated the school. The school was like the place. If our cousins came over, we'd all meet at school Everybody met at the school. But when I went into

junior high, they decided to bus us to Watsonville, to E. A. Hall School. It was the junior high. And that is when it got a little bit hard for me. Here I was getting off the bus in Watsonville and I had this Mexican girl want to beat me up because I had my, I was hanging—I was coming from Aromas and I was with my white friends. And that's all the friends I had. I mean, that's who you played with, who you were dealt. And she was really mean to me. She made Junior High really hard.

**Olivia Sawi** 29:54

How about the transition into high school? Did it get better or worse?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 29:59

High School was a little bit better. High School was a little bit better. But life was a little bit disjointed at that time. Then we had family all over the place. My Mom had gone back to—my Mom had gone back to college to get her education. So it got a little bit hard. I kind of fell into not such great friends. I ended up being a teenage mom, leaving Watsonville High School, and going to Salinas High School where it was more diverse. And I can actually say to, that was the point. My Mom was really hardcore Catholic, there was a lot of shame in our family. So, at that point, that was a turning point in my life where I went to go live with the family in Salinas. And when I had my son—which I was in a teenage mothers program—when I had my son, my father came to the hospital and moved me home. My mother wasn't home at the time. I don't know if we want to put that in there. She wasn't home at the time, but he brought me home.

**Olivia Sawi** 31:23

I'll mark down the time in the case you want me to take that part out. [laughs]

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 31:28

It's got to kind of go with that flow, because that is what happened. But, yeah. She—she said, "No, you have to go over here." And he said, "No, you're my daughter. You're coming home." And the relationship with my son and my father was so tight that, yeah, he would come and get him in the morning and put him on—my father left the house as soon as it got light. So he'd come and get him and sit him on the table and have breakfast with him when he was just an infant. My son Jeremy is—my father basically kind of raised him, they are so much alike.

**Olivia Sawi** 32:14

And they—had they had a relationship all throughout his life then, your son?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 32:19

All throughout his lifetime. As a matter of fact, when my son went away to college, it was my father and I who packed up his car. And yeah, it was a hard day for me and my Dad. I

remember both of us were just in tears because Jeremy was leaving. But Jeremy kept the DeOcampo name and definitely had my father's work ethic installed in him. The year my father had his heart attacks, Jeremy moved out to Aromas. And my father had him dig up the acre of the property to put his garden. He had had five heart attacks. Like, boom, boom, boom, boom. It's amazing he lived. But when he came out of them, his mind was really good. And we could not move quick enough to keep him happy. I mean, he was like, "You have to get—Tonette, you have to do this." That's when he taught me how to drive the big diesel tractor again. It was crazy. He climbed up on that thing backwards so he could teach me how to drive and he would be yelling at me, "Get your hat, get your gloves." And he taught me how to drive that diesel because he was so worried about the property and he wanted everybody to be able to maintain it.

**Olivia Sawi 33:44**

So you've talked a little bit about your father's work ethic. Where did that come from? And how did that affect you growing up?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 33:56**

Where my father's work ethic came from? I don't know. I would have to think that my uncle, his brother, his worth work ethic was—he worked a lot too but he took time out to go fishing. If he could go fishing, he'd go fishing. I used to go spend weeks with my aunt and my uncle in Pismo and he would go to work, drop me off down at the beach, come back, pick me up, go fishing, go back to work. But my father worked. He was always driven. He had a lot of farms that he looked after. Ranches, yeah.

**Olivia Sawi 34:51**

How did his work ethic affect you and your family?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 34:57**

Well he instilled the work ethic in all of us. I would think my brother, my sister, and I have really good work ethics. I mean we've always been good at getting things done and I have to say, my children and their children all have good work ethics. It's just what you did. There was not a question about it. When you turned eighteen you got an alarm clock so you could get to your job on time. [laughs] I think when you were thirteen you got a watch. And you never were late. You weren't late. It was instilled in me. You're not late, you get to work. Whether it's—you give your word that you're going to be there, you're going to be there

**Olivia Sawi 35:46**

Yeah. So going back to growing up, are there any specific moments that really stand out? Or that you treasure deeply?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 36:03**

Uhm, I think when we were growing up, the times we spent at the Lazo Ranch where all the big barbecues, or my grandfather's house where the killing of the pigs or the goats were, they really stand out in my memories. I mean, how could they not? It was always a good time. And at the barbecues they would be "Okay open your house, we're going to kill the pig. Okay, girls go in the house. We're going to kill the pig. Okay, well of course, go in the house, don't watch." Well, you couldn't help getting on the back of the couch and looking out the window and watching because that's what you did when you were a kid. So you watched and then it was interesting and then they let you come outside. It was horrible but it was life right? It was our life. I remember the smells of the scalding of the hair of the goat or the pig. I remember feeling bad for them but at the same time it was food and it was always a good time. A big pot of rice, always a lot of laughter. The women would be there cleaning the, you know, cleaning that up while the intestines are cooking or doing whatever. Yeah, there was always—that stands out and I think anybody that's ever been in that situation where they kill the pig, you have the big parties, those were—that was family.

**Olivia Sawi 37:56**

So thank you for telling us that. I'm getting memories of our family barbecues. We were never able to slaughter pigs here but my father, growing up, he would always tell me very similar stories of growing up in this Valley. In the Santa Clara Valley, too. He would always tell stories about the goats, you know the goats. [laughs] So, uhm, so, what do you think were some of the major struggles your family endured?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 38:24**

Oh my gosh. We went through when the labor unions were being formed. And my father was a labor contractor. And the strikes that were going on, it was a struggle for my father because he was working—I think he was working for Crosetti or maybe Resetar—I can't remember where he was working, I was really young. I remember the cars, the people, the flags; there's usually all those flags coming. And having to have all the curtains drawn in the house. All the shades are pulled down. We had to stay away from the windows, the shades are pulled down. My Dad carry his big bolo knife in the truck. And it was a scary time. I remember him on the phone talking to people and my Mom—and it was, it was a scary time for our family. Because we were in Aromas. We had a farm. And there were people that came out to it. I mean, they were striking, they came to the farms! For us, it was very scary. It was a scary time. And I believe they all unionized because it got better. And they unionized, but that was scary time.

