

# UC Santa Cruz

## Oral History Collaborations

### Title

Lorraine "Rain" Bongolan interviewed by Una Lynch

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## Lorraine “Rain” Bongolan interviewed by Una Lynch

**Speakers:** Lorraine “Rain” Bongolan; Una Lynch

**Date:** April 5, 2023

### **Scope and Contents:**

In this interview, originally recorded in person, Lorraine “Rain” Sipin Bongolan speaks with Watsonville is in the Heart team member, Una Lynch. Rain talks about her father, Felix Hidalgo Bongolan’s immigration from Santiago, Ilocos Sur, Philippines to Oahu, Hawai’i where he worked as a foreman for Dole pineapple plantations during the 1940s. She shares how Felix met Irene “Inning” Sipin. They communicated via letters until Felix was able to travel back to the Philippines to marry Irene in 1951. Rain also talks about her mother, Irene’s life growing up in the Philippines during Japanese occupation. Rain explains how her parents eventually settled in Watsonville, where Irene’s brothers were already living. She describes Felix’s work as a camp cook at a Filipino labor camp on Lee Road in Watsonville and Irene’s involvement with Filipino community events. Rain also elaborates on how notions of assimilation and the American nuclear family impacted her experience growing up in Watsonville.

### **Una Lynch 00:01**

Okay. Sounds good. Nice. Well, I'll get started. My name is Una Lynch. And today's date is April 5, 2023. And I'm here today with Rain Bongolan. And we're in Watsonville, California. And so I just wanted to say thank you for doing this interview with Watsonville is in the Heart and agreeing to come and sit and talk with me today. And so basically, we start the interview, I'm going to ask for your full name, and then your date and location of birth.

### **Lorraine Bongolan 00:41**

My name is Lorraine Sipin Bongolan. I'm married to Rick Van Stolk, but never took his name per se. So Lorraine Sipin Bongolan, and professionally and otherwise most people know me as Rain.

### **Una Lynch 01:01**

Perfect, yeah. And then where is your date of birth and location of birth?

### **Lorraine Bongolan 01:06**

I was born in Watsonville, California, the old Watsonville hospital on June 14, 1952. That's seventy years ago. Goodness gracious. Yeah.

### **Una Lynch 01:20**

Um, well, I guess kind of the first thing that I'm curious to ask you a little bit about is your parents and maybe starting with your dad and where he was born. And just a little bit about him. Yeah.

### **Lorraine Bongolan 01:35**

Both my parents were born in Santiago in Ilocos Sur— northern islands. Dad was born in October 1911. He— I don't know a lot about his life in the Philippines, per se, as a young man. He left when he was probably nineteen years old to move to Hawai'i, like a whole wave of young men left. There was, you

know, great poverty in the Philippines, and especially in the northern areas. And there were probably recruiters early on, kind of pre-plantation days, of people who own plantations— pineapple plantations in Hawai'i on the main island. And I'm sure he was recruited among several thousands of young men to go and live there. And so that's what I know of him living there. There are some, you know, very few pictures, but interesting pictures of what you can imagine young men's lives are like, you know, on a place that was still a territory at the time.

**Lorraine Bongolan 03:00**

And you know, for a lot of young men coming from the Philippines, the first stop would have been Hawai'i, and then later on, especially those who immigrated in the— jumping a little bit in the forties and fifties. You know, that would be the jumping off place, and then go to California and other places on the West Coast. But for some, the Hawaiian Islands were so familiar with regard to, you know, how they compare to the Philippines, that a lot of them just stayed. A lot of them just stayed. So he, again, I don't know a lot about his younger life there. But I do know that eventually, he became a foreman for the Dole Plantation. And in addition to being a foreman, he might have done this as a volunteer, he taught English as a second language to newcomers who were coming on through.

**Lorraine Bongolan 04:11**

I only— there's another little story about my dad and his life there. I didn't discover this until after he had died, and my mom and I were going through an old trunk. And we found a picture in the trunk of this beautiful blonde lady in the trunk. And I said, "Mom, who's this?" And she said that, "This is your dad's first wife."

**Una Lynch 04:39**

Oh my goodness.

**Lorraine Bongolan 04:40**

Yeah. And I thought, Oh my goodness. And so, you know, there weren't a lot of Filipino women that was part of their history. It was just the men that came over. So a lot of them were lonely, you know, all of that. They met some women in the USO, you know during war time, et cetera. And I guess that was the case with my dad. The marriage didn't last long. And after that disappointment, I think my dad decided—I think he had been writing. He had gone back to the Philippines for a visit, re-met my mom and her family, and began corresponding with her. And it was over the letters that they fell in love. And dad flew back to the Philippines—had to been 1951, married my mom there, you know, didn't want to bring her here unmarried, right? And they moved to Hawai'i, and lived there for a time.

**Lorraine Bongolan 05:52**

That's where my mom learned a lot about American life, you know, that as the Hawaiian Islands were becoming more modernized, et cetera, with that influence coming in the early fifties. And pretty soon thereafter, because I was born in fifty-two, my mom came to California with my dad when she was eight months pregnant with me.

**Una Lynch 06:18**

Wow.

**Lorraine Bongolan 06:19**

Yeah, wasn't my dad's choice, but because my mom's brothers were all here in Watsonville— And I'll tell you about that. It was that she was kind of forced to come here because they wanted their little sister basically to take care of them— to kind of be their maid pretty much to tell the truth, you know. So that's what happened there. And for my dad, he was then hired by one of my uncles to support the farms. You know, the whole agribusiness piece— my uncle was the labor contractor. And so he would contract these young men that he got, for a few months out of the year from Mexico. He brought them up. They worked, but they needed a place to stay. They were not necessarily, you know, blended into Watsonville life. They lived in labor camps out on Lee Road. And they live there, they were fed there, my dad brought them lunch in the fields in a panel truck, et cetera. So it became kind of the family endeavor to support farm labor, right?

**Lorraine Bongolan 07:41**

Filipinos were unique in that they could speak English, as well as Ilokano, as well as Spanish. And so they were often hired to be the middlemen in the labor relations, here in terms of the supporting the farm's labor. So, they lived— we lived on basically the labor contractors property. There was a house there, and then the labor barracks were further down, and my dad's kitchen was part of that too. In that space, even though my mom's brothers who were the main family who were here— they had kind of gone through the same transition, they moved into Watsonville. They would still congregate in that farm house every day. They would go there at the end of the day. They didn't go home to their wives and the rest of it— because my mom was this great cook, my dad was this great cook, and it was the place where they could almost feel that sense of the village in the Philippines. I didn't realize that until I had gone, as a teenager, back to the Philippines to see it for the first time. And I experienced that same feeling that I experienced when I was from about zero to five. When I was around all of my uncles, you know, all of my uncles. That's all these people in that picture that you picture of. That's a great picture, by the way.

**Una Lynch 09:12**

It is.

**Lorraine Bongolan 09:13**

Yeah. So what was I going to say about that. So— about my mom— she, you know, during wartime it's a little sketchy, but what what she had she had a traditional upbringing in the Philippines, you know, up to the time she was a teenager when the war broke out. Let's see her birthday— she was born in July of 1919. Um, the war broke out and they— she talked about hiding in the mountains for probably eight or nine years.

**Una Lynch 10:03**

Wow.

**Lorraine Bongolan 10:03**

Yeah. And because in a war torn situation, the Japanese had taken over a lot of the villages, et cetera. They hid in the mountains, especially if you had, you know, the young —a lot of young women hid with

their families in the mountains. She would go, you know, they would take turns going to try to get rice out of their fields without being caught somehow. And they lived that way for a long, long time.

**Lorraine Bongolan 10:38**

Now, mom stayed with her family, again, in those back villages in the mountains during that time. My—her younger sister had the opportunity to go to Manila, kind of escaped that to live with a kind of a more well to do uncle to be a housemaid, but also get an education. So my aunt became educated, got a college degree, you know, etcetera. Went back to the village. And ended up being her older sisters' teacher. And that was a running joke in the family. Because my mom and her older friends would be there at school, with my—with her younger sister trying to teach them. And mom would basically defy her, you know? They had lived the life. They had hid, you know, from what they perceived as the enemy at that time. So they told stories of smoking big cigars rolled from raw tobacco leaves in the back of the classroom.

**Lorraine Bongolan 11:55**

It's like who's gonna make it stop. And it was an interesting—you know, it was always kind of a funny story. But, as I began to dissect it, I realized that a lot of the young women were made to look older, you know. So they wouldn't be attractive to, you know, a lot of the single men and soldiers that were running out there. So their hair was pulled back and they were made to look older that way. Wore old clothes and smoked these really, really bad cigars, you know, made out of raw tobacco leaves. Tobacco leaves are about yay big when they are full.

