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Veronica Hernandez interviewed by Dioscoro "Roy" Respino Recio Jr. and Amanda Gamban

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Veronica Hernandez interviewed by Dioscoro "Roy" Respino Recio Jr. and Amanda Gamban

Speakers: Veronica Hernandez, Dioscoro "Roy" Respino Recio Jr., Amanda Gamban

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Scope and contents: In this interview, originally recorded on video over Zoom, Veronica Hernandez speaks with Dioscoro "Roy" Respino Recio, Jr. and Amanda Gamban who are members of the Watsonville is in the Heart project team. Hernandez gives a broad overview of her family's immigration history and experience living in the Pajaro Valley as agricultural workers. She discusses her father, Paul "Skippy" Tabalan DeOcampo's immigration from the Philippines to the United States in 1928 and her mother, Gloria Molina DeOcampo's experience moving from Texas to California. Hernandez details memories of working in agricultural fields with her parents. She also discusses her experience growing up as mixed-race and her encounters with racism. Lastly, she discusses how working in the fields inspired her to pursue a career as an ESL teacher and her employment after leaving the fields in her 20s.

Amanda Gamban 00:00

We can start tracking everything. Yeah, so let me—since we are going to be archiving your experience and stories through UCSC, they have a disclaimer just to get your signature and your consent of sharing your personal history and family history as well. So let me just share my screen and I think Roy mentioned that we are going to send this to you in the mail. So let me just show you what this looks like really quick. Right, so it looks like this form—let me just open up my screen—is really just asking for your consent.

Veronica Hernandez 00:19

Okay. Oh, I see it. And I have a signature on the bottom.

Amanda Gamban 00:21

Yeah. So we'll make sure to send this to you in the mail so you can sign off on that. Roy, is there anything else you wanted to add?

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 00:27

No. Just that, on behalf of the Tobera Project and our partnership with UCSC we appreciate you, Veronica, for taking the time to share your stories and your insight and your wonderful opinions about life and love and liberty. Let's move forward. You're ready, Amanda?

Veronica Hernandez 00:34

Thank you for having me.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 01:09

Ready, Veronica?

Veronica Hernandez 01:11

Yes, I am. Thank you so much.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 01:13

What's your full name, and did you go by any nicknames when you're a kid?

Veronica Hernandez 01:17

Uhm, my full name now? Well, let's say it's Veronica DeOcampo Hernandez. No, they wanted to call me "Ronnie" but I said no. You can call me Veronica. But at home, on my Mom's side, they call me "Vero." On my Dad's side, they call me "Veron." So I guess I had nicknames, but not at school.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 01:41

Great, and tell me Veronica, when were you born, where were you born, and what was your first days as an infant and toddler growing up? Any recollections of the pre-infant years? Or the infant years?

Veronica Hernandez 01:57

Um, I was born in 1958. And I was born at Watsonville Community Hospital on Montecino—Montecito. And I was taken home, to my home, our family home. It was a rental at the time on San Miguel Canyon Road, Watsonville across the street from my Uncle Lazo. I lived there until I was four years old. I have some pretty vivid memories there. Good memories. We were surrounded by fields. So I probably learned to walk while my parents were hoeing. And it was very common during that time for children to be in the fields. It was not—there were no laws against that. And, basically, we were safe and we were just with our family and we had lunch together and we worked together. And on that ranch, I remember a milkman delivering milk. And I was always very inquisitive, very chatty, and he would deliver to my Uncle Lazo a couple bottles. And we wouldn't get any bottles because my Uncle Lazo shared his little box. So I can still distinctly hear the clinking of those milk bottles. My Aunt Mae was an excellent cook that was the wife of my uncle. She was not Filipina, but I loved her so much and I learned what American food is from her, because I had no idea.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 03:36

Right.

Veronica Hernandez 03:36

So I was little, you ate rice, the vegetables from the fields, and fish. Chicken—Chicken adobo, pork adobo. That was my diet. And then the morning, fried eggs and rice. Lunchtime, you warm up what was for dinner and rice. You know, that was my diet. So my Aunt Mae—those milk bottles remind me of her because she made a lot of casseroles. She'd just do casserole. And I didn't know this but I remember her pouring milk in macaroni and cheese and I was a little horrified like, "What is that?" And she gave me a little taste, of course I liked it. But it wasn't often that I ate those. But those are my memories of San Miguel Canyon Road.

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 04:29

Great. Veronica, tell me—even before you were born, obviously you had parents who are loving and endearing to you—tell us about your parents: where they're from, who they are, how they met, and came together in Watsonville.

Veronica Hernandez 04:43

Well, I did have—I took a class and I remember interviewing and then I got to reacquaint and learn all of these and they met in the Watsonville Plaza. And the Watsonville Plaza was a general meeting place. Plazas are general meeting places for many people on Sundays. My Mom, my wonderful grandparents on my Mom's side—Margarita Molina and Ascencion Molina, we could call him "Chion"—loved him. They came in from Texas, very hot. So he brought his girls to California in search of a better way of life because it was very hot. And picking cotton, agriculture in Texas was almost unbearable. So they purchased a home on Lincoln Street. My parents along with my father were big about save your money, work hard, and purchase your home. Because my father would tell me, time and time again, "Because you don't know what life will be like when you are old, honey." And those words still stay with me. And I was a homeowner at twenty-one, thank you father. And thank you, my mother. They used to save my uncles—real big with money, as far as that was what we got as a birthday gift. So in those days, you got twenty dollars, that was a lot of money for my uncles. As I look back at it now, twenty dollars but my Mom would take it and put it in a savings account. My mother was very good that way. My father liked to spend a little more, but that was okay. That's called life. That's how they complement each other.