**Olivia Sawi 39:55**

So you're talking about like how your father was a labor contractor. How did his position, did, or—yeah, okay. How did his position as a labor contractor affect his relationships, or if at all affected his relationships with other Filipinos in the community?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 40:13**

I'm sure it affected his relationships. It couldn't not have affected his relationships. Because I can't speak Filipino and I didn't understand it, I didn't know my father was in between. Because he worked for—it was either the Resetar's or the Crosetti's at the time. You have your employer and you have your people and then you know what's right, but it was a hard place to be. So I know in the end—I know in the end, my father's heart was with his people. But it was a lot to take in at the time in the Pajaro Valley. It was a struggling time.

**Olivia Sawi 41:14**

So, let me see here. So did your elders or your parents ever talk about the race riots that happened years beforehand?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 41:27**

Uhm, my father said it was a really dangerous time. And I remember . . . yeah, he talked about it being dangerous. I remember hearing conversations with other Filipinos talking about it, about the ranch. Let me think what's the name of the place. It's one of the migrant camps where Fermin was murdered. It's one of the camps my father used to have his laborers at. So I do remember hearing stories, but I was so young that it was dangerous. I remember that.

**Olivia Sawi 42:18**

Did you experience any lingering—or, I guess not, lingering, but any discrimination? It didn't sound like you felt that as much in Aromas. But when you went to Watsonville, did you feel a little bit of the discrimination?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 42:35**

Oh yeah. When I went to junior high, that was Watsonville, and that girl wanted to beat me up because I was coming from Aromas, number one. You know, "Oh, yay. Kids being bused in from Aromas." Picked down. And in Aromas, nobody wanted to beat you up. We all grew up together. That was hard. And then later on, after I move back from—when my father brought me home, I left Salinas High School and came back to Watsonville. Again, it was like if the school was on me because I had a little blond baby. And it was mean. It was just terribly mean. And I remember going home and telling my Mom and she would tell me, "You need to just nevermind." Have you ever heard that one? "You need to just never mind." So you just stayed away from scary people. I don't know. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, it was a very diverse town,

Watsonville. You could have the—I mean, my family is half Mexican. So it's kind of like, how—I was in between.

**Olivia Sawi** 44:11

I'm looking through my questions and thinking of a good one. So, can you describe a place that you felt comfortable to be in, that you felt safe? What was your safe place?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 44:29

I think most places were safe. Unless you ran into the wrong people. I think that's just the way it is today, too. There was a very hard time in Watsonville where there was a very, I don't know like . . . 'cholo' attitude and if you weren't connected to it, it was like, "Who are you?" But I guess I kind of—well I moved away early too. I moved to Southern California for ten years and then came back and that kind of was like a buffer. A buffer, I didn't have to feel it. And when I moved, I moved to Riverside—or, I moved to Orange County and it's a very diverse there so that was okay. I never felt any kind of racism there. Until the boat people came and then I felt the racism about the Vietnamese that came in. And then it kind of got, "Okay, you look Asian, you must be part of them." And you know, you felt it. You could feel the racism, but you couldn't help but feel sorry for the people because they were doing the same thing my father did. Yeah. So that part of my father coming here and being first generation, I felt many times as an adult.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 46:14

And as an adult at my job at Cabrillo on a hiring committee at one point, I had a woman say—a woman said, "I have this belief that if you're going to come to college here, you need to speak English first." And we were trying to get a bilingual teacher to teach at the childcare center for these women that were coming in to learn to speak English, right? You know, you have bilingual education, you have the EOPS program, you have—you know? So that really hurt my heart. I mean, that was like, I felt like she slapped me. Because I thought, "Oh, she's just 'I'm from the old school, if you're gonna come here to get an education, you should speak English now.'" And I was thinking, "They just want somebody that can be bilingual to speak to these little children that are being taken care of here. So why not have these children have a teacher that's bilingual and they can communicate?" And I felt very wrong by it. And I did take it to HR, our attorney. But school was not in—he was on vacation. It was a big blow up. And the end result was diversity training for Cabrillo College. The whole college. And I don't know how many people know that it was me that kind of blew the whistle on it, but it hurt. That was, I was being—in the union, I was getting kind of high up there in SEIU. I was in a lot of communities and it wasn't okay.

**Olivia Sawi** 48:14

Tell me about your journey on how you became a counselor at Cabrillo.



**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 48:19**

I wasn't. I wasn't an academic counselor, I was an advisor under the counselors. I worked in Student Services. And—gosh, I can't even remember what my classification was now. It was classified staff, working with Students Services. And I worked with—to get students ready to move on, not only to junior college, but to get them to go further than they might be able to go. And my caseload of students were single moms being forced to go back to school through the CalWORKs program. And I would try to guide them to find any financial assistance, child care assistance. I was a liaison between the school in Cabrillo in the county. If they said, "Hey, they have to go school and work. Go to school and do eighteen hours at school, carry twelve units, and you got five kids." No. That's not going to happen. So I would bring it back down to reality, see where they could go, and try to help them be successful.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 49:40**

And I ran the care program at EOPS. It was cooperative agencies, resources for education. I was a program specialist, too. And I also worked in the CalWORKs program and when we initiated the whole program to Welfare to Work Program, during the Clinton administration when there was a lot of money and we did a really good job with that. I was on the consortium of ten community colleges working on legal things. And then I got sick. So I kind of—yeah, I had to step back. And that was that. But it was a challenge. I got to work with other young women, and women my age and older than me, sometimes that wanted to go back to school. And I knew how hard that was, to go to school and work and raise your children. So I've had some really successful students and I've taken them on many, many trips to Sacramento to advocate for their rights. I was on the executive board for the Train of Consciousness through Cabrillo College and we took students on train from Salinas, to Los Angeles, to the Holocaust Museum, to the Japanese Museum, and to South Central, the slave museum. Yeah, so ingrained in me is advocacy and tolerance. Because there's racism everywhere. And tolerance, if you can't change your ways to be tolerant and understand that we all have a right to be here and be respected. So I went through that. And going through the Japanese Museum and seeing the internment camps, I had to stop. I had to walk out. And I had to go back in, I knew my father had gone through that journey. And there were other people too, who knew that there were German families that have gone through that journey, or—you know? It was a really heavy experience, but I was on that board for several years. I'm really proud of the work that we did. Yeah.