**Una Lynch 11:55**

Oh my goodness.

**Lorraine Bongolan 12:28**

And so my mom still did it. You know, as you roll up that whole thing whole, and just tie it off. And it was very unattractive and stinky. You know, but she got into the habit of doing that. She would tell that story and it really—you know, she thought it was a funny story to just talk about pastime, but I didn't realize it was really kind of a war story.

**Una Lynch 13:02**

Right.

**Lorraine Bongolan 13:03**

You know, what a lot of young women were forced to do just so they could look a little bit older and undesirable, you know, that way.

**Una Lynch 13:13**

So I guess are her memories of that sort of war period, it seems like, maybe kind of, glazing over the more negative things or trying to focus on—

**Lorraine Bongolan 13:25**

Well that, yeah— I think glazing over is right. As I think she process— I mean, who can understand war? Why it's happening? So just more became, okay, we go and find food after dark. If we're up during the day, and we're out in public, we dress a certain way and smoke a certain thing, you know. So that you, you know, you just don't look as vulnerable as you could look, you know. So she would tell those stories for a long, long time. Anyway, this kind of explains why, even though she's very, very attractive, you know, it was not until she was a lot older, that my dad met her again, you know, on one of his travels back there, from Hawai'i to the Philippines. And so he did he they met— re-met in 1951 and got married, and then came to live in Honolulu, or yeah, in Honolulu. I'll get it for you later, but just kind of really beautiful people. Just want to show you that at some point. But, um, so they live there for a time in Wahiawa and then, again, my mom's brothers were— well where is that that picture?

**Una Lynch 15:06**

Yeah, this one?

**Lorraine Bongolan 15:07**

Yeah. My mom's brothers were all here in Watsonville. My Uncle Frank— is he in this picture? No. He came over, and then he brought his uncle— his brother Joe, and then brought over his other brother, John Sipin. And they all started to work for West Coast Farms, which is— the Recitars own that. It was, at then, just an agribusiness— they didn't call it that then— that was run by a family from Croatia, Yugoslavia at the time. They knew a little bit of English, and no Spanish, and Croatian. For some reason, these young Filipino men were able— because kind of their nature, they're very charming, et cetera— they were able to communicate with these owners. And they became kind of middlemen between them. And a lot of people— a few years later into the fifties— who are from Mexico, a lot of young men— because in the Philippines, in some regions, you speak Spanish.

**Lorraine Bongolan 16:27**

And so they brought people like my uncle, my dad, down to Mexico, to recruit young men to come back up here. So that's how we— you know, Filipinos have kind of been periphery to that whole leadership of foreign labor in Watsonville because they could speak three languages. And they could make a bridge, really, between the owners and people who are working. Yeah.

**Lorraine Bongolan 17:02**

So that's what happened. And so my mom came, and we would have these wonderful— is that? Is that? What's the other picture that you have there? It's just— it's my mom.

**Una Lynch 17:02**

Yeah.

**Una Lynch 17:07**

A glamorous photo of your mom.

**Lorraine Bongolan 17:19**

And then the other one is the whole family, right? Wish I had that picture. I did send something to Roy at one time. A picture of a— you might want to refer— if you want to make notes of that— is that I did

send him [inaudible]. You might want to refer or if you want to make notes of that is that I did send him a— oh, it ended up in the calendar.

**Una Lynch 17:43**

Okay, I have the calendar.

**Lorraine Bongolan 17:44**

So if you look at the calendar, there's a picture that I sent of a family gathering at this camp house. So we usually got together on the weekends and had meals together, or for a kid's birthday, et cetera. So in the calendar, you'll see that picture so that's a connect the dot kind of picture, because it kind of brings together what our life was like trying to be a support system, living here in the United States, but also it kind of carried over a tradition from the Philippines. Right.

**Una Lynch 18:23**

How did all of your mom's siblings end up in Watsonville? Did they come straight from the Philippines? How did they know to come to Watsonville?

**Lorraine Bongolan 18:33**

So my Uncle Frank, who was the oldest of the of the Sipin family S-I-P-I-N, he came over, you know, as a twenty-something back in the twenties and thirties. He came, settled here— a lot of these young men were riding the rails like men, you know, every color, every background, because it was pre-depression, right? He came the year before the depression.

**Una Lynch 19:00**

Oh, no.

**Lorraine Bongolan 19:01**

Yes.

**Lorraine Bongolan 19:02**

Great timing. And so um, landed in this area, but like so many of the men started riding the rails all the way up and working in Washington and Seattle. And usually in the fisheries, right? So salmon— canning salmon at the time was in. So they would follow that route all the way up to Alaska even.

**Una Lynch 19:02**

Great timing.

**Una Lynch 19:26**

Right.

**Lorraine Bongolan 19:27**

So there were times when they would— my son, Micah.

**Una Lynch 19:32**

Hi. Nice to meet you.

**Lorraine Bongolan 19:34**

And they would go all the way up to Alaska. You know, and then come back down. And then depending on the season—because the season for lettuce and strawberries was, you know, there's some thinning that happens in the fall and then mostly that happens spring through the end of summer. But if it wasn't that, there was a four month period where there's nothing happening here. So that's when they would do the thing with the fisheries, right? And do all that. So it was my Uncle Frank, who came the year before the depression, and did that. And things were not much better. It was a worldwide depression, really. And things weren't much better. And so his brother said, "Well, can we come?" And he's like, "Sure." You know, they actually came— his other brother Joe and Uncle John came over. And then they, again, wanted this little servant for them— in the form of my mom— to come over to and so she did, and then her sister. And then my mom and her sister met these men. You know, my mom, re-met my dad and in the Philippines. And then they lived in Hawai'i for a time. But then the brothers said, "Come and live here." They all did.

**Una Lynch 21:00**

Right.

**Lorraine Bongolan 21:00**

And so in— again, you'll see that picture, and I'm, I think, I might be four or five in that picture of that family gathering. That was kind of one of the peaks of it. We were all there. This kind of— I could almost imagine that same group of people in the Philippines. Only now it's here in what was the main farmhouse, that was kind of at the end of these barracks that had a lot of the laborers there in the kitchen, where my dad fed them. My dad ended up being the camp cook. And at a peak season, there were probably, you know, three hundred men that lived there at the end of Lee Road— young Mexican men, nationals. And then, Dad would feed them breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Lunch, oftentimes, he brought out loaded up in a panel truck. The panel truck would go to the fields, strawberry fields, apple orchards. In the summer, I got to ride along. It's crazy.

**Lorraine Bongolan 22:09**

Anyway, but that was our life until, um, let's see— 1955 was the great flood in Watsonville. I mean, Lee Road—everything was just flooded. You could look outside that same farmhouse and to see water, you know, to there. Its a huge flood. It was after that, that my family decided to move into town. Yeah. And by then, all of the others had done as well. You know, we're not the very last, but we all kind of moved there— even though we all gravitated to that same farmhouse as kind of a weekly tradition to get the family together. And we moved to Madison Street. Madison Street's kind of in the heart of Watsonville. The school that I went to was Mintie White, Mintie White school, and she was a student there. Mintie White Elementary School, and it's across from EA Hall, et cetera. I think in a class of twenty-five kids, I was one of two kids of color. Yeah, at the time. It's very interesting.

**Una Lynch 23:36**

How was that experience? Like being in that kind of environment, when then you go home and you're surrounded by your big Filipino family? Was it isolating or did it just seem normal?



**Lorraine Bongolan 23:52**

Well, it was interesting in that that particular street— I thought it was a pretty much a middle class house, but the on that mill in that street there are probably— walking to school, they're probably eight or nine families who were not white— that were Latino families, two Japanese families, myself. You know, there were some single moms that lived there of all different colors but we— you know, it's a short walk to school but we would go there. And go to Mintie White school, what can I say—I spoke English. Everybody spoke English. It's funny was talking to somebody about their elementary— their kinder experience. I mean, I don't know anything else but American schools, you know, and I'm a school teacher now, and I teach others to be school teachers. But I have to say they—you know, if you remember your kinder experience, there's a little miniature kitchen or two. And a place for your cubby and a big rug— where there was story time and then naps together— which I never napped. I was kind of like, can't believe I'm in this room sleeping with other people. Right? And I saw my first set of twins. Twin boys [laughter, inaudible]. So there I was in this kinder and I—there was something magical about school. There just really, really was. And not that I imagined, or knew anything about how school was like in the Philippines, but growing up I only knew of two jobs that women did. And that was either being a nurse or being a school teacher. So everything felt like it was in place. So I didn't know everything felt like it was in place. So my sister and I grew up in that neighborhood, in that situation, while my father continued to work supporting the farm's labor by heat. My dad would get up every morning at four o'clock. So he'd go in and make breakfast for these three hundred young men, and have them fed and off, you know, by six. So you don't know what three hundred pairs of eggs look.