Veronica Hernandez 06:32

My mother and father were about twenty-three years apart. Which is, I found as I was—my uncles from the islands seemed to have these younger women and it probably had to do with there just weren't very many of them. And as I studied history, I think they were just allowed to marry, to date and marry people that were within their same heritage. But there were no Filipinas around at that time. My wonderful Auntie Rufina and Auntie Annie came later in life.

So they married. My father is Paul Tabalan DeOcampo and I had the honor of being around him for all of my life. I had an older father and I think he was forty-eight when I was born. Forty-six, forty-eight when I was born. We were very close. I was not a boy so I still had to haul the pipes around even though I was not. And it was just part of life. Irrigating pipes needed to be moved, I helped move them. He tried to teach me how to drive the Caterpillar Tractor. I was only 105 pounds, you have to have a lot of weight to turn that. And so I remember hitting the fence. He was so good to me, "Honey, you cannot drive it." "Okay, Dad." I wanted to say I was kind of a teenager getting a little, let me say—in Spanish, we say "saberlo todo"—know it all. But I thought, "I could have told you that, Dad. So I drove the smaller tractors, he taught me how. I learn how to drive the pickups because we had a lot of hauling to a lot of tomato lugs and things that would needed to be loaded in the truck. So looking back, it's quite an honor really. I wasn't a boy but it certainly taught me everything.

Veronica Hernandez 08:42

And meanwhile, my mother would say, "We will not stay in the field all our lives. We're going to go to school." So I was very young and my Mom started to go to Gavilan College. And my father, culturally, would say, "Who will accompany you?" Well I'll accompany her! Anything to get out the dishes. And I think my sister stayed behind and did the dishes and things. I was an honor student, did well because I was hanging out at the library. But it intrigued me. And sometimes I was able to go to a class or tutor with my mother. So my father was very supportive of that. My father was an older father so he knew how to keep a house. He knew how to cook, he was the main cook. My mother really was not. And my brother, myself, and my sister had been complimented over the years on our excellent cooking and I attributed that to my father just constantly, "Taste this, honey. What do you think?" Wash the dishes, it was a team effort, you know, And it was like food was—the preparation of food was just a very important time. Lots of fruits and vegetables. Lots of vegetables, let me put it that way, from the wintertime we would have—well in Spanish, they call them [unknown]. But I grew up with a lot of my Filipino uncles so I didn't know a lot of—my Spanish is very childhood from my Mom's side. But they would call it pig meat. And, oh I just loved it. You could steam it, put some ginger root—that was a staple in every food we had—and purple onion and soya and it was just spread out these greens. I later find out that's Mediterranean cuisine as well, okay. And all I knew is boy put that over, next to a heap of rice and have chicken adobo. It was like, "What do you want for your birthday dinner." "That. That's what I want." So those kinds of memories are wonderful and you need to leave here because I can really—yeah, tell the story.

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 11:02

So Veronica, before I turn it over to Amanda, I wanted to ask about how your parents met. We talked about how your dad was such a renowned farmer; as a foreman, as an irrigator, as a grower, a harvester, and a sharecropper working for different large entities in

Watsonville—Driscoll's or Crosetti's, Green Giant, Dobler family. Tell us about how your parents met and how life was living in the fields, working in the fields with your parents.

Veronica Hernandez 11:28

Well, they met at the Plaza. Sorry, I could go off onto a rabbit trail. They met at the Plaza and then we worked on my uncle's ranch, the Lazo Ranch, he had 20 acres. And we hoed. I remember hoeing a lot. And I remember, and I still see it—And I'm sixty-three now—and I remember at four years old looking at the sky because it seemed endless. You're hoeing, the rows are endless, the sky was endless. And I remember my father taught me the shrill of the birds, what they sound like when it's going to rain. And and in the springtime, they had a certain type of chirp.

Veronica Hernandez 12:12

So my mother was there alongside. This is San Miguel Canyon. My father also worked for J.J. Crosetti. That was the main—that was where he worked for forty years. And I got to be pretty involved with that, meaning I was side-by-side in a J.J. Crosetti truck many times. My sister and I would pick windfalls. We'd get excited, we'd get—oh gosh—I think we would get ten dollars a bin. Can you imagine eight and ten year olds filling a bin? We'd dream what we were going to do. We're going to fill two bins a day, that's ten dollars each. In the '60s, that was a lot of money for for our age and we would dream about what we would spend it on. So it was each season. My parents, we also had our own field in Aromas after four years old. My father and mother I believe for \$600 bought five acres on Marcus Street, Aromas and that is where I grew up. And that is where—we didn't move a lot and so we stayed there. And I remember being four years old and watching our house come down the street on a big trailer. Because in those days, it was I guess affordable to buy a small house that came from Santa Cruz and my parents paid \$14,000 for that house.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 13:39

Wow.

Veronica Hernandez 13:39

I asked a lot of questions. [laughs] So and then here comes the mailman to meet you and we lived by the railroad tracks, a block away. So I got friendly with the mailman and I'd asked him, "Where are you going to meet the train? You want to come?" So my parents are waiting for this house. And it's coming down the street, the mailman is there going to the train—it's so vivid—and I am squatting down, throwing rocks, looking at this house coming thinking, "Wow." And I can still see it, coming down Marcus Street from Blohm Avenue. Why they chose that and not the other end—it seemed like it would be easier—but maybe the turn was too sharp. And that house is still there. It has been added on to. It has been renovated beautifully. My

brother has bought the property. My father had passed, my mother is eighty-seven and when she was about eighty-three or four, she could not manage the cost of upkeep. So we worked in the fields. Then in Aromas, again. Tomatoes, cucumbers, green beans.