**Olivia Sawi 52:34**

Where did this drive for tolerance in you, where did that—it seems like with tolerance and advocacy and justice, where did that drive and you come from? Where did that urge come from?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 52:48**

I think it was because I was [pauses] I was very smart, but at the time, I was a teenage mom. I had been accepted to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. And my counselor said, "You can't do that. No, you can't do that." And I had to go to work. But I always went back to school. And then there were things that would come up and it was like, if you don't have somebody advocating for you, you are lost. You are lost. And I lost a lot of years and I had to figure things out. Then it just clicked to me that, if you've been through it, then you should share it to make it easier for the next person. You should always share whatever you have to make life better. My father shared—my father was one of the most generous men I ever knew. I mean, we grew up farming so there was always food. And there were always other farms. So there was always something of abundance to share. And I cannot ever remember my father not offering something to somebody without wanting anything back. His grace and his generosity, that you always help another human being, no matter where they came from. Because my father is really diverse in his relationships. I mean, he was friends with the Slovenians and the Mexicans and his employers, which were Italians, and he was just well liked. So I didn't feel a lot of prejudice because everybody loved my Dad. But, you know, as you grow up, things change.

**Olivia Sawi 55:00**

So yeah, let's talk a little bit more about your dad. He seems like a really amazing person. How did he—I still want to know how he got to that position where he was so well liked and he owned all these things. How did—I'm so like, I am fascinated by him, you know? [laughs]

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 55:23**

You know what, I really want to do some more research. My father had a brain for math that was crazy. I'm—I don't have a brain for math. But my father would be able to communicate and—Okay, I have to give you a "for instance," because that's just the way he is. He could go and look at a field and know what needed to be done, and know the supplies he needed to get, and be able to come up with the numbers in his head. He always carried this little book in his pocket. And he just knew if he did the things right, then his bosses would be happy with him. But my father worked a lot. He worked a lot. Like a lot more than he probably ever should and he probably was never paid as much as he should have been paid.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 56:31**

Yeah. But he did go back to the Philippines, too. He would take trips back and he would take a lot of things to the Philippines. I mean, for months in our storage room he would be storing up coffee and whatever foods to take back or clothes or necessities in the Philippines because our family there were very poor. He would take things back. And he also would [giggles] he

would arrange marriages. He would help people come here and several women that married into some of the ranches here in this area. My aunt came. I think he arranged my aunt and my uncle's marriage, but I'm not really too sure. But, yeah, we used to kind of laugh—he was like the matchmaker. And he'd make that trip to the Philippines every couple of years. Take some rancher with him, find a wife, they'd come back, and yeah. It was very interesting. My Dad was a funny guy. [laughs]

**Olivia Sawi** 57:38

Do you ever get a chance to go back to the Philippines with him?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 57:42

I did not. My brother did. My brother's younger than me and I really wish somebody would.—I really wish he'd come up and do an interview because all our stories are different. All of our stories are different. He's seven years younger than me and I used to like to say, "Oh, yeah, life was great and then my brother was born because he's seven years younger than me." And I was like, "The little boy that got to go everywhere." And then they had—then the boy was born and then things changed. But that's just life, right?

**Olivia Sawi** 58:23

All right, so we may have covered this, but I want to ask again: when you or your family were facing hard times, how did you get through?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 58:40

I don't know. I just kind of—we just got through it. It's just what you did. I think about it, I think about the hard times and I think well, we just knew that it was a hard time and we all worked. It was like, "Okay, if it was hard then we all work," because nobody else was coming into work. Or when my Mom went back to school, it was hard on my Dad because he didn't have anybody to do the books with him. Every night, my Mom and Dad would do the books. He'd have his cigarette. He'd have his book, she'd have the time cards and he would read out the name, my Mom would write down the time cards. And my Dad did the timekeeping every other night religiously to keep track of his labor. And if my Mom wasn't there, then my sister or I would do it with him. And I think that was a hard time, when she went back to school, because she was gone a lot. So we stepped up and took care of the house and made sure the rice was done. And we learned to cook early and we just pitched in.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:00:01

What did your mom go back to school for?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:00:04

My Mom went back to school and became a teacher.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:00:13

Was she able to teach afterwards, or she was—

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:00:17

She did. She just retired not too long ago. She taught bilingual education. Spanish is her major and yeah, she did it. A lot of the years that I was in high school—I think, it was kind of a blur through that time because a lot of things happened during that time—but I think she was almost done with school by the time my brother was up in high school and I think he had an easier time at that point. Because he wasn't—I think she spent more time at home. But I was away by the end. So I couldn't really tell you.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:01:12

What's your relationship like with your siblings?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:01:16

Uhm, it's a little bit disjointed now since my father passed away and the property was sold. My brother actually ended up with the property in the very end. But a lot of these decisions were my mother's and she didn't keep us as—after my father passed away, things kind of fell apart. But you know, if there's ever a problem, we call each other. We don't live that far away from each other. We have different memories and different friends, which is okay, but I wish we could be closer. I mean, I know if my brother ever has a problem he'll call me and—

**Olivia Sawi** 1:02:17

Did you have any other jobs growing up besides working in the fields?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:02:22

I did. I babysat. I babysat for some of our neighbors. And that let me get out of the field a little bit earlier. And I also had a summer job at Pinto Lake Park in Watsonville. And that's where I got to know some people in Watsonville. It was at the concession stand where they had those little games and they had boating—I mean, it was a park. So it was very different. It was very different than working in the fields.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:02:58

I want to know a little bit about growing up mixed at the time that you grew up in. Because you said you're part Filipino and part—was it Mexican—right?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:03:10

[laughs] I grew up thinking I was Spanish. And then it kind of went—when my mom went to university—it became [unknown] and it was Latino. And it was her people—that's how she puts it, her people—and then I did my DNA here recently and found out I'm predominantly Chinese-Filipino. And my Mom did her DNA and found out she was adopted and then she shredded it so we don't know what happened with it. So that part where I thought I was Mexican and Spanish, I'm like 5%, Andes and 10%. Iberian. So I don't really know. It's kind of being kind of—I don't know. But I do know my Chinese-Filipino is predominant and yeah, I'm happy about that! The other part I just don't know. We, you know—my Mom's. I think that might have been what was so hard for us growing up because she didn't know. Or she thought, you know, my grandmother was adopted and came over from Europe somewhere on a boat to Brownsville, Texas. And her parents had died on the way over. So my aunt and my grandmother were orphans. And then, I guess my grandmother had adopted my Mom, so she was an orphan. So you have all these—I don't know. I'd like to find out at some point. This has all been a newer experience, to find out within the last few years.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:05:10