**Una Lynch 26:42**

I can't even imagine. Yeah.

**Lorraine Bongolan 26:47**

Really fast. But anyway, that was that was kind of fun.

**Una Lynch 26:51**

How did your dad feel about moving to Watsonville since it was like your mom's family, and he had his life in Hawai'i—

**Lorraine Bongolan 26:57**

I don't think he was that happy about. Even though he would rationalize it later by saying cost of living in Hawai'i, even back then was like ridiculous, you know, ridiculously high. He knew that my mom was lonely for her family. They— she didn't know anybody there. He had lived there as a young single man for twenty years. And so it was probably that kind of pressure, you know? Plus, she was eight months pregnant, and they're putting this pressure on her to come and live with us. "You'll be with your brothers and your in-laws." Where it was really, so she could be a caretaker to them. But she did it. You know, and he— family life was a pretty foreign concept to dad, you know, I think at the time. But he got to make up for that by being a part of my mom's family. So a lot of that kind of blending, I think that happens for young immigrants. You know, there's a lot of— and we're going to have to be flexible. You know, because not only do they not control the, you know, the scenario, they're also beholden to a lot of people for support in this situation. They're not showing up with a lot of money and getting to pick work,

you know, but the lifestyle, et cetera. So, they did that. You can pretty much chalk it up to the immigrant experience, you get work wherever you can, I was gonna say, when the season was— they weren't working the apples and lettuce, there were the nurseries. You know, they'd hired them to do this, and that. So and then a lot— then they did the caning experience, right? Doing all that.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 29:00

In the 1960s—jumping ahead a little bit. But in the 1960s the nature of farm labor became— went from being farm labor to agribusiness, you know? And so everything pumped up— the numbers of men that would support it, the farm would hire. You know, everybody was getting a little bit more, you know, comfortable on their lifestyle. My uncle started to— the uncle who's the oldest brother— was living in the best neighborhood in Watsonville.

**Una Lynch** 29:37

Yeah.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 29:37

You know, and was entertaining. A lot OOF white families kind of do that. But my parents were always still in a kind of subservient role to that. You know, something my mom would cook for the guests and my dad would et cetera, et cetera. But I got to hang out at my uncle's house, you know, in this nicer neighborhood. Do all that— which is right around the corner from Mintie White.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 30:05

I know you love that. [laughter]

**Lorraine Bongolan** 30:07

But just to show you how— I always chalk it up— I know, it's like a stereotype. But I chalk it up to a stereotype around. You know, Filipina as A school teacher. And, you know, just a can-do spirit. But I'll never forget— and my friends don't even believe me when I tell them the story. I'll never forget— though, there was a period of time, and I'm sure this was illegal, where— here's the elementary school that I was in. And right across the street is the middle school, EA Hall and Minty White. But at noon, I was asked to walk down the hall to the secretary's office, and you know that— you don't know this, but— because you're too young. But there was a period where in schools, no one was ever in the halls. Now kids are just in the halls all the time.

**Una Lynch** 31:02

You needed, like hall pass?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 31:03

Yeah, I mean, but it was— you wanted to, you know, scoot through there, because it was like scary. You're the only person in the hall, you know. Anyway, I got to do that because I was left to sit in the secretary's chair, and nobody else was in the building. So I could answer the phone while everyone left to get lunch across the street.

**Una Lynch** 31:33

Why?

**Lorraine Bongolan 31:34**

Someone had to be in charge. And they thought I could be in charge.

**Una Lynch 31:40**

In elementary school?

**Lorraine Bongolan 31:41**

I was a fifth grader.

**Una Lynch 31:42**

Oh, wow. Oh, my goodness.

**Lorraine Bongolan 31:47**

So I knew there was a message in there for me somehow. I mean, I could go south and say because they didn't want me there, but I don't think so. And it was just this kind of a neat experience. But I don't know, I just had to share that. But just to show you how attached to schools I am.

**Una Lynch 32:08**

Oh, yeah. For your whole life.

**Lorraine Bongolan 32:11**

I had the perfect penmanship. I had—

**Una Lynch 32:12**

Oh my gosh!

**Lorraine Bongolan 32:14**

And people hated me for it. [laughter]

**Lorraine Bongolan 32:17**

Because I never had sit there and to do all of the, you know, whatever the things were— Because mine was so perfect that they— the teacher had me get up and walk around the room like she did to look over people's— to help them. And I tell the story to my friends and they just said, "People must have hated you."

**Lorraine Bongolan 32:41**

But it's just—my teacher is. I just recall that. I recall even before starting school and my favorite toys were this this little kind of folder, little leatherette folder with a couple of pencils and little pads of paper and— sorry, had to go there.

**Una Lynch 32:59**

No, that's a sweet story. I guess then I'm curious if in school you were not sort of around other Filipino kids? Like were there other sort of groups or environments in your life where you were kind of involved with the Filipino community?

**Lorraine Bongolan 33:15**

So that's the perfect question because actually, we were talking earlier about Mrs. Tabasa. My mom did get involved in going to the social things at the Vet's— you know, Greg probably talked about the Vet's Hall near the high school. And there would be dances, probably once a month for the Filipino Community. I know the Alminiana's were involved in that, and the Ragsac's, the Tabancay's, everybody. So my mom was a latecomer to that, but we would go to those. So that was really my only connection there and then doing the dance classes because we would perform at those gatherings, you know, at the Vets' Hall that Mrs. Tabasa taught.

**Una Lynch 33:16**

Right. So what kind of— what kind of dances were there? Because I'm not familiar.

**Lorraine Bongolan 34:13**

So I remember there were dances where— first of all, do you know the— what the costumes look like with the big sleeves?

**Una Lynch 34:23**

I think I've seen some photos of them. Yeah.

**Lorraine Bongolan 34:25**

And that the big sleeves are the things that stay no matter what the era. And depending on the era, they would either be ball gowns that poofed out like this in the fifties or my mom's in the thirties and forties well they'd be slinkier things, right? But— and Greg was my partner, but that's what we did, is that we— that was my connection to the Filipino community. If it weren't for Mrs. Tabasa— you know, she was really the connection, and how I got to know the Ragsac's and the Alminiana's, et cetera. What can I say about that? That was the only connection, really, that I had. My cousin had some notoriety. I know— you know, he should have the right to talk about that story. But my uncle John married a lady from Arkansas, a redhead from Arkansas, who was like six feet tall.

**Lorraine Bongolan 35:32**

Yeah, he was not six feet tall. And they had two kids. And they lived around the corner from the Ragsac's, you know, on Dawson Street. And they were— that's another kind of expanding experience for me is to see this interracial couple. You know, I love my auntie. She taught my mom American food. Taught her Jell-O. You know, and fried chicken, and corn on the cob, you know, all and meatloaf. Oh my god. You know, these amazing things. So that was, she was a big part of my mom's acculturation. A big part of that. What else can I say? When my uncle moved— my uncle who was the wealthier one who kind of, — and we moved into a kind of a nicer part of town near the school, we got to meet the people up and down the street. You know who owned car franchises and the local funeral parlor. You know? So people have means, you know, that was another kind of view into American life for us. You know, that way?

**Una Lynch 35:32**

Oh wow.

**Una Lynch 36:54**

Right. Yeah, I'm curious to hear maybe a little more about kind of, some of your uncle's, I guess, like rise in the farm labor industry. And sort of, maybe, where they started, and how they were able to kind of increase their status?

**Lorraine Bongolan 37:10**

So I was talking to you about how they came at a time when it was difficult for everybody. They came right at the start of The Depression. They were kind of the same circuit that all men of every color, you know, did too and then had to deal with the racism on top of that. And they did— when it wasn't working the apples and strawberries, they worked the nurseries and then they worked. You know, they went up the coast all the way up to the salmon canning fisheries. And so that's how they dealt with that. And then otherwise, when things started to settle in the late fifties and sixties, they were just into a groove of this seasonal work with the Recitar family and West Coast farms, right? Being, you know, this intermediary where they were thinners. You know, that they they thin the crops, it was kind of an easier job. And with setup, kind of— they weren't involved in the heavy harvesting. That's where they brought the young men. But they did that and a lot of times Filipino men were involved in setting the irrigation pipe, you know, that sort of thing and overseeing a lot of stuff. So they were intermediaries in the whole scheme of workers— you know, in farm labor. I don't know what to say.