Veronica Hernandez 14:56

To this day, I have a garden. My husband always says—I've been married thirty-six years—there's not a season that I don't have a garden because that's the Filipino way. That's what I grew up—I know it's a way for a lot of people—but in my mind you had your tomatoes, you had your green beans, you had your other vegetables, and I like zucchini. But you always have fresh vegetables, so very fortunate. At twenty-one, I bought a home on San Juan Road and I don't live in that home anymore. I lived on San Juan road, again, but in 1985, I was privileged—I'm going to say—I bought another home, but I had it built. So I live on some property again. And what my father and my mother had taught me, and from the experience of my childhood, and the hard work of the fields, and hoeing and knowing where to irrigate and knowing how to work hard and to trim trees and to—we didn't have a lot of trees, I do now. I can still maintain my property. I get help now and then but my husband and I maintain it. And here I still am.

Veronica Hernandez 16:14

That is not something that just happened accidentally. That's something that I was prepared to do. I was trained to do as a child. So my parents did that for me and then my Mom also said, "It's time we start thinking." Because my Mom realized: she's twenty-three to twenty-five years younger than my father, what happens if he should pass away? She was ultra responsible. And my dad like that thought too. And sure enough, he did. And so she had her own pension, but he left her with a paid for house. So that's how they met. Farm work was our avenue and then it led to education, but my father still farmed and worked for J.J. Crosetti. Retirement wasn't in his vocabulary, it was just when your body gave out. So I think he might have been seventy-five and he'd sit in my garage, "Honey, I'm going to plant sugar peas again." "Pop, you can't do that anymore." He could barely get out of the chair. And I said, "Pop, you can't do that anymore. It's too much." He made the five acres on his property.

Veronica Hernandez 17:33

So, let me say, their marriage wasn't the traditional marriage of maybe somebody's ten years apart. So that part was a little different. There were times that we traveled around with my father. He used me a lot to explain things because of his very thick accent. He would get frustrated in stores and they would—let me say, I believe they got frustrated with him—but that was the reason. When I became a teacher, I specialized in English as a second language because I wanted to do it very, very considerately, with sensitivity, with respect for the primary language, and the culture. I was prepped for that also at a very young age. I would do my

Dad's Crosetti time cards. My Mom would do them, but then she started going to school, so then I had to. Dad would say, "Why pruning. W-I-N G?" I say, "I don't know, Dad. Action of pruning? But I was a kid, I didn't know how to say, "Okay, oh gosh, drop the 'E'." Drive him nuts. So I'd fill it all out and there again was, "Crap. How do you explain this to second language learners?" So, what a beautiful heritage I was able to grow up in. From fieldwork, to education, to learning how to work with second language learners. And then my father passed in 1995, he was eighty-nine. But, he was very proud that I went back to school. And he told me a month before he passed, "Veron, they don't want you there." I was shocked at his words. "They don't want you there, but you make sure you stay there. You don't leave. You don't—" and I go, "I'm not going to leave, Dad." And I remember we were driving on Riverside Drive. We were driving his little grey pickup. He couldn't drive anymore so I was driving. But I later realized why: because a lot of doors were not opened for him. And he was wanting me to know that in a very different way, because I think Roy mentioned, you know how our parents don't want to reveal to their children how they were—if they were treated, abused or mistreated. So I didn't hear a lot of that.

Veronica Hernandez 20:37

Many trips to visit my uncle who—you see this—my uncles carrying me as a baby. That's my Dad's brother. So throughout—when I started to learn to drive, I would take my Dad to visit him in Arroyo Grande. And he would tell me about the fields he worked in, in Greenfield. And he would share some of the ill treatment that took place from time to time and my husband would hear these stories as well. But he was resilient and he didn't want to impress that on us and he just would say it and then it was it. And we were on to happier tones, happier conversation. So that and my Mom went off to school and she became a teacher and my father still farmed. And I live a mile away from the family home, even at this time. And so Dad would make frequent visits here. And that was a joy. You know, 1989 earthquake. Who was here? Like before it even stopped shaking, and it was him. You know, "Everybody okay, honey?" And he's just checking, making sure things were okay. But what did he bring? You know those field, big tins. Then—in the '60s—they had them and you put water and you kind of press the button and you get water? He brought that tin full of water. I go, "Oh, okay, Pop. So, yeah, maybe we don't have water." We were all in shock. But I remember him bringing that and it reminded me of the '60s and thought, "Oh, yeah, that was—" So his tool shed was like an archive, really, for a very long time. So let's say—is that a correct way? Museum, a farm Museum.

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 22:32

Different tools, different paraphernalia or equipment he would have?

Veronica Hernandez 22:38

He would have a lot of—we still have them, I still own the lanterns of the '60s, early '60s—irrigation lanterns. And those were not a flashlight like you do now.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 22:50

Right.