So were you—It sounds like you were closer to your dad's side of the family.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:05:15

Yeah.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:05:16

Were you—go ahead.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:05:19

My Mom's side of the family: we had one set of cousins live near us, but they moved away a lot and then they'd come back. So we had our cousins, the Reyes', and then our other cousins came from Texas and the other ones were in San Diego. So they weren't very close. We weren't very close to them. It was like visiting them once in a while. My sister is very close to the ones in Texas because she's closer with my Mom. She's traveled to Texas with her many times.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:05:59

You've spoken a lot about your uncle, John Rosser. How did your Dad meet him again?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:06:10

My Uncle John Rosser was orphaned by his mother. And my Aunt Mae and my Uncle Leon Lazo—my Aunt Mae Rosser, my Uncle Leon Lazo, and my father adopted him. And so he grew up on the farm, the Lazo Ranch—Rosser-Lazo DeOcampo Ranch—and yeah, he grew

up with them. And my Uncle Leon Lazo, he was his dad. He worked him hard but my Dad was kind of like his fun dad. And he always tells me stories about my Dad and his experiences growing up. So he knows a lot about the farms in this area, what happened when the cabins got burned down, the migrant camps that are beyond me because I was young.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:07:31

So I want you to think about a typical day. We've talked about a typical day for you where you've, you did all these things. So think about a day that you remember, and like a typical day for you in Aromas, went to school, uhm—what would like a typical, boring day be like for you?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:07:55

A boring day would be like, well, school is a block away. Go to school in the morning, eight o'clock, right? You go to school. Kids got to eat lunch in the cafeteria, we came home for lunch, and then we went back to school. And then, when we would come back home, if it wasn't a work day, then it would be—you had to make sure your chores were done. That was always absolute. And then you went outside to play. Depending on if the cousins were living in Aromas, we played with the cousins who lived a block away. Or we would go back to the school and play, or we'd play on the farm, like try to drive the tractor. That's what I learned. My sister and I learned how to drive by starting on the farm haul tractor. We had to crank it and then we would drive it before anybody got home. Yeah, we lived in the country. That's what we did. But that would be—you played at the school.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:09:13

Then the other kids moved in. When the other houses got built and kids moved in—the Walker family, the Carter family, the Romero family—there were a lot of kids in those families. And so we'd go to school and play baseball, or we played hide-and-seek or tag or football or basketball. The school was like right next door to us so it was like our playground. So that was a lot of what we did. If if we didn't get to go—that would be a typical day. Your homework was done and—or we would go out and play then when we were out playing, you would listen for the whistle. My Dad would whistle and then you'd come home. And we all knew our father's different whistles, or the moms that would honk the horn, and then you go home. Because we were so little, we could be at the school or at the river or the railroad tracks. There were times after school when we got to go to Brownies and Girl Scouts. That was at the Firehouse. Or catechisms on Friday, that was always just so much fun. It was in our house. And then it meant the nuns hung out for hours and it was a good time for my Mom.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:10:46

Were you very active in the Filipino Catholic Community as well? You said your mom was, right?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:10:54

A Mom and my Dad were so we were. We went along with them to all the meetings and we were there. And I can [laughs] I remember going to the hall and there would be other Filipino kids playing in the hall. And sometimes one of the priests taught us how to play pool. There would be a handful of kids just playing. I didn't know them really well. I knew my other Filipino cousins, the Fuertes and the Tuzon Family. They lived in Las Lomas. And so those were always like—when the gatherings and the birthday parties happened—it would always be these group of kids and families. And what did we do? We'd go outside and play on the farm, on the tractors or in the barns.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:12:01

So it sounds like you had this this Filipino community that you hung out with. Would you say that you hung out with—in Aromas you said you also hung out with other types of kids like there were, you said, some white kids, Japanese kids. What would be the demographic—what types of kids would you be playing with?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:12:23

In Aromas they were mostly white kids. Yeah. My friends and my class were mostly white. And there was a couple Mexican kids and one Japanese boy that actually my parents became godparents to their brother. So we were very close to a Japanese family. Mom was Japanese, father was Mexican. And we were very close to them.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:13:00

Did anybody ever tell you, when you're hanging out with these different people, did anybody ever tell you like, "Oh, don't hang out with them?" Or, "don't don't hang out with them" or was it all very open in your community?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:13:11

It was all really open because you didn't really have a choice. I mean, of course, people got mad at each other, but your kids, right? I mean, in a town of 408 people, we know. That was it. You know, we have the Carter boys across the street and next door to them were the Walker kids. Next door to them were the Romeros, next door to them—you know, it's just like, that was it.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:13:41

Was there a noticeable difference in this attitude when you would travel to Watsonville? Or did you just stay away from that type of—those attitudes?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 1:13:51**

Well, when we went to Watsonville, if we went to have fun we got to go to the skating rink. Skating rink was on Friday and Saturday nights. You had your friends that you maybe knew in Aromas. But then there were kids that you knew from town and you made new friends and you skated with them. And the same way if you went bowling, you just intermingle with other kids. And I didn't feel a lot of racism when I was a kid. We were just kids. We all hung out.

**Olivia Sawi 1:14:29**

Was there like, you know how people in different towns would say, "People in that town are so and so." Was there like a general feeling of kids in Aromas who felt like that about kids in Watsonville or other cities around you?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 1:14:47**

Well, yeah, if you came from Aromas you were like a hick. You're like the country bumpkin. You're like . . . different. But, yeah, it was different. You couldn't help it. I mean, you had to drive seven miles to get anywhere, right? So a lot of interaction would be with the Filipino Ranch, with the triangle between our house, my uncle's house, and the Barba family. It was kinda like that was our realm. And that was like four miles apart. But it's not like if you live in county, you can go down the street and there's people right down around the street. It was a different, small town. I mean, my sister still lives in Aromas. She knows everyone in Aromas. I've always lived on the outside of Aroma since I've moved back. I lived in San Juan, I lived in Santa Cruz, San Juan back to Aromas. But, yeah, I'm not as connected as I could have been.