**Una Lynch 38:39**

And how did they get involved in like recruiting people from from Mexico?

**Lorraine Bongolan 38:47**

So in the wintertime, when it was down my uncle and my dad— and my uncles and my dad would go down to the— they obviously knew some places there and labor relations. I know when I was watching— when I was watching The Godfather, I was trying to look at the kind of immigration patterns then and I kind of knew that when the Irish and/or Italians went out of favor, for whatever reason, back East, there was a big— all of a sudden now let's look at Latino labor or laborers from the islands. So whatever year that was— you have to cross reference that.

**Lorraine Bongolan 39:30**

When was it that Italians and Irish were in favor? And then when did they go out of favor? something about immigration policies, that there were favored nations versus not favored nations as to who to go and recruit.

**Lorraine Bongolan 39:47**

You know, it could also be because whatever the industry was, in this case, agriculture, there were places that were— they're more suited. I know that when people went to recruit in the Philippines, they didn't necessarily recruit out of the cities there. They went and recruited where they have one of the seven wonders of the world, right? Where the terraces are— Northern Luzon, which is where my

family's from— was a place where a lot of young men were recruited to do farm work here. So it kind of made sense. Geographically, geophysically, you know, all of that. So I don't know if that gets at your—

**Una Lynch 40:32**

Yeah. Did your uncles also do some of that recruiting in the Philippines or more just in Mexico?

**Lorraine Bongolan 40:39**

Yeah, they did. So they went there. And they were translators for a lot of the big owners of the pieces of land here. And they went with them to Mexico because they can speak Spanish.

**Una Lynch 40:51**

Oh wow.

**Lorraine Bongolan 40:52**

Yeah. So that's what I'm saying about— Filipinos were laborers, but they also had a special role in farm labor in the Pajaro Valley because of their language skills. And because they knew of these places and felt either comfortable going to Mexico, and certainly comfortable in the Philippines and/or Hawai'i to recruit.

**Una Lynch 41:18**

Right. Yeah, that makes—

**Lorraine Bongolan 41:21**

And that's why you see more of a mixture of folks in terms of their socioeconomic or other experience there, than if you were interviewing Latino families right now.

**Una Lynch 41:33**

Yeah, there's more of a variety.

**Lorraine Bongolan 41:35**

Yeah. And it's no better or worse, simply, it's circumstance, you know, they just—that was their life. They had to do a lot of, you know, do a lot of adjustment. Periodically, looking at that.

**Lorraine Bongolan 41:56**

I don't know if that was— family life was the core of it. It didn't change much during that, except for when their fortunes changed, and they started moving into the city— in the city proper of Watsonville. I was telling you about my neighborhood, and my neighborhood was— probably now that I want to think about it, I appreciate— it's a very multicultural neighborhood. It was not an all white neighborhood.

**Lorraine Bongolan 42:22**

My Uncle Frank lived in an all white neighborhood. Much nicer houses, but just a few blocks away, you know, was a very more blue collar neighborhood. Interesting, because we lived in one house and the people living behind us—there's a girl who's exactly my age, we're both educators. So I educate

teachers. She was she's a retired principal of a school in Watsonville. The Velasco's. That's an immigrant story. So, what else would you like to know?

**Una Lynch 42:58**

Yeah, I guess I'm curious about what sort of— you were sort of mentioning earlier about kind of these changes in immigration patterns and sort of the later fifties and then the sixties, kind of being this new period of immigration. I guess, like, how did— what did that look like? And what were, kind of, the results of those changes?

**Lorraine Bongolan 43:20**

So in our family— so that heavy kind of moving and my own parents immigration that happened in the early— you know, my uncle's came probably in the forties big time. And then my mom went to Hawai'i, married my dad, and went to Hawai'i, and that was the fifties. And then there was pretty much, that I could tell you know, pretty much the same—was the same families in the fifties and sixties. Again, the Ragsac's, the Tabancay's, the Tabasa's, and it was pretty much the same faces that you saw at the Vets' Hall. Okay. And it wasn't really until, I would say, the late sixties, seventies that I'm noticing a whole bunch of new faces that are Ilocano—probably Roy's family is about that time. And I don't really know who the first people were in his family. If they first came or if they had uncles who were part of that first wave that came in the fifties or not. But I just had noticed that, and now I had moved away to live right, to go to school, et cetera. So that happened would be the mid-seventies, and I started teaching—So I would say early eighties I saw difference in the families, more families of names that I didn't recognize. I didn't know the Recio's per se. Yeah. So I would say there was a period where, some of the people that I know you've already interviewed— where it was probably the same 10 to 15 families living here. Some of them married other Filipinos, some married Latinos, you know in the area, and so that's how that was for a long, long time.

**Una Lynch 45:14**

And then, is that kind of second wave of immigration when you also see sort of, in your own family, like your uncle's sort of change of circumstance and sort of rising by their economic mobility?

**Lorraine Bongolan 45:31**

By then, they had pretty much assimilated into middle class living in Watsonville, as much as they could at the time. You know, my cousin's went to Watsonville High, I went to Notre—no, I went to Minty White. And then when I was in the sixth grade—when I was in the sixth grade, I went to Notre Dame, because then— I know there was somebody in our families said that they need to go to a Catholic school, kind of thing. And so we did. And there was a kind of an interesting moment, when my dad was not happy about it. But where— in order to go to Notre Dame, all of a sudden, my parents had to get married in the church. Oh, were they— weren't they already married?

**Una Lynch 46:32**

Oh, were they— weren't they already married?

**Lorraine Bongolan 46:32**

They were in a civil, but apparently, the school or whatever, the organization didn't accept that as a valid marriage. Did not make my dad happy. But yeah.

**Una Lynch 46:50**

Very odd.

**Lorraine Bongolan 46:51**

Yeah. So I recall a very interesting ceremony happening in a church. I won't mentioned the church. And I said, so "what did this mean before this?" You know, I was 11. Probably. But, yeah.

**Lorraine Bongolan 47:09**

So that had to have been in the sixties.

**Una Lynch 47:11**

Right.

**Una Lynch 47:13**

I guess, besides going to a Catholic school, was Catholicism a big part of your life or your family's life, or—

**Lorraine Bongolan 47:20**

It was, in— you know, Mom would go at the high holidays, but it wasn't— it wasn't a part of our weekly kind of, you know, deal, except for when we started going in Catholic school. You know, that time. Again, I'm going to attribute all of this to the big interruption in their own lives, you know, in— during the war, when their villages completely destroyed. You know, there was no place to go to school, there wasn't a place to live. Let alone go to a church. So that was an interesting piece of their history. Wow, this is this is feeling a little thready because it—you know, that's not distant, but I'm trying to speak for so many lives over a big period of time.

**Una Lynch 48:15**

Right.

**Lorraine Bongolan 48:15**

And the nature of life, I have to say this, then was, you know, we— oftentimes when you read about famous people's biographies or interviews, they're all these like, big moments, you know, like celebrities. This award or that, but I think for a certain generation of people, especially if they've gone through wartime, that to have to have things be uneventful—

**Una Lynch 48:47**

Yeah, was like a luxury.

**Lorraine Bongolan 48:49**

Was like a luxury. So you know, as I'm going through this interview process, I'm thinking, Oh, well, I could tell her— maybe I could tell her about this, maybe I can tell her about that. You know, and I



thought that, but I'm thinking now about their lives. And when they were happiest was when it was uneventful.

**Una Lynch 49:06**

Yeah.

**Lorraine Bongolan 49:08**

Because their lives have been pretty darn eventful prior. And so there's this great picture of my sister and myself when we were— I had been like thirteen— very awkward— and my sister was eleven, my mom, and dad. And we were positioned in a certain way with my dad sitting in one of those lounge chairs and my mom— we're kind of in Sunday, Easter clothes or something like that. And my mom had it in this amazing frame in this very prominent part of the house. Said, "Mom, why do you like that picture so much". She goes, "Because it reminds me of the First Family." And it was the— I don't know, know if you know your history, but of the Lyndon Baines Johnson, and he had two daughters, Lucy Johnson and Linda Johnson. And so mom positioned us in this thing. And that picture was in a very prominent place. And it was as if it was a kind of an altar. It's like mom wanted us to be like, the all-American family. So you didn't want it to be eventful? You know, per se, and you want it to look like this.