Veronica Hernandez 22:50

You lit them and the ones you hold. I have them, my husband is very sentimental, he keeps them. And then the weighing scale that is for the green beans. We would weigh the green beans and punch a card. I was the puncher because I was already learning to read and he deemed me pretty good at math. But I was so scared I was going to make a mistake. So I didn't last too long, "No, Dad. No, please, don't make me do it." So that scale we have, I still have the puncher. My father, he gave us these things—he had a premonition that it was the end of his life. So he gave my husband and I some of these things. And also, this little mechanism to make the payroll checks for the workers, we have that. And I still have his suit, one of his suits. And he used to have them made in San Francisco, Chinatown. But that was in his single days. He had gone to San Francisco first, of course, off the boat. And he worked in a Chinese restaurant. So when he would run out of cotton, long underwear: "Honey, we go to Chinatown." "Dad, I think they might sell them here in town." What was it called—B and B's, on Main Street? "Let's go to B and B's, Dad. Please." All the way to San Francisco and here we'd go. He thought that was the place to buy them. So it was cold in the winter and he wanted to be warm. And when you're working in the fields, and it's cold and muddy, you want to feel comfortable. So I would abide by that, "Okay, we'll go." But he would treat me to duck in the Chinese restaurant. There were these Chinese market, there would be duck hanging. Now we would always get back. So, I wouldn't eat that often, but that was a treat.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 24:55

Great. Thank you Veronica. And I appreciate you sharing your insights and opinions and observations. Amanda, do you want to ask some questions now?

Amanda Gamban 25:06

Yeah, just kind of going into your family and your childhood, I wanted to ask about your siblings: how many siblings, their names, and some of their experiences also growing up in the fields and with your dad as well?

Veronica Hernandez 25:21

Well, my sister is two years younger than me, Antoinette. And my brother is ten years, nine years younger than me and that's Paul. So in the field, my sister was there side-by-side with me. But when it came to lunchtime, I had to go in and prepare some lunch for us and make

sure my brother ate, because he was a toddler—he was little. So those were kinds of jobs. My brother was little, learning to walk in the field. He worked in the field, but due to age differences, my sister and I were there. We picked cucumbers and strawberries. And in those days, the strawberries had runners—you know, these long— and my sister and I had the job of picking up the runners after they were cut. Now, picture little young people with burlap sacks and filling them up. So my sister and I, what I did, she did. So we had our jobs in our little ranch. Then we would go to the Crosetti Ranch. Sometimes I think I got her into more mischief, I was the leader of that. I remember there was a Jeep and I learned how to drive it going, "Hey, do you want to go for a ride?" "Okay!" So we'd go for rides. Basically we did things together, my sister and I, but my brother was a lot younger. So his experience, my experiences with him was mostly caring for him. But we worked in the field, he took his nap and then the playpen was next to the packing shed. And when he needed his nap, our field was near our house so he slept in the house. Our packing shed was our garage and then we had one in the back.

Veronica Hernandez 27:16

So we were known for cucumbers and pickling cucumbers. People would come from San Francisco with big orders and my Mom had all the recipes for dill, bread, and butter. And my job was to cut stocks a dill. And the charge for that was twenty-five cents per—if the customer wanted it. So we would go out with a sickle and it was a little—and I'm sure my sister did the same thing. We would go and then we'd twist it, bring it in. There the orders would be filled and the people would come and pick them up and pay my Mom. And that was kind of a fun little farm that happened out of our garage: it was a pickling cucumber ranch for a good amount of years. Then we branched off. I remember George and Phillips and we would go deliver whatever people didn't pick up—George and Phillips is a shipping company in Watsonville. And my sister would go too! We were in the front seat with Dad. You know, we just were close in age, so we would go too. My Uncle Yon, my Dad's brother, would treat us on a Saturday when we didn't work on the field: give us a ride to the theater in Watsonville and we would watch some fun movies. But that was what we did for enjoyment, and we were quite pleased to do that. So my brother was a lot younger, so he stayed home and my sister and I did pretty much the same things. That's what I remember.

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 29:07

Great. Sounds like a great childhood, Veronica. Amanda did—

Veronica Hernandez 29:11

Yeah, no complaints.

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 29:13

Next question, Amanda.

Amanda Gamban 29:15

Yeah, kind of going off going to the movies: What did you do for fun when you were growing up with your family? And then are there any spots like within the Watsonville area that you feel like—

Veronica Hernandez 29:27

Oh yes, skating!

Amanda Gamban 29:29

—home for you?

Veronica Hernandez 29:30

Skating! There were Filipino fathers that would load up a car—and my Dad was one—we were in Aromas, we would go to the skating rink in Pajaro. So that was a big deal for us on Fridays and Friday nights. And, you know, as hard as my Dad worked, it was enjoyment for him. Now he would go and sit there and sometimes take off to downtown to do some errands or whatever he did. And then he'd come back, but he would basically stay there. We never had to wait for a ride. He was always there way ahead of time. Twenty-five cents and we would go skating. So that was a Friday night. And once in a while we would go on Saturday, but mostly it was a Friday night. And then there was the movies, it was always a matinee we went there at night. And we would see movies of the '60s, you know, "Herbie the Lovebug." It was funny, my husband and I, we didn't know each other. Well, actually, his family worked for my family in the field but we didn't—we were little kids. Well, he was at the show too and he would remind me us of the shows that were there. So we didn't, I didn't know—everybody, every kid in Watsonville was there. And they were giving hula hoop giveaways. And my sister and I will be side-by-side and eating popcorn and my uncle would give us a dollar—and that was a lot—and we would buy our little treats and really just enjoyed that time.

Veronica Hernandez 31:02

Also, I think the Recreation Center in Aromas—in Watsonville—well, they extended it to Aromas and that was very important to us. But here's the deal, we had to work in the field till three till—I don't know, something like one o'clock, two o'clock—then we could go to recreation. Not because my parents would have to be mean to us, but they needed us. You know, they needed me to go get dill, they needed us to help load a truck. So we were off on every—I believe the day was Tuesdays—we were able to go swimming and the recreation bus would pick us up in Aromas and we would go swimming at the Watsonville High School pool. For again, a minimal fee of like twenty-five cents. So those were the activities that we did around fieldwork.