**Olivia Sawi 1:16:02**

And where are you living now? I think I forgot to write that down.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 1:16:06**

I am living now a mile away from the house I was born in. I'm living in Royal Oaks, I'm living off Vega road. And I drive through the fields that my family has owned. And you'll hear a lot about it in different stories, like Modesto Tuzon will tell the story about the area his father owned. And the Fuerte family, they were on the other side of the hill from us. I lived right by between Aromas and Watsonville, in the hills.

**Olivia Sawi 1:16:48**

And you said your brother got the land when your father died? Is the land still part of your family?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 1:16:56**



When my father passed away, I moved out there to help my Mom maintain the ranch. We just really wanted to keep it in the family. But then I got sick and I couldn't help maintain the ranch. I just couldn't do it anymore. Then my brother moved there. And then my mother moved from the farm to Watsonville to a retirement community. And my brother was living out in Aromas. It was a family ranch until she decided to sell it a few years ago. And that was a big—that I think is where the family really split because my mother sold the property to my brother and my sister. And probably because I was sick, I got left out of the loop on that. But I was able—I made peace with it because I live a mile away from all my memories. And Aromas is right there. And my sisters wasn't able to build on the property. And I knew there were problems with the property because I had worked with my parents trying to subdivide it before. But it all worked out for the best. I don't have any hard—I was never going to go there again, but I had to let that go. I can hold a grudge for a little while but not very long. And I'm happy where I'm at. I drive through these fields and fields I've been through all my life. I drive through and look at the black dirt, knowing how it's been farmed. I hate the hoop houses. I hate the hoop houses. I remember the pristine Valley with the beautiful orchards and the strawberry fields and the bean fields and now it's all hoop houses and plastic. And I know that it's good for the farmers but I feel like—and I know that they have to do it to make you industrialized farming, but I also know that through a lot of the pesticides and this transition, a lot of us got sick a lot of other immune disease, a lot of poisons, I mean and they didn't know it at the time, but it wasn't a good thing. So that was hard. I know that a lot of our fathers suffered from being directly underneath these poisons and the sprayers. And, you know, we as kids used to chase the plane that was crop dusting. My sister and I had a bedroom on the other side of the wall of the storage room that helped poison. But you can't hold that against your parents because they didn't know. They didn't know.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 1:19:29**

So are there a lot of people you know who have some autoimmune—

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 1:20:08**

My sister and my brother both have psoriasis. My sister's is really extreme, she has a really chronic, bad case of psoriasis. It debilitates her at times. I have myasthenia gravis which is really rare. I know that my cousin Reed has gone through cancer. My cousin Lanny has talked about how much soil they had to remove off their property to get down to non contaminated soil. And his mother passed away from cancer. And yeah, just—we didn't know. And they didn't know and so also at the same time, we were going through all this stuff where, "Oh, don't eat the bad fats. You use fake food." Right? We've all heard that one. And now we have to learn, "Well, avocado is not bad." Now you got to feed your brain good food. You have to take care of your body. We predominantly have high blood pressure and diabetes and all these things that

you have to watch out for. I can't say in my lifetime, in any Filipino barbecue or party I've been to, that it was really healthy. Right? It was good!

**Olivia Sawi** 1:21:48

Absolutely. Oh, yeah, so good. But, you know, not the best but so delicious. [laughs]

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:21:56

My father used food as medicine, though. He was just—he knew if he didn't feel good, that he needed to eat more broccoli or he needed to go eat fish. He cooked for himself. The Filipino dishes he cooked for himself. Our food was very divided. My Mom cooked food for us. And my Dad cooked like his fish and other strange things that didn't smell so good. But then there were things that he cooked that we all remembered, like we all knew how to make ginger beef and adobo chicken and lumpia and all the good stuff. And my kids all know how to cook Filipino food. It's part of our heritage and they hold it pretty close. Yeah.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:22:52

I want to know more about how your father came up with the approach of food as medicine because, I mean, people all over the world have known about food as medicine, but when you're—sometimes when you go to a new place it's harder to have food as medicine. So how did he come across that knowledge or—

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:23:17

I'm not really too sure, but I can remember trips to San Francisco to Chinatown where we'd go to the apothecaries—the Chinese pharmacies as he put it—and he would come out with these little folded up papers with herbs in them. And he would know that you ate bitter melon and if your stomach was upset or what you did for your gout. And he knew that different foods would make him feel better. And Western medicine, when he had his heart attacks, just about—I'd have to say, my father was not my father after his heart attacks with all the drugs that they gave him. And he locked himself in his room for days to take himself off of that medication so he could have his head clear again. And he did it and it was a major battle between my mother and him that he didn't unlock that door. And when his head was clear, he called the shots on what he was going to eat, although he did cut back on the salt. When he was in the hospital, my sister and I would bring him chicken celery soup, which is his chicken celery ginger soup. Because he was eating the food from the hospital and it wasn't—yeah, wasn't what he was used to eating and I don't think it was feeding his soul. And he was in the hospital for a long time.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:25:04

So how did his—how did his knowledge or his take on food as medicine—how did that affect you growing up?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:25:16

My father kind of took care of us when we were sick because my mother was, well she was teaching. So at that point where she was gone working and he would come home and take care of us. So it was always fresh fruits vegetables and he would tell us always—we lived on a farm so we had fresh fruits and vegetables. So much to the point, right, you kind of hated them after a while. But he would know that they would make you feel better. And he—it just was something ingrained in him and it was something that I understood and I started studying it more. I think the book "Back to Eating" was a book that I kept really close to me after my father's heart attacks because he knew he needed a heart tonic. And he kept telling me about these berries, berries. I didn't understand the berries and I finally looked it up and it was Hawthorn berries and I ended up making him Hawthorn berry tea which was a heart tonifier. And then he would tell me about other things, so I would go to herb room and pick them up and he would drink these teas and they would really started my passion for learning herbs and plants as medicine. And yeah, I've kept that pretty close to me throughout the rest of my life. Although the time when I got really sick, I was so sick that I just—you're so sick you can't even think—and you have Western medicine coming at you from all sides and it took the modalities of acupuncture and Chinese medicine to help bring me out, along with Western medicine, to stabilize my myasthenia gravis. But definitely that part of food as medicine came from my father and from my grandmother. My grandmother, too, she used a lot of herbs.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:27:38

I want to know more about your herbalist path. Tell me, what do you remember about your grandparents?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:27:47