**Una Lynch 50:26**

So then, do you feel like assimilation was kind of a big goal?

**Lorraine Bongolan 50:30**

That was the goal. Absolutely. So in essence, there's no story. Except for that, that is everyone's story at the time. And I think if you think about it, if you are looking at the lore of television, that was the whole point. Even Happy Days was a parody of another time. You know Happy Days came out in the eighties, but it was really trying to show you the fifties. And it was like, why is that? That's because there was a certain normalcy, we— it was post war, you know, all of that stuff. And it's like, it's like this every day.

**Una Lynch 51:13**

Do you think your dad had kind of those same aspirations of kind of a peaceful, all-American family?

**Lorraine Bongolan 51:24**

He was very stoic and very tired. He probably was very at peace with the fact that my mom was with her family here. He didn't have his family, you know, they were dead or gone, et cetera. And I think that was a part of him that was a little you know, disappointed because he had more of a middle class job, you know, a desk, job, et cetera, when he was in Hawai'i, and that he sacrificed basically, so my mom could be with her family here. And he took on whatever support he could give to, you know, her family, who had big plans and big hands and a lot of different ways to support these richer families.

**Lorraine Bongolan 52:21**

So there's a complexity, you know, Filipinos will try to fill in— at the of that time, will try to fill in where they're needed. You know, where they're needed and the opportunity was. They didn't have an

education. Dad went to the seventh grade. Mom went through high school but with her younger sister teaching it.

**Una Lynch 52:43**

It was taught by her sister.

**Lorraine Bongolan 52:44**

Daring to teach her, kind of thing. So for me to become a teacher was like— that was like an amazing thing for them. I always I just really love that. Love the thought of that. So, yeah. And my career as a teacher, you know, I just—really I taught at Rolling Hills Middle, then I taught— and then I had kids. And then I taught at Renaissance Continuation High School. Known as a pretty flamboyant fiery teacher, you can probably see that now. History teacher— kids, I think, enjoyed my classes, et cetera. I think kids of color— at the time, kids of color, especially Latino kids, could relate to me because that was the closest thing they had there. There were not a lot of Latino or Spanish speaking teachers at the time. And certainly Filipino kids, they saw me— I don't think it was Roy.

**Lorraine Bongolan 53:51**

But I remember one Filipino kid came in. In the very first day in class, I called on him and he stood up because I guess in the Philippines, you stand up if an adult addresses you in class.

**Lorraine Bongolan 54:04**

Yeah. And it was sad because the kids kind of laughed at him and you know, so I was telling him "You don't really need to stand honey. I mean, when you do that." But it was an interesting thing. So I felt really good about my career because I felt like I was fulfilling a lot of people's dreams for me to be doing what I was doing. I love— I think I was a natural born teacher. But I also think that my family just really, really are proud of me that I had achieved that. My aunts and uncles were always— said, "She's a teacher." You know and all that. So that was—that was that. And then I went to UCSC, which was like really amazing. Got my teaching degree there.

**Una Lynch 54:48**

Right. Do you feel like having spent, it sounds like, most of your or all of your career in Watsonville—Are there things about kind of the Watsonville of your youth and then the Watsonville of your adult life? Do you feel like it's changed as a place?

**Lorraine Bongolan 55:06**

Hold on to that. But I— because I want to color what you're saying with the idea that I— apparently I was so enthusiastic about this. That in my twenty, twenty-first year of teaching, I was invited to join an organization or work for an organization— was on leave from the district— to work for the new teacher project. I don't know if you know them, but about twenty or twenty-five years ago, my boss and Ellen Moyer decided that teachers needed to get extra support— new teachers. Because otherwise, she had done a study where it showed that if you didn't get support, you're likely to drop out of the profession after three years. And so she said, "We need to,"— and now it's a law in the state of California. Every teacher that— first and second year teacher has to have support. Because, you know, it's costly.

**Lorraine Bongolan 56:02**

It's costly to get someone to go through that program just to have them drop out. So you're always constantly with teachers the whole time. So I went to work for them, because they pulled out people who they thought were exemplary teachers to support new teachers. And not only did I work for them—and usually you get to do that for two or three years and then you go back and you're refreshed, you know, after getting better perspective. But I got to train new mentors, like myself. Have to say, I mean, I think I have my own skills and my own gifts. But I think it played—the fact that I was a woman of color played a role in it. I think in a good way, I don't think I was used, you know, per se, but I was—I went in and supported teachers all over the country, you know, so I have experience at a national level. I was even asked to serve on a committee for the Department of Education, you know, and so I did a lot of travel. Really to come out of there to get some perspective on kids of color, teachers of color, supporting kids in difficult contexts, et cetera. So I have to say that, but what was the other thing you were asking me?

**Una Lynch 56:25**

Earlier, I was asking you, kind of, about the developments or changes that you saw, kind of in Watsonville, when you were a kid, and then when you had your illustrious teaching career.

**Lorraine Bongolan 57:48**

As I say, I think Watsonville's development kind of followed this pattern of immigration. I think there's an end. There was a period of kind of stasis in the seventies and eighties. You know, it was kind of the same families, especially among people who had emigrated from non-European places. It was a stasis. And then in the eighties, there was another wave, I think that happened. I don't know if Roy was part of that or not. And they—these were kids that were in my classroom. And so there was a whole other wave. So I think in the sixties and seventies, it was pretty much whatever—the immigration movements sort of settled down. I don't know if that correlates to how the economy was growing. or the migration patterns within the state or not? I haven't studied that. And then something happened in the eighties. Again, I think the same time that we saw news about Vietnam and, you know, a lot of turmoil in Southeast Asia and a lot of immigrants. So Watsonville felt some of that. And then that's also when a lot of older men, retirees went back and found young brides and brought them over. Oh, so they brought those young people back to Watsonville. They didn't stay and retire in the Philippines.

**Una Lynch 59:13**

Oh, so they brought those young people back to Watsonville. They didn't stay and retire in the Philippines.

**Lorraine Bongolan 59:16**

No. Well, there was a little bit of both

**Una Lynch 59:18**

Yeah. How did that even happen? Or like, how did those relationships form?

**Lorraine Bongolan 59:29**

I think that maybe you might have— say you're someone who's almost a grandpa, right? And you might be single, and then you— but you've got some relatives who are younger who say, "Oh, Uncle—Grandpa, you should go to the Philippines and find yourself somebody." You know, and they go, "Okay." And they do.

**Una Lynch** 59:56

Wow.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 59:57

Yeah. And so there was kind of another little mini wave of these guys who were about my parents' age, you know, and then they retired and they never got married. And then they did that. Because travel was more affordable. And there was pressure from people who did have family who would say "oh, don't you want somebody to take care of you" kind of thing. There was also intermarriage with a lot of Latino young ladies from Mexico, et cetera. You know, so but there were a few people who went back to either the Philippines or Hawai'i and brought back wives, young wives.

**Una Lynch** 1:00:35

So then was it like—did it feel like a large part of the community that was these kind of unmarried men? Or was it? Did you notice more families were being formed in Watsonville?

**Una Lynch** 1:00:48

Right.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:00:48

My memory is a little bit hazy. So I know there was a period in the fifties, and sixties, where there were these young men that were either from Hawai'i recently, who were here, who either got married to a range of different cultures— from white women who came from the Dust Bowl to a few Filipinos that were here, to marry women who are Mexican. And then there were just men who stayed single for a long, long time. Who were convinced later on to marry. So it's kind of all over the place.

**Una Lynch** 1:00:48

And then people in the community that were in interracial relationships— Did you notice anything in particular about that? Was there any backlash? Or was that just kind of a normalized aspect of the community?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:01:46

I think it was normalized. But also there's very few neighborhoods really where you could find them living, and it's just right off of Watsonville High, right? And it was their own little area— ghetto, if you want to say it that way. But it was their own little— I don't really like that word. Doesn't really describe it. But it was— I think it was their own kind of little subcommunity that was there. And they supported each other in terms of the— they had shops and businesses, et cetera. And pretty much stayed to themselves. There were groups of men there, probably you know a hundred of them, who did the chicken fights on the weekends— very illegal activity.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:02:37

My dad sold fried chicken in the back of a truck.

**Una Lynch** 1:02:42

How ironic!

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:02:44

Yeah. But anyway, I always thought that was funny. But yeah. Okay. But, um, so there was a period where it was pretty much separate but equal. Let's put it that way.

**Una Lynch** 1:03:01

For people in interracial relationships?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:03:04

Not— anyone who was related to a Filipino at all.