Veronica Hernandez 31:52

I got sneaky after a while and I said, "Hey, I want to go to summer school! I want to start to get older." Because I knew, "Ugh, I could go to summer school, maybe I don't have to work in the field as much." I started getting tired. So I went to summer school about two summers and that was about it. And then those days, I think summer school's half a day for a month. And it was a big deal to get bused into Watsonville. We didn't go to Watsonville other than to the loading dock. And it was wonderful because those men knew—I can still see them—and my Dad's nickname was "Skippy." "Hi, Skippy, what do you got?" And I would look and watch them treat my father with importance, and that was a big deal to me. So my Dad would get in the mail. They taught me how to read the agricultural reports: what produce was selling and for how much a pound. So that's how they chose where the produce was going to. Because my sister and I would go to the mailbox and get the mail, "Hey, here's the mail! Here's the agriculture report." Open it up—I remember it was a triplicate—and I would read it and I'd say, "What's this mean?" And they would tell me what it meant and I learned from there: "Oh, that's why Dad. You're going to send so much of this produce to the San Francisco store" or wherever and so much to this because of the amount that they would pay per pound, or whatever. They buy per lug. Yeah, so that was it for enjoyment and then going back to the loading docks.

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 33:49

That's great. Amanda, you got another one?

Amanda Gamban 33:58

How was your experience growing up? And when did you stop working the fields? Because I know Roy was mentioning that you went to college and that transition—how was that?

Veronica Hernandez 34:08

I did. I did. But I really was a later—well in Aromas, apricots were big. So farmwork was ingrained in me. Ingrained in me and not in a bad way. So I thought, "Oh, I think I'll branch out and go work for the Silva's!" They had apricots and we cut apricots and I would get paid a check for that. With my parents I would get paid. And I had a little band aid box. And I remember I would just chuck my money in. They would pay me like five dollars a week. And I remember saving enough for a bike. And then later, as you get older, you want clothes and you had that Sears catalog. So they would pay us five, ten dollars a week. But when I went to the apricots, wow, that was at hunk of change. I would get paid twenty-five dollars. So I went from my farm work to being an older teenager and then going to the apricots Can you believe that? And then I would work in the Crosetti orchards, like I told you. We would get paid there. And then as a young adult, I branched off and I graduated on to the packing shed of broccoli in Crosetti. That was like, big time for me. Like, yikes.

Veronica Hernandez 35:44

So I got married right after high school—everybody was, that was what everybody did. And I decided, "Okay, how can I make this little money go far?" So I was taking classes at Cabrillo to be a preschool teacher, then I was working at the packing shed, and I bought my home. My husband and I—that's my first husband, five years we were married—and we bought that home. And so still it was agriculture because really that was all I knew. And so then, in the fall, I was still in the shed. But this time it wasn't broccoli, it was apples. So I got to be in the conveyor belts. And it was a bag that blew open, I had to hold it. Five pounds of apples dropped in it and I put the twisty and I put it on a conveyor belt. I thought I was big stuff because I got paid more and it wasn't as muddy and cold. So then when school started, I was in college, I was at Cabrillo.

Veronica Hernandez 36:55

Well, I went part time. I got my preschool teaching permit. I love being a preschool teacher, but the money wasn't very lucrative. Unfortunately, that very important job. I needed more money and I went into the offices. I worked at Watsonville High, I worked for Pajaro Valley School District for thirty-one years. And for LSS school district for four or five. So, I guess it might have been my mid-twenties when I finally said goodbye to agriculture. But I've never forgotten and the property I own now is agriculture. I still have an orchard of six trees. I have a garden, lots of things that still are part of agriculture. But yeah I was thirty and I became a teacher and went back to school full time. I had two children by that time. And I have remarried and I bought my home where I live now: 1987 San Manuel Road. And I still live here, that was 1985, and I became a teacher. But my childhood and my time and agriculture shaped me to be very—my goal was to be a very aware and compassionate teacher for the children and families in our Pajaro Valley place of agriculture. During that time I was a migrant teacher and I was very happy to be a migrant teacher because I didn't travel away. I was in one place, but I certainly knew what seasonal income was. I knew what it was like in the winter to eat meagerly. But we were happy, we didn't know any different.

Veronica Hernandez 39:09

I certainly learned during those times how to eat ramen noodles. You know, make them look like a delicacy. My Dad taught us well how to put egg in there and dice up green onion and put some more soyo in there—and oh my gosh, that was a big treat. So it was my mid-twenties. But agriculture still stayed with me. Because of that I always had the kids of agricultural families and it was a challenge sometimes because the poor things would come and go and then the State would say, "You have to teach them to read." And I'm thinking, "Wow, okay. I have new challenges here." But I'm glad that I was always very aware—and many teachers were—but I want to say I walked in their shoes. And maybe those kids couldn't work in the field

with their parents. I welcomed the fact that during conferences, they would be embarrassed to come in because they would have their field garb. They would have washed their hands but I tell them, "Oh, please, don't." So that was a joy to me to always say it, "No, no, I've been there. Let's celebrate it! And not be embarrassed of it. This is a beautiful thing." So in turn, I got many, many crates of raspberries, strawberries, and blackberries and whatever they were harvesting. So, yeah. So did I ever leave agriculture? I don't think so.