My grandparents would be my mother's grandparents. I don't remember my father's. I never met my grandpa, my father's parent. And my grandfather, he was a great man. He was a big man and he was a rancher when he was in Texas, but here he became a farm laborer. And he—all of our family, I guess were, they were migrant workers and they worked in the farms—but he would sell sodas at farms. Each farm he has a big cooler in the back of his car and he'd go sell sodas to each different place. And the youngest, I guess it would be me and my cousin Donnie and my sister, we would get to be with them because it's kind of like babysitting, right? We hung out with my grandpa while everyone worked. And they lived in Watsonville, but he died when I was maybe five of kidney failure. And I kind of got mixed up because they took him back on a train to Texas and that was about the same time President

Kennedy died. And he went back on a train, so I always thought, "Oh, when you die, people went on trains." [laughs]

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 1:29:18**

But my grandmother is very into her plants and her gardening and what herbs would help what. Like you drink canela tea, peppermint-cinnamon tea, or peppermint tea for different ailments. She had a garden—my Dad used to actually go help her, put her garden in every year in Watsonville. And we collect seeds and my love of plants and farming has to come from my Dad and my grandparents. My Mom says, "You can always grow anything." Sometimes I can, but we've moved out here where it's a different—our dirt is different. It's not that black gold that's down in the Pajaro Valley. It's sand and it's hard panning. I probably will spend thousands of dollars bringing good dirt up here, I don't know. But dirt is important to me. It's very important to me.

**Olivia Sawi 1:30:30**

Talk more about that, how dirt is important to you. Tell me more about that.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 1:30:36**

Well, I can smell the dirt. Smell the dirt. I like to feel dirt. I can tell if dirt is good to plant in. I can tell what nutrients it needs. I've been through some of the industrialization of the cannabis business. And oh, God, I hate all the fertilizers and craziness that they do. Which I'll tell you a little story, I don't know if you want to put this in or not. My father used to use—put the marijuana in the alcohol for his rheumatism, right. And he would actually make it for some of the judges in Santa Cruz County and really important people. My father was part of the American Cancer Society. So he knew a lot of the really important people and they knew him. It could help them with their rheumatism. So he would make them this appointment. This green, stinky ointment. And I didn't know what it was growing up, but when I was taking care of my father and went up in the attic one day and I found some pot. I went, "Oh my God, this must be my brother's. What is this? This just looks horrible." So I hid it so my father wouldn't find it. And then my father would call up, "Goddammit, Tonette, your brother took my stuff." And I was like, "Whoa, whoa, wait a minute. What stuff, Dad?" He says, "I had a bag in the attic." "I took the bag, Dad." He says, "Goddamnit, that's my marijuana I make my medicine from. So my brother got in trouble, I had to tell him, "I have it. I didn't want him to get in trouble, here it is, Dad. And yeah, that was a big eye opener because you know, it is good medicine if you use it in good ways. And to this day, I make the amazing ointment. I got away from the alcohol and the stinky stuff. And I make amazing pain salves now and I have to attribute that to my father in teaching me that long ago before everything got popular here. And it was something that they knew: was the medicine.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:33:04

Yeah, this is a great segue into more of your herbalism path. I want to know more about that.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:33:12

Well, when I got really sick, I had Western medicine. I have an acupuncturist who's been my acupuncturist for like twenty years. I could not open my eyes. My eyes—my eyelids were like, closed. has double vision so bad. Eyelids are closed, can't speak. I had to leave my job. Couldn't swallow. And I had to really learn what herbs—like ashwagandha, it's an adaptogen. It will work for you when you're stressed out, it'll help you if you're tired, I'll help you if you need to relax. I've done a lot of studying about herbs. I mean, it's come a long way and there's always something to learn. I mean, these weeds that we call "weeds" are really medicine and we'd plow them under and we'd throw them away. And no, now I grow them. And I tend to them and we eat them and my health has gotten better and I make medicines for other people. And my son, Jeremy, his wife is an herbalist and he's very much followed the path my father did with food as medicine. But he grew up a lot with my Dad. Like he loved the Filipino mung beans and chicken—mung beans and chicken wings. And I remember him asking me, "Can you make that, Mom?" And I didn't understand what he was talking about until my Dad put together a jar and said, "Take this to the boy, okay." This was our special food together." It was mung beans and—I don't know what to call it, and I joined Filipino food groups, but—I can look at some of the things and go, "Oh, yeah, I remember that." But I can't make myself cook it because it's just too hard on us. Yeah, I have to watch my cholesterol. My sister has high blood pressure. I have to watch my cholesterol. My brother has high blood pressure and so, you know, you have to be careful. Yeah.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:35:42

So you've talked quite a bit about your son and your journey with him. How was it like raising him as a young mother?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:35:54

Hmm. Raising him was the easy part. Going to school and going to work was the hard part. I was always going to school and that was my Mom pushing me. I think my father always accepted us for who we were and was always happy to see us, but my mother always had this, "When are you going to do this?" Or, "When are you going to do that?" I mean, the other day, she just told me, "Why don't you buy a house in Watsonville?" And I'm like, "I never want to move again." You know, it's never enough. So my son, raising him, it was hard. I have three boys: David, Jeremy, and John Paul. And yeah, I always worked or I went to school while I was raising them. And it was hard. But in hindsight now, they all understand because they have their own families, and they know it was hard. So, it was hard. It was a hard life, but I'm okay

with it now. You get to a point of acceptance and I don't have to work that hard anymore. My job is to stay well.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:37:11

So as we are wrapping up, I want to know—I want you to think back—what is one of your most fondest memories growing up?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:37:25

Oh, I think it would be [pauses] I think it would be during the times I got to go with my Uncle Leon DeOcampo and my Aunt Irene to Pismo Beach. And I would go for two weeks at a time and go fishing with my uncle and go climbing with my uncle and we would go crabbing at the Avila Pier. And it was just a very different time. It was time away from the farm. It was where I could be the only child, you know? It was a really great time. It was a really great time, I cherish that time. And the other thing would be when my Dad would take me to the wrestling matches with all the other Filipino men. Oh my gosh, and I'd have to sit on the hump in the middle of the car because there would be like three guys in the backseat and then front seat and wherever I fit in I wanted to fit in. But he would take us, take me, to the wrestling matches at the fairgrounds. And one time we went to the Cow Palace and I breathed in all this smoke in the car: cigar smoke, smoke smoke. And they were very fun times.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:38:54