**Una Lynch** 1:03:08

Okay.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:03:09

That's why Mrs. Tabasa's name looms large because she was a figure in it. And it was a pretty, you know— especially centered around— I always wonder if there's like, some kind of historical display in the Vets' Hall. That would be like an amazing thing to have— the different groups and the different events that ever happened in the Vets' Hall. Anyone ever track that, but I don't know who would have. But I would say in the fifties, sixties, heavily through the sixties, that that was the community. It was very recognizable community. And if you were Latina married— you were Latino and married to someone who was Filipino, you were still part of the Filipino community, you know, like that. And then I think something happened. So in the eighties, that there was a shift like there were because of the war et cetera, in Southeast Asia, where the nature of the immigrants was just different. People would start to come not as singles, but as whole families.

**Una Lynch** 1:04:18

Right.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:04:19

And that seemed like kind of demarcation. Because I wasn't really living in this community at that point. So I didn't really keep track of it that way and kind of fell out of all the— kind of the social things. But that's when I feel like it was happening.

**Una Lynch** 1:04:35

So you're saying, kind of, that growing up, the Filipino community was sort of distinct from the rest of Watsonville? Being a student and, kind of, going outside of that community to go to school— do you feel like you were sort of in between different groups? Or did you mostly just feel a part of the Filipino community because that's where your family was? And—

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:04:57

What do you mean when I went off to school?

**Una Lynch** 1:04:59

Well, you said you went to school, and then most of the kids in your class were all white.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:05:04

Oh yes. So when I was still in elementary school— and elementary school through the eighth grade, and maybe even a little bit through high school— there was still a recognizable community kind of centered or orbiting around the kinds of activities that Rosita Tabasa did, right? And we would all recognize each other in town et cetera. My Uncle John and Aunt Ethel lived in the heart of that. They live around— literally just around the corner from the Ragsac's and the Tabasa's, you know, right there. So when we go visit my uncle, you know, we'd run into one of them or another. There was a pretty solid community, then, very recognizable community. The social life was around the Vet's Hall and all of that— some church activities, because there was a— Catholic Churches were a little closer there, but there were more Catholics that live in another part of town. So it was a little bit of that. And then I'd say in the eighties— it's just kind of coincidental with my growing up— is that I had moved away— that older family or that original set of families kind of stabilized, but then kids were going off to school, just like me. You know, Greg was my age. Eva Alminiana was my age, the Tabancay's— you know, all of that. We all started going off to school. I think Eva might have gone to— I didn't know she was in San Francisco, but apparently she's in there. I went to USF. I went to USF and then I went to UCSC, you know, so? Yeah. And then I came back. And then there were these new families that I— you know, so I had these kids in class who were Filipino, and I'm like, Are you related to? And they sort of were, you know, or they're distant cousins, and so there was some connection. The Sulay's, if you know that name.

**Una Lynch** 1:07:06

Yeah.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:07:06

That was a big name too. He, Bert Sulay— who was also one of my partners when I was those [indiscernible]. He delivers mail, you know, in La Selva now. And his mom was this very famous, infamous, crazy Virginia.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:07:25

Yeah, I think I only knew her. I never met her Filipino husband. I don't understand that now. I know they had a lot of kids.

**Una Lynch** 1:07:37

Yeah, they did, I think like five or something.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:07:40

And I always knew her because she drove the kids to practice or whatever. But I never met the dad who was the Filipino. But she knew how to make all the Filipino dishes so that was kind of interesting. Wow where'd you learn how to do that? She said—

**Una Lynch** 1:07:55

That's nice. So it seems like even like— or like your aunt who is white and Virginia and people like that were still very involved in Filipino culture.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:08:08

Absolutely. They adored their husbands. And they— it was a certain bond when you kind of go through a similar— I don't know what Virginia's situation was like, but I know what my aunt's situation was like— his wife, my Aunt Ethel. She was from Arkansas. And they're part of the women who are part of the Dust Bowl— who were not socially as accepted as people who weren't from there. You know, they were migrants, too.

**Una Lynch** 1:08:39

Right.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:08:42

They were migrants too.

**Una Lynch** 1:08:45

And you were saying earlier that there was sort of an effort to kind of recreate some of the feeling of community from the Philippines in Watsonville. And then when you went to the Philippines, you said a little bit later in life as a teenager, what were those things that you felt like had kind of crossed over?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:09:08

Just that sense of the extended family. I thought maybe that was unique to us because we were kind of the odd person out, you know, when we were here. But when I went to the Philippines, that was an amazing thing. So I've never been on a plane before. I was fifteen. We get over there, and we went immediately from Manila to the back country where— the original village my mom was from. And there was this event where I remember being carried into the house because I passed out or something—probably just jetlag, who knows, never been on a plane before. And I was on somebody's bed, and I woke up with somebody doing this to me.

**Una Lynch** 1:11:10

Oh wow. Oh my goodness.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:11:12

I had this piece of cloth that was laying down, and they were, like, they have this whole thing on my face. And they're doing it, and I could smell it. And they kept doing this to me and this to me. And I came to. And I said, "What happened to me?" And they said the word, [unknown]. And I said, "What's that mean?" And they go, "It means to be held in the arms of the Spirit." And I thought—and I said, "What does that mean?" And my cousins were, like, laughing at me. And they thought, "Well, why don't

you get it?" And I said, "What does it mean?" And they go, "Well, you're here in the Philippines for the first time. You look just like Nanang—namely, their mother, the great great grandmother, who bet— you look just like Nanang. Of course, she would come to visit you." So they believe that I got visited by my dead grandmother.

**Lorraine Bongolan 1:11:19**

Yeah. So it was like I'm not in Kansas anymore. Just this feeling of— you ask, was like how it is here? It's like, yes, but times ten because we would be all in that room, you know, like this. I'm gonna get you that calendar so you can refer to it. But there— it was interesting because, of course, in modern places it's all like it is here. But this was in the backwoods kinds of places. And so for a window— if there's a window in your room, it's really framed in wood. And then you take a stick and at the bottom of it— it's just latched. You would push it open and prop it open, like that. So those are the windows and these houses that are on stilts, right? Nipa huts. Well, imagine laying there in the still of the night, and everybody's windows are open. And so you can hear everything. Right, because it's not a lot of cars. There's not a lot of all of that. And so you asked, was it like, you know, how it was? And I said, it's like that on steroids because you're hearing everybody's life, and you want to hear everybody's life. And it's normal to hear about everybody's life. I used to say, "Well, isn't this just gossip?" When I hear my—when my aunt would come over to my mom's and they would talk into the night. I said, "You guys are just gossiping. That's mean." And here we think that's mean, you know, kind of thing. It's like, no. It's like there's no TV, there's no internet, there's no— it's like it's very human to want to attach yourself and be interested in other people's lives. And that's what I felt like. I mean, I— that's the moment that I think I fell in love with Filipino culture— wasn't until I was there. It's like Okay, that's why my mom's like that. That's why. It's because they're used to wanting to hear about everything.

**Una Lynch 1:13:28**

Right, and be involved in other people's lives.

**Lorraine Bongolan 1:13:32**

Yeah, because if you think about it, that's how you're gonna survive. If there's a hurricane coming through or a typhoon or something, you're gonna want everybody's help to pull together, to move together, to find food together. So there's something in living in that kind of environment that's really genetic. You know, you gotta be quick on your feet, quick thinking, be adaptable. You know, that's sort of what I've been talking to you about—about the situation even living here. So here I am— this kind of normal child, but she's so good at that she's going to be left in charge of the school at ten. Does that make sense?

**Una Lynch 1:14:23**

Yeah, no, it does seem like this kind of thing of almost looking out for other people by being very aware of what they're doing. And that seems to have been like a through line in your life a little bit. Both in your childhood and growing up around all these family members in Watsonville. And with being a teacher, and helping students, and helping other teachers, and just like— like you were saying, like people aren't going to thrive without support.

**Lorraine Bongolan 1:14:53**



Think about that. I think that's why—I mean, even though they only promised— because it's kind of a cool job, I got the same salary I did as a teacher— only instead of having one hundred and fifty kids in that role, I had fifteen teachers that I took care of. And of course, my influence over the one teacher is going to influence her hundred and fifty. You know, so talk about a job that was made for me for a time.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:15:28

I got to talk about that in DC too. So that was pretty funny. I spoke at a subcommittee hearing for, at the time, Senators Harkin and Clinton. Yeah. And I— you know, I just feel like my life has been blessed that way. I feel like my life is about being responsible for helping carry people's messages through. I was a history teacher and an English teacher. So that's me.