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 40:57

Right. So Veronica, tell me as well, part of your growing up you had to deal with community. You were very much part of two communities, but indeed, the Catholic Community at the Filipino Association and district dads' groupings and laying out what your parents to do different activities in the community. Whether it be family events, roasting a pig, a christening, what have you, it was quite festive for you. There was always something going on, is that right?

Veronica Hernandez 41:21

That's correct, yes. And it was my father that would do a lot of that and my sister was with me side-by-side because we're so close in age. And there will be meetings at the St. Patrick's Church. I'm sure my sister will remember going to the Sarah Center. And we would take our homework or books and we would color and then Mrs. Damasco would always bring delicious gastronom. And we would always—you know, those were aunties and uncles. And even though biologically they weren't, we understood that they came from the Ilocos Sur, Santo Domingo, Philippine Islands, and so there was a bond that was of brotherhood and family. So I learned also many words that were in the Ilokano dialect that my father spoke and shared with my uncles that were the same in Spanish. It was really interesting because I had the experience with my grandparents. So we would be at church gatherings. Filipinos were—and still—at that time very Catholic. I still attend Mass. On behalf of my of what I was taught from my parents and we were active and I became active.

Veronica Hernandez 42:44

That was just natural. You were not afraid to be readers, you were not afraid to be lecturers, let me put it that way. At church, to organize picnics, to organize gatherings. I remember at that time they would have—Mom and Dad would go to Stockton—because all the Filipino associations would meet in Stockton, and my cousin would come babysit. It was like, "What is this?" It was like a big deal. I would see my Mom buy this beautiful new dress and Dad wore his suit. And I was quite proud of that. It was like, okay, and I would pay attention to all of that. And they were active, they were active in our community. And therefore, I feel I learned to be confident in being active. I wasn't the best at it. There probably better organizers and I liked to follow with them. But then there were many times that, and to this day, I still do quite a few

things in that community. But in those days, the Filipinos, I don't remember too many others. A few Anglo women that were just wonderful and loving. But they were married to Filipino men or—I don't know that they were in married. I don't think they were, I think they were their partners and I think it's because they weren't able to. Because when my uncle passed, I was there with my father. I looked at a lot of paperwork, and I found that my uncle had a lot of money, but he couldn't purchase the property. So my Aunt Mae and her family purchased it. They were wonderful people that never took advantage of him, just left him to death and left all of us.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 44:37

And Veronica, you're referring to Leon J. Lazo, that's your uncle you're referring to right?

Veronica Hernandez 44:42

Well, yeah. And as I find out later, it was a distant cousin. And his money was who brought my Uncle Yun, that you see me in my picture with, and my father because they weren't as—they didn't have as much money but they had a way to get here through them. And when I interviewed my Dad for a class, he told me that and he told me he came on a boat. And he got lucky because he was the cook and there was a storm. He was in the galley and the other Filipino men weren't—there were many that weren't as fortunate and they got swept off. Because they just stayed on the top of the boat because that's the only place that gave them. I can still see Dad telling me the story: he was in his rocking chair and he was eating apples—and Dad liked to put vinegar in his apples, you know? And here my daughter Anna, his granddaughter, what does she tell me last week? COVID has lifted. "Oh, Mom, can you slice me apples like grandpa and sprinkle some vinegar on it?" I go, "You remember that?" She goes, "That's the only way I eat them." I say, "Oh, okay."

Veronica Hernandez 45:58

So you know my oldest daughter, Anna, very close to my father. That was the first grandchild so he adored her and had a lot of opportunity to see her because we were only a mile away. So yeah, those I know I go back. But anyway, that the Filipinos were the Damascos, the Ragsacs, the Alminianas, the—gosh, you name names, and I'll remember them. And I pick up the phone: "Honey, it's Uncle Benny?" "Oh, okay, Uncle Benny, I'll go get my father." They weren't biologically related, my uncle, but that's the respectful way. "Oh, it's Auntie Rufina." "Okay, Auntie. I'll go get them." And it was always because they were planning some kind of barbecue and get together of some sort. Always at the end of a harvest we would have a celebration of the harvest and all the workers would come together. So that was always—we looked forward to that.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 47:11

That's beautiful. Veronica, you told me too about just belonging and you being of mixed race and you trying to go to college and just living in Aromas, going to Watsonville. You told me that you had some concerns or observations about just being different and coming into your own, realizing your ethnicity that you may be different—plus being Filipina and Latina. Tell me, in coming of age, how did you feel and how did you feel a sense of belonging or not belonging? How did you cross that bridge to develop yourself, your psyche, your outlook, or even just your well being?

Veronica Hernandez 47:46

I feel I was very blessed. I was very blessed with an upbringing that gave me confidence. I was very proud to be Filipino and I would share that I was very proud to be my family was from Texas. And I would share, "Hey, in the summertime, I hear Ilokano, I hear Spanish, and then I go back to school and hear English." I mean, it kind of was a hard deal sometimes to adjust in the fall. But I became very confident and it shaped who I wanted to be and what I wanted to do with our society. I wanted to—Ilokano was a language I thought, "Yikes. That's going to be hard for me to learn." So I said, "I want to improve my Spanish." So I did that. And I went to Cabrillo and then I studied abroad. I earned a scholarship and I studied in Cuernavaca and I stayed there. Being Filipina, I learned to cook foods. In fact, two years ago—oh no, less. Before COVID—"Veronica, will you cook us some pancit?" And I still am around my Auntie Irene and learn a lot from her. I love her dearly and through this COVID, every week: "Auntie, how are you? Auntie how are you?" She lives two hours away. During this Mother's Day, I will find the time to go over there.