Where were the places—did we already talked about this?—where were the places that you were able to relax? It sounds like Pismo Beach was a place to relax, it sounds like you worked really hard and you were able to play. Were there any other spots that you found that you were able to just let things go and relax growing up?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:39:17

We used to go out to Hollister to Bolado Park and it would be a great time because my Dad would take a blanket and he would lay under the trees and we'd take a picnic lunch and my sister and I would play in the pool all day long, like two days in a row. And that was like our staycations. But those were the times I can remember that were always fun and my Dad got to relax. I mean we were playing. I mean, who thinks about relaxing when you're a kid? So when you actually saw your parents relax, you knew that it was a good time for your parents because they were not doing anything. My Dad was laying on the grass, and enjoying just laying on the grass, and watching us play in the pool. And those are some really fond memories. So this happened for a lot of years because he didn't take vacations. I remember vacations being planned, but being canceled because he had to work. So that was his best way to have us have a good time as a family, that was away from everything else and relax.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:40:44

Are there any other stories that you want to document for this project? You have so many great memories and a lot of great stories. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you want to bring up?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:41:00

Uhm, I think that's about it. I mean, it was a very tricultural community. I feel like a lot was lost when my Aunt Mae passed away. And that part of the family started moving out of the area. Because I remember very vividly my Aunt Mae, at a very young age, living across the street from them. And once we moved to Aromas, it just, you know, took me miles away. I think that was a really important part of our life in our family that needs to be documented. Because the Rossers were—without my Aunt Mae, that property never would have been by. And they could not have succeeded in the way they did in this valley. My uncle owns so much property that it's unreal to me to even hear the stories these days. And my father worked for so many very prominent ranchers—apple orchard, he was farming for the apple orchards. And he just had a lot of relationships that were good relationships with many different people. Many different groups of people. And they all respected each other and they respected my father. My father was a little man, but he was the biggest man I ever knew. And he had the biggest heart and he was so generous. And he had a sense of humor that was just—he was just a funny guy. All my three granddaughters have called me. Every time they have to do a big report, they always choose the Philippines. And they always want grandpa's story. I'm like, "Didn't your sister say that?" "No, Grandma, tell us again." So, you know, his stories stayed in the family. And I shared—I bought seven calendars—and I gave each one to my nieces and nephews and my brother and my sister. I think my sister brought her own—no, I gave it to her and then she bought another one. But I wanted them to have grandpa's stories. Because my Dad passed away in 1996—by '96—that's a long time ago. The stories hadn't been written down and if he hadn't told me these stories in the end of the different ranches and how they came together, it would've been lost when he passed away. It would have been lost. It would have been my Uncle Johnny that knew the stories. Or, now, I guess Modesto Tuzon, my uncle, my cousin Lanny, and Rita have come into the project and they have stories.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:44:42

What is one story that your father passed down that you just really want documented? Is there one story, or are there a couple of stories, that you really want documented?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:44:59

I think a really important thing that my father did for other Filipinos was to help them get their visas. My father made many trips to San Francisco to help people get their visas, to help them figure out how to get their paperwork. My father had to pay for his papers. He came here with

no papers. And where did that land him? In an internment camp. So he helped people get their paperworks straight. And my father's education had to have been very limited. But he was so smart. He was so smart. He understood how to work the government system, going up to San Francisco to apply for your visas. I mean, I had no idea! And I got my passport and that was hard enough. And this was way back when you had to go to these offices and you had to get things stamped. I'm so sorry that we don't have them; after my father passed away, a lot of things got lost in the closing of the house. I ended up with a box of pictures that was meant to be thrown out. And I went, "These are our pictures. These are important." And I have them and I shared them and I will share them with my brother and sister, I'll make copies of all of them. Yeah, it was very important that my father helped other people come here to live a better life. And he brought my Uncle Domingo and my Aunt Francesca, and my cousin Pablita here. And I think you're gonna end up—somebody is going to interview my cousin Pablita—so she's going to have to tell that story. We're the same age, but we have a whole different story. And yeah, he helped people come here to live a better life.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:47:10

And you mentioned a couple times that there were some things that you personally wanted to research. What were those—what are some things that you want to research and know more about?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:47:20

I want to know more about my family in the Philippines, which I guess I could talk to my cousin Pablita and ask her because she's from the Philippines and she is a DeOcampo. But I'd like to get some historical—like, where my grandparents were. I know I was named after my aunt who died in a river, drowned in a river—I mean, how else am I going to get a name like Antoinette and be a Filipino. [laughs] Right? My name is really unusual for a Filipino. And I'd like to know where my father was interned at. I think Manzanar, but I know there has to be documentation somewhere.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:48:15

Is there anything else that you wanted to talk about? We talked a lot, we talked about a lot of stuff and this is great, this is fantastic. Is there anything else?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:48:30

Uhm, I think it was hard for my father. I mean, we didn't [unintelligible] but we always had enough. We always had enough and it never was like a competition with the other families. Which I really appreciate because, in my life, I'm not a competitive person. I like to accept anybody from where they come in. I want them to be their authentic selves. And I just really cherish the love that my father had for his family and for taking care of other people around



him. I mean, if there was something to share, there was something to share. And it was always that way. You didn't go to another home without something to share. If there was an abundance, you shared it. And I tried to live my life that way still. And yeah, it's really sad that my uncles have passed and I'm really proud of who my uncles were in this valley. I'm really happy I lived right here where I can drive through the memories and fields and the dirt. We just watch the field and I went, "Sixty days, new crops are going to be coming up." So it's really interesting to watch the transitions.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 1:49:57**

But connecting with the other Filipino families that I grew up with: not close, but knowing them. Like the Ragsacs and Eva Monroe who was—oh gosh, I can't remember her last name now, but a lot of these people—it felt really good when we were in Watsonville that day, to be in a room full of people that shared the same memories. And there's not a lot of people that you can talk to about it because they don't share the same memories. Unless you—like I have a very good friend, Danny, who is half Filipino and a half Mexican. When we get together we can drop into that Filipino dialect talk, the pidgin and the things that we did. You know, my father killing the goats. And it's unique to the culture, that's very unique to the culture. And I think that's why when I went to Hawai'i this last time, it was so hard on me because I felt like I went home. I was in Hilo and Hilo's not a big town and people respectfully call me "Auntie" and, I think if you're a tourist coming there, you don't get that. Right? The person I was with was like—what'd they say, what'd they say, it was like—if I asked you if, "You want soyo with your rice?" "Well what soyo?" "Oh, soy sauce. Sorry." It's like I felt like I was home and I shed a lot of tears on the way home just remembering how great it was being around my uncles. They were really good people. So this project has brought a lot of hard feelings out in you. And I'm so proud that they did so much hard work in this Valley and in the Central Valley, and advocated for themselves to get unionized and be important people. Because, you know, a lot of Filipinos are service workers. We're people pleasers. We take care of people and I think that's in our heritage. Yeah.