**Una Lynch** 1:16:02

Yeah.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:16:03

And now I'm retired, but not really retired— I still support a couple teachers that are more, through CSUMB and, and I finally a grandmother, so—

**Una Lynch** 1:16:15

Wow. Congratulations!

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:16:18

Yeah. Took a little while as— so those are my two little monkeys right there. These two kids— those are my children. And now there— well Micah you saw, and my daughter lives next door with her baby. She's gonna have another one.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:16:37

Thrilled about that. Is this what you wanted?

**Una Lynch** 1:16:41

Yeah, no— I'm totally enjoying our conversation. I guess are there any things else when you reflect on your life and your parents' journey to the United States, and maybe anything that they've imparted onto you, or that influenced how you grew up—that you have reflected on in this conversation or anything else that you'd like to share?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:17:13

You know, I'm touched by the fact that I conjured up that thing on my mom— where she wanted us to dress up like the First Family. And so there's a part of me that says, "I think we did that well." That's that picture of assimilation. And maybe it's a product more of the time that I grew up through UCSC. You know, that time in your twenties, where there was a whole other revolution going on.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:17:55

Oh, this is—Hello. Hi. Yeah. Oh, well, do we want to—do we want to get strep throat? What day is it tomorrow? No, I mean—I guess—I do, but I don't know. No we postpone that. Let me think about it. I

should see them, but I don't have to. How's that? Or I could do it very early. Okay, well, yeah. Let me go help you. If I can get if I can get back by ten thirty, would that be good? Okay. Okay honey thanks. But I'm gonna be needed as a grandma— [indiscernible] go to work. Interesting. But what were we saying? What was I say?

**Una Lynch** 1:19:21

You were talking—

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:19:22

Oh, I know what it is. It's like so half of my story, as I'm reflecting on— is that I think I did a good job in terms of that whole assimilation, of that picture, of the— you know us mimicking the Johnson family. But it's because of the time. When I kind of came of age as an adult, moved out of my parents house, and then went to the University in the seventies— that there was something expected of all of us that went through that, especially at UCSC. And I went to USF. So San Francisco was kind of another hub for all that, Berkeley— where revolution was part of it, and also being braver about claiming the right to form your life— not that people don't end up doing that. But there's something about the movement then and the things that UCSC represented, right, et cetera. That really said, You get to form your life, you get to set up an alternative lifestyle, et cetera. You know, my mom used to say— Rick said, "This is ironic, because it's your mom and her extended way of living with her family, her extended family, that makes me want to do something other than have a nuclear family." And yet, it's the dad, his dad, that benefited from this. My mom was so confused when she came here.

**Una Lynch** 1:21:05

She didn't understand—

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:21:06

Yeah cause she said, "Why are you living close to your dad." And Rick would say, "Mom, this is like, the way you guys lived." And she would just kind of throw her hands up, like— it's like, talk about caught in the crossroads. It's like, wait a minute, didn't we come here so we can all live in our little, nuclear, family boxes. And now you guys are saying you want to live kind of like we did in that little house on the— at the camp, you know, all together. So, wow, that's kind of a revelation to me— is that I feel because of the times because of the revolutions going on in this society, et cetera and because of who I married— that I kind of come full circle to my—a kind of a 1970s, 80s version of my parents' extended family life. You know, we're all here. That was Rick saying, "Felicia needs us to babysit." Yeah, you know. And Nico, who lives in Cincinnati, said, "Well, I want to come back and either live in that house or this house." And Tom would have been my mom— that was my mom's dream. You know, and ironically, to follow the American dream, they had to go buy a house in the middle of Watsonville that was separated from everybody.

**Una Lynch** 1:22:43

Yeah. And move away.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:22:45

And then here it is that we're here all wanting to live together. So there's your conclusion for that. That's the wrap around for that.

**Una Lynch** 1:22:56

Yeah. Right. Like your parents were, maybe, hoping for something very American nuclear family.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:23:05

Yeah.

**Una Lynch** 1:23:06

And you've kind of wrapped it around and taken it back to, maybe, how life would have been in the Philippines.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:23:13

It's interesting, because when Rick's software company was all here— he had like fifty employees on this property, tucked in different places. That whole place had like thirty workers and whatever— that we ended up selling the house to his executive secretary.

**Una Lynch** 1:23:32

Oh, wow.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:23:33

Yeah. So it's funny I can drive down that street and see my— tree that my mom planted. And you know, there was Teresa living there. Life is strange and it's not strange, at the same time. And history is powerful.

**Una Lynch** 1:23:55

Yes. No, it can be intense and a lot to bring up— these kinds of things or sort of do an analysis on your own life is a challenging—

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:24:09

Thank you so much.

**Una Lynch** 1:24:10

Yeah.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:24:11

Look at that pretty lady.

**Una Lynch** 1:24:13

I know. No this is such a beautiful photo.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:24:16

Isn't she gorgeous?

**Una Lynch** 1:24:18

Oh, and that's her too?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:24:19

Yeah. Isn't she gorgeous?

**Una Lynch** 1:24:20

She has like the same hair. Like the same haircut. No, this is such a glamorous photo of her.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:24:28

Isn't it? And she's thirty-two there.

**Una Lynch** 1:24:30

In this one?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:24:31

Yeah.

**Una Lynch** 1:24:31

So then is this taken in the Philippines?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:24:34

In the Philippines— they all have these kind of interesting shots that they staged, right? They like take a really rough— it's black and white and then someone colorize it. That's the deal.

**Una Lynch** 1:24:46

Really?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:24:46

Yeah. Oh, yeah, that's a photo of a colorized picture. You know, the best they have is black and white. And then you go in and and you literally paint over the picture.

**Una Lynch** 1:24:58

Oh my gosh.

**Una Lynch** 1:24:59

Yeah, no, this is a gorgeous photo. I didn't know that colorization process.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:24:59

isn't she beautiful?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:25:04

Oh yeah.

**Una Lynch** 1:25:05

Interesting.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:25:06

We used to— one of my colleagues at Renaissance High used to teach that and he did it almost as a meditation. Because the kids would end up looking— a lot of them did it on cars that they souped up on. But anyway, they would— it was like a meditation because you'd have to look at it a long time, and almost imagine it in a different light. You know? So that's a black and white photo of mom.

**Una Lynch** 1:25:33

Wow, that's great. It looks so real. I mean, it obviously it is— it's a photograph, but it's—

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:25:39

You know, you can tell there's just like—

**Una Lynch** 1:25:44

I mean, her hair is very uniformly dark.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:25:46

Yeah.

**Una Lynch** 1:25:48

And then on the back it says, "Born on July 3, 1919 in Santiago, Ilocos Sur. Immigrated to Honolulu in 1951. Immigrated—"

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:26:02

You can take a picture of that.

**Una Lynch** 1:26:05

"To Watsonville." Yeah, I definitely will. This is a wonderful photo.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:26:10

See now look at me and Ricky— Ricky with his long hippie hair, there.

**Una Lynch** 1:26:21

In this one?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:26:21

Yeah.

**Una Lynch** 1:26:21

This is a great photo. Oh my gosh.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:26:21

We're like—

**Una Lynch** 1:26:22

You guys look so cute. I love this.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:26:24

We're cute there. How old are we?

**Una Lynch** 1:26:27

Where was this taken?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:26:28

That's my mom's house in Watsonville.

**Una Lynch** 1:26:34

There's lots of like— do you know what kinds of books these are?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:26:38

Encyclopedia Britannica. No, no that's Compton.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:26:43

That's my whole internet right there.

**Una Lynch** 1:26:47

Really, gosh.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:26:48

Oh, those I don't— have even seen those?

**Una Lynch** 1:26:51

I've seen them at the library.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:26:53

What's really cool is when you look at the anatomy ones, you open them up, and it has these overlays that are like plastic overlays— where you see the digestive system, you turn it—

**Una Lynch** 1:27:06

Oh, like you can see all the layers together? And then each one separately.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:27:11

That was like seeing anything on this thing. That's what was, what that experience was like. I was like, Oh my God, look at this color. Let's see inside of our bodies. You know?

**Una Lynch** 1:27:23

That's crazy. Is this the house that you grew up in?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:27:25

Yeah. That's 327 Arthur Road.

**Una Lynch** 1:27:30

And is this where you guys moved after being on Lee? The farmhouse?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:27:35

Yes. Wait, no, we moved to 411 Madison.

**Una Lynch** 1:27:40

Okay.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:27:41

And then 327 Arthur Road.