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 49:42

Amanda you there?

Amanda Gamban 49:45

Yeah, I'm here. I think we might have lost her. One second, I'm going to—

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 49:50

You looking good? We're looking good?

Amanda Gamban 49:52

Yeah!

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 49:53

Okay.

Amanda Gamban 49:53

Yeah, it's really great to hear all of her stories. Uhm, let me see. I'm just gonna make you co host really quick, just in case. But it looks like she's still connected. Do you want me to text her?

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 50:10

Yeah, yeah.

Amanda Gamban 50:17

I'm gonna go ahead and pause the recording.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 50:19

So we don't want to keep you too much longer. We'll probably do like fifteen more minutes and then we'll call it a wrap. Unless you feel—it's, you know, Cinco de Mayo. You know, hey.

Veronica Hernandez 50:28

Oh, I should go have something a little strong for myself?

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 50:31

I should go. I should go have something. [laughs] I'm kidding.

Veronica Hernandez 50:34

Okay, so if you want—yeah, so fifteen more minutes is fine. And then if you tell me—give me direction after that.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 50:42

Okay, cool. I just want to make sure you're comfortable and we're on a good path. Is that right, do you feel comfortable?

Veronica Hernandez 50:47

Yes. Yes.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 50:48

Okay, great. Cool. Amanda, you ready for your next question?

Amanda Gamban 50:56

Yes, so I'm trying to think where we left off.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 50:58

Okay.

Amanda Gamban 50:59

Uhm, what—

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 51:02

It was about the Filipino community and she was talking about just the community life and experiences.

Amanda Gamban 51:10

Yeah, a sense of belonging.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 51:11

Right.

Amanda Gamban 51:14

And yeah, is there anything from your experience growing up or like an object that you are very fond of or that just reminds you of your childhood? I know you touched on the milk jugs and lanterns.

Veronica Hernandez 51:30

Let's see. I think it—what's the year that little pickup? It's a Chevrolet pickup. My uncle, Cipriano, had a little red one. And my father had a long bed blue one. Gosh, it was like a 1957 Chevy pickup. It has a little round nose on it. There's somebody that's selling one, I told my husband, "Gosh, I wish I could buy that pickup." But for \$37,000 I can't. But they fixed it up. But that will always be. Oh, so now they're like a big decoration, ornamental decoration. You see that little Chevy pickup? You see them on every—people decorate their homes with it or their garages with them. For me, that was what we loaded the produce in. That's the first vehicle I learned to drive. That was my first vehicle that I could drive from Aromas to high school in. My husband now says I used to be a little bit embarrassed while I was a teenager. You know, who drives a stick shift farm truck? Well, I did. And my husband said, "You didn't realize it, but we thought you were pretty cool." I go—you know, I didn't say anything—but I thought, "Yes!" Because I would—I don't know, it was pretty dusty. But that was that. And maybe before I leave this world I'll own one again. So that is like—that meant a lot to me. Because that put food on our table, that transported the produce from field—what they call field-to-market—I would say at that time. So I loaded many a truck.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 53:25

Right. Veronica, it sounds like your family struggled to maintain yourself. But, indeed, you were stable, which is that beautiful thing. But you weren't necessarily rich, rich, but you're rich with a

lot of stories and heritage and a lot of pride from your parents' hard work. Tell me—it wasn't always easy, you know. Did you ever confront or encounter any sort of racism or not belonging or any sort of conjecture regarding prejudice or racism at all?

Veronica Hernandez 53:52

Oh, yes. Well, you know, in the small town—I'm not going to name it because I don't want to label it or anything—a small town of sixty, there were not very many people of color at all. And I deem myself, especially after a long summer work, pretty tanned, pretty dark. Even though we wore hats and long sleeves. There was no, unfortunately, sunblock. And I'd have to sit outside. I used to think, "Why do you make me visit outside? I can never go in?" But you know, I have to be careful with that because I'm not sure if it was that era; they don't like kids in the house. Or was it when I went over? You know, I wasn't of the right—let's say—type of childhood. And I remember hearing it I was invited to a birthday party and they were commenting that I was pretty tanned. Well, the birthday party I remember was like in September or something. But I had a pretty strong little spirit and all I could think of is, "You make me sit outside on this porch, one day I'm gonna own this house. One day I'm going to have"—my husband laughs because I've told him this story and a few of my close friends—"and I'm going to have such high education you're not going to be able to touch me. And I did it.

Veronica Hernandez 55:23

And I remember having—I was in eighth grade and boy I like, but his parents didn't like me. And all I could think of is, "What did I do that caused that?" Well, I wasn't the right shade. But he was very nice—his parents weren't very nice—but he was very nice. The little girls that were my friends, they liked me! So it's really a shame. That says that they learn to define differences from whoever brings them up because they didn't define any differences to me. Obviously, they would go, "Want to come over?" And we would color, play jacks, you know, just talk. And they would offer them snacks, and they wouldn't offer me. And I thought—I was such a stinker, but I never said anything—"I don't want to eat that tray of food anyway, I got better food at home," I would think because it was my first experience seeing TV tray food. I didn't know what that was. It had little compartments of stuff, but they would never offer me anything. And so those were—like I learned from that. I thought, "I'll never do that, to anyone." And I learned from that, that even though their parents and adults might think that way, my friends didn't think that way. Because they treated me very nice. And they invited me over and then a Native American Girl moved to my small community. And there was like, [gasps] we connected. "Well, why?" We are people at color, you know, girls that had some similarities. And she was wonderful. And nothing too harsh, I guess. But enough to tell me, "I think I need to—if you don't want to me to be on this property—I think I need to earn it one day." Then I did [laughs] And I thought, "Okay."