**Olivia Sawi 1:52:39**

Wow. Thank you, thank you so much for your time. This was fantastic. I've really enjoyed this and if there's anything else please just get in touch with me. You have my phone number, message me if anything else comes up that you want to talk about. We could—if you want to—if you have more stories about your uncles, we could talk about more just about your uncles sometime if you feel like that. Because I feel it, I'm seeing and I'm feeling and I'm hearing your tears of pride and happiness. And we didn't get to talk as much about your uncles, but they sound like amazing people and that would be a great—

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 1:53:28**

Oh my gosh, they were amazing people. But I know that between John Rosser—you're going to be interviewing John Rosser, Pablita DeOcampo, my cousin Leah, my Uncle Leon DeOcampo—that's Leah's as father—and my Uncle Leon Lazo and my Uncle CP, who they called shorty—they were really important people in a lot of lives. A lot of us that were the first generations here. It's kind of hard to be first generation. I mean, you know that. First generation with your family that came here and however your family came here—the Philippines is a long ways away, right? So to make that decision to come is a big decision. And they had to work hard and a lot of people don't understand the hardships that they did go through. They were paid pennies, PENNIES to work and lived in terrible living situations.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 1:54:50**

In yet there were such kind people. People that always go, "Well, the Filipino people here are so nice." Well, yes, they were nice, but they couldn't have not been nice [laughs] right? When this whole thing happened this last summer with the racist movements and—oh my gosh, all these things that happened this last summer I can blame—okay, I understand this has happened and it's bad for everybody. But in my lifetime, my father was put in an internment camp because they thought he was Japanese. So that's really kind of a hard one for people that can't wrap their heads around it. This is not hundreds of years ago. This is this last century. And I do know that the Lechtenberg name has gotten me in a few places that I wouldn't have gotten to before. Like when I took my students to the state capitol and wanted an audience with the Governor, well I used Lechtenberg and I got in. But when I stood up to introduce my students they looked at me like, "Who the heck are you?" You know? So yeah, you feel it. But then you're proud because, "Yeah, here I am. Deal with it." And here I brought my students in. Yeah, we are better educated than our our parents that came here, some of us. But it hasn't been easy. It was not easy for them. Easier for us.

**Olivia Sawi 1:56:41**

I really like what you said about these movements that were happening in summer 2020. That so many folks forget this history, right? That's why it's so important to do this because people forget that these same things were happening less than a hundred years ago. It's not even a hundred years ago, right? So—

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg 1:57:05**

I've only met one person whose mother was in an internment camp and she's a good friend of mine. She's Japanese. And she was like—when we met she worked for Gavilan College, I was working for Cabrillo college. When we met, it was like, really, you know, like, "really?" If you haven't felt it, then you haven't been dealt it. And if you've felt it, then there's something in your heart that says, "It's not right." And you can put it away. Like my Mom used to say, "Nevermind." Well, I got to the point where I couldn't not nevermind anymore. And I'm not

going to ever nevermind. If a wrong is a wrong, it's wrong. Because we're all worthy of being treated right. Yeah, yeah.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:58:08

I love that, that's so powerful.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:58:09

And that's what I try to instill in my children and my grandchildren. "You are authentically you and you came from where you came from and you learn from your parents, you could learn from me, but you are authentically you. So you have that power to be who you are and be the best you can be. And when you don't want to be anything at all, take a break and then come back to be authentically you and light that spark." I love my grandchildren to death. All I want to do is encourage them that, "You know what, you're so worthy." Yeah. I thank you for doing this project and Roy for reuniting me with cousins and my Uncle Johnny, I already been in touch with but through this project we've gotten even closer. And now I'm hoping to go see him in a couple of weeks.

**Olivia Sawi** 1:59:21

Thank you, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today because many times some folks don't feel their story is important but they obviously are. And I have a feeling that you understand how important these stories are to put down. And it was very important that the end of this conversation just became really, really rich and full of a lot of great things and I can't thank you enough. This is fantastic.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 1:59:59

Thank you. Because my father's stories are at the very end that's when we got most of the stories because he couldn't go anywhere, he couldn't go to work, so he told us stories. And they were great stories. Everybody that's doing this project right now: I just thank you a lot. From the bottom of my heart, I feel that our heritage is so important because we're very unique people and we blend in. I mean we keep climbing, our families. My kids married other other people and the beautiful Filipino features and the community that they still have, the heartfelt that they still have to know, "Oh, can you tell us about grandpa? They never knew him. But, you know, can you tell us about great-grandpa?" So the stories will go on and that will be a good thing.

**Olivia Sawi** 2:01:02

Have you written down this—you've written down the stories of your dad, right?

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 2:01:06

I have an old drawer of stories, somewhere. I moved three times in four years, so it's somewhere. When Roy—when they first came at me with this project—my daughter-in-law was in labor. We had just moved here. All my photo albums were like, somewhere. And I had to dig them out and put that together really quick and, yeah. We have stories. But I can't wait to hear stories from Rita and Lanny and the Fuerte boys. Because that was our core of kids growing up, Filipino kids.

**Olivia Sawi** 2:01:49

I look forward to those too. Yeah, I look forward—if you ever put those together and one day we could—I can come down there and meet. I'd love to see your—or hear—your father stories as well because this is—it would be amazing.

**Antoinette DeOcampo-Lechtenberg** 2:02:05

Yeah, because there's some stories that you may not want to go down the history. Yeah, my Uncle Johnny Rosser has told me a lot of stories about my Dad too. Because he raised him, you know. He was his other dad. So I guess he was like my brother, but he's really my uncle. I don't know. But I'm really happy to have him in my life and I know that a lot of my uncles aren't really blood uncles, but they were all uncles. Right, you know, your ninangs and—it was a good way to grow up. Very different from most other people I know, yeah.