**Una Lynch** 1:27:44

And so in how long were you at that farmhouse with the rest of your family?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:27:48

Oh, only four or five years.

**Una Lynch** 1:27:51

Okay.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:27:52

So it's kind of a transition. I think when my sister was born, she was '55. And that was the year of the big flood, and that's when they moved. I was born in '52.

**Una Lynch** 1:28:07

I haven't heard much about this flood. Was it like— did it have a large impact on agriculture?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:28:13

You'll have to look it up. I don't know. I was too little, but just look up "Flood 1955 Watsonville". Yeah, talk about the levee— the water overflowing the banks. You know, like that's been in the news. There weren't even banks at the time, you know. So yeah, Watsonville was flooded. You couldn't really drive through to go into town from there. Oh, no. You should definitely read up about it. Changed lots of people's lives. So yeah.

**Una Lynch** 1:28:49

Definitely. Well, thank you so much for sitting down with me.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:28:52

And yeah, this was interesting. Bittersweet.

**Una Lynch** 1:29:00

Is there anything else that you feel like you're reflecting on a little bit?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:29:03

I'm sure I'll come up with something. I feel like, we told a lot about my parents' story. And that's good. And now that I'm reflecting on it, it seems like— a kind of capitulation I had is that my story doesn't go very deep, even though they could see it like I led, you know, led this rich life, you know, in all this stuff. Because that's the interesting thing— is that these people feel that they've reached this pinnacle when their kids can be like everybody else. You know, it's kind of the opposite story, I mean—

**Una Lynch** 1:29:48

Now people want their kids to be special.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:29:51

They achieved way more ,even though my father never made more than two \$2.50 an hour working for his brother-in-law. My mom, in her later years after my dad died, worked at the cannery — the green giant cannery on Beach Road. And yet they accomplished more in their life, I feel, or at least struggled through a lot of challenges that I can't even imagine. You know, all so that we would have it easier, better, et cetera.

**Una Lynch** 1:30:27

Yeah, it definitely seems like they were—

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:30:30

Isn't that funny. We all want the same things. You know, and they grew up at a time when the war— the world was raging. A World War, you know, a World War. And having to move a continent and ocean away. That's huge. You know, what have I lived through? My grandson might have strep throat, but my daughter needs a babysitter. Yeah, I guess sometimes people like— the grass is always greener. People want what they can't have, whether that's something more exciting or something more—

**Una Lynch** 1:31:10

Yeah, I guess sometimes people like— the grass is always greener. People want what they can't have, whether that's something more exciting or something more—

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:31:16

Yes. So the conversation I had— you know, he goes, "Okay, warning, warning. Luke has strep throat." And I go, "Do we want struggling?" And he goes, you know what he said? He goes, "We're retired. We can afford to get stuck for more than our daughter. Because she"— Oh, my daughter is the executive director at the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History.

**Una Lynch** 1:31:39



Oh, very cool.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:31:40

Yeah. Yeah. So they're the competitor, the one downtown. Well, I think it's different.

**Una Lynch** 1:31:46

I think they do different things.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:31:47

They do different things. Yeah. I love that little place. But yeah, that's what she does. And my son-in-law works for OPC, Ocean Pacific— something where it's the government and looking at preserving ocean quality off of Monterey Bay. Oh okay,

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:32:08

So that's a very politically correct family.

**Una Lynch** 1:32:15

Those are very cool professions, all of you and being a teacher is.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:32:18

Yeah. Thank you for letting me experience that. And I'm sure I will call you.

**Una Lynch** 1:32:29

Oh yeah? With other things you wanted to share?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:32:36

I didn't weave it together, as well as I could have. You know, and I'm wondering what I left out that would give you a better picture. I feel like I've covered my parents' life pretty well and done that. But I think I'm okay with it because I think the end point will be— and you can even say this— that in reflection that I wasn't sure that I told the whole story. It's like, why is my parents' story a lot more interesting than mine?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:33:11

But I think it's because that's part of their design. They wanted me to be as American as possible— the way they viewed it and so like, what better than a daughter that teaches American history and English?

**Una Lynch** 1:33:26

Yeah Americanizing the children.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:33:31

I mean that that was their goal. That was their goal.

**Una Lynch** 1:33:36

Yeah. Well, we definitely do follow up interviews with people who are interested.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:33:41

In fact, I'll just say this to you— that if she were to see Luke, my little baby. Oh, that's Felicia and Nico.

**Una Lynch** 1:33:50

Your grandson?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:33:51

Yeah, but the baby—he's so white. They would— my mom would just go, "he's so white." And love it.

**Una Lynch** 1:34:13

Right, because that feels closer to like—

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:34:15

The dream. Yeah. Isn't that funny?

**Una Lynch** 1:34:20

It's very interesting.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:34:23

There's a lot of stories within that little circle too. Yeah. That I mean, that picture, right there, used to always— she would fight with her sister over because she says, "I look whiter than you do."

**Una Lynch** 1:34:39

Oh, yeah.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:34:40

So that's that whole impact of colonization there.

**Una Lynch** 1:34:44

Yeah. I definitely think colorism is still very pervasive.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:34:48

So how does my story— I mean, every story is unique, but how would you characterize, kind of, the unique parts of my story?

**Una Lynch** 1:35:01

I feel like the kind of desire for Americanization or sort of assimilation seems, maybe, stronger than in other interviews that I've done. And maybe that could also be just the lens that people have in the present— to be kind of appreciative of other cultures besides conventional American white culture. And so kind of reflecting on it, picking out those moments of embracing Filipino culture. Whereas— because I think that assimilation was a big, a big thing for a lot of families, but it doesn't seem to be the thing that people highlight in their interviews.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:35:52

And yet, because of my formative years in the, you know, in San Francisco, and the counterculture, and the nature of what I chose to teach, and who I was teaching, I would say my biggest advocacy was to champion our cultural differences and celebrate it. That was what I was known for. It's like, Oh, there's Rain, she's gonna all make us do dances, and stuff like that. So I would hate for me to be represented as someone who stood for being, you know, for being white, you know basically? I mean, even though that was kind of my parents' goal. I think the time when I was raised, kind of gave me almost the opposite message. Right. Yeah.

**Una Lynch** 1:36:50

Right. Yeah.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:36:53

And it's so funny because my son, who is darker than I am—I mean, he looks more Filipino than I do. I'll never forget this apparent—I had a C section so I was out of it. My mom and Rick were looking at Nikko in the hospital window, whatever. And Nico— and Rick goes, Oh, look, he has Lorraine's nose. And my mom would say, Yes, but at least he's alive. That's a huge story.

**Una Lynch** 1:37:38

Wow. Oh my gosh.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:37:40

Like, yeah, he doesn't look white. It's too bad.

**Una Lynch** 1:37:43

At least he's healthy. That's so crazy.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:37:49

But that's, you see what—

**Una Lynch** 1:37:51

Right. It's reflective of a point of view. Yeah. That's really interesting. All right, thank you. Also in your analysis of things— it's very, like— the history teacher, English teacher shows through with like, looking at the historical lens and thinking about patterns of migration and things like that.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:38:12

See how important that is. I keep telling that to students this— that you know, okay, you don't have to love history and English, but this is how it's going to help you. Okay, and I would love to hear that more from the teachers that I'm supporting because without that being— them being really cognizant of that, I think, about kids who, beyond, you know, going Latino power or whatever, don't really appreciate the richness of their culture. I worry about that. And they really should have that. You know, Nico loves celebrating it. Yeah. Felicia, not so much. And Felicia is very light. She's very white, beautiful girl. She looks like my mom. You know, and her son is— might as well have blond hair and blue eyes. My mom would love him, right, except for his nose. It's just funny. We're guided by the times. You know, that's

that's just how it is. That's just how it is. So well. Thank you so much. Yeah, I wouldn't have done this. [inaudible] I'm very thrilled.

**Una Lynch** 1:39:23

Oh, I'm so glad. Yeah, and definitely if anything comes up that you would like to talk about more at length. We can do this again. Any time. Cool. Well, I'm gonna put a pause on the recording.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:39:41

That's your phone, right?

**Una Lynch** 1:39:43

Yes.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:39:44

I haven't read this but you might be interested. One of my teachers is teaching the story. Take a look at that.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:39:59

I have no idea, but I thought it should that to you.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:40:09

I would have gotten in trouble for teaching a book like that.

**Una Lynch** 1:40:12

Really?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:40:13

Oh, yeah.

**Una Lynch** 1:40:16

This sounds wonderful