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 57:29

You had the last laugh I guess, huh Veronica?

Veronica Hernandez 57:34

I was a little bit of a stinker but I didn't attack. I didn't tell them.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 57:39

Right? Just like your dad—do you think that carried over from your dad? Like, he just didn't want to talk about it. He just had to endure or persevere. He was very resilient you said. He may have encountered stuff, quote, unquote, but he just wanted to keep it moving forward, do you think? Is that kind of maybe where you get the mindset from?

Veronica Hernandez 57:57

Definitely. And my Mom from from Southern Texas. I heard stories of it as well. A lot of segregation. But then again, she just told the story very lively. And we were raised around a lot of priests and nuns. And they were pretty good to me. I can't say I had any bad experiences with that. But that—you've got to know—they were at our house every Friday. Every Friday. And they must have felt comfortable at our house, I guess. They would have a nice dinner. And then it was catechism day and my parents would say, "Come to eat." Because really, that is the Filipino way. You know, come to eat before you go home. So because they would leave our little town and drive, well, probably ten to fifteen miles away. So yeah, that's all I have to share about that, really.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 58:58

Okay, cool. So I'm going to ask you another question and then Amanda's going to ask a question and we'll wrap it up. So Veronica, in heading towards the end of this interview, I know that you told me you went to the library three times to see the exhibit—the Watsonville Is in the Heart exhibit at the Watsonville Public Library—three times and you also have the calendar, maybe two calendars, by now. Tell me, what does the project mean to you and how does it make you feel when you go to the library or look at the calendar and all the pictures and such?

Veronica Hernandez 59:25

Oh, it makes me feel so young again. It makes me feel like, "Wow, I'm six, seven, eight up to my early teen years." It makes me so proud that I knew these people because they're such formal pictures. These people were beautiful people in and out. And it makes me feel very proud that I still carry on some of what I learned back then. It helps me remember those times. And I took a lot of pictures because I thought, "Oh, wow, I don't have this picture!" And I could name everybody in that picture, a couple of the big, community pictures. And that was really great. The calendars, my DeOcampo family in Arroyo Grande, it was very moving to them. I

also grew up going to their activities in Arroyo Grande, the Filipino community activities. And I posed the question, "Maybe this is something you should start?" Our agricultural town in Watsonville, when I went to the Smithsonian, in Washington, DC, I purposely went there, to that section to see how instrumental Watsonville was and we really are. And the Filipinos are there in the picture as well as other—but we need to have a bigger spot. Because our hard work and the work ethics that were instilled in me and that I saw in those pictures, need to have a bigger wall, need to have a bigger podium. Because we were pretty instrumental and look at 2021. And I think for the thirty-six years I gave to education, that community planted that seed. Those experiences planted that seed. So the teacher that I was—and I did receive some accolades for that—is because of those people. So when I see them, I'm happy that I never forgot. I'm happy that they were my roots. As well as my Mom's side. But, I'm pleased and thank you, because I visited three times, "I gotta get off work just a little earlier"—I was alone two times, I might have gone and gone four—and just visiting it because I was with them. So thank you.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 1:02:39

Thank you. Thank you, Veronica. Amanda?

Amanda Gamban 1:02:42

I think that's beautiful. I think I'm trying to think of any other questions. But kind of going off to off of that, just what you would like people to know about your community, as these stories are going to be archived? Kind of just the takeaways, because I think you kind of wrapped it up pretty well, but is there anything else that you would like folks to know as they're learning about your histories and your family?

Veronica Hernandez 1:03:10

Well, the history I shared is really from probably the late '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s. That is, you know, and I do know that Filipinos now that have come, they're going to have a different story. But mine—what do I want them to take away? We were young children in the fields. And those were the days of no child labor laws. So we walked with our parents, but they entered some harshness that I didn't see. So that was my era, my time. And I know other Filipino Americans that are my age and they share the same stories. We enjoy talking to each other. And some will say I didn't do agriculture, well that was because that's a later generation. Those were people that came maybe '80s or they're just younger than me. Yeah, I'd say we were the agricultural era, for sure.

Dioscoro “Roy” Recio 1:04:27

That's great. All right, Veronica, I really appreciate you taking the time to speak with us and I appreciate you giving us consent to video. On behalf of the Tobera Project and the UCSC

collaborative to partner this effort to preserve and honor and celebrate our manong generation: your parents, my parents, all of our aunties and uncles, and just the community in general. This is a good time to live and give thanks and also to appreciate all the things that we have. Particularly on Cinco de Mayo too [laughs] let's celebrate what do you say?

Veronica Hernandez 1:05:04

Yeah, yeah, I think I need to go and crack open a cold one on behalf of Cinco de Mayo.

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 1:05:10

Yes, ma'am. Amanda, any closing thoughts?

Amanda Gamban 1:05:13

I was just going to say thank you for sharing all of your stories and it's so nice to meet you. Hopefully, after COVID is all done, I'd love to meet everyone in person. Thank you so much.

Veronica Hernandez 1:05:25

You're welcome. It was a pleasure. Thank you for asking me to tell my story.

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 1:05:31

Veronica, you have a good night, okay? You take care of yourself.

Veronica Hernandez 1:05:34

All right, same to you. Thank you, Roy.

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 1:05:36

Bye-bye now.

Veronica Hernandez 1:05:38

Thank you, Amanda

Dioscoro "Roy" Recio 1:05:38

Okay, see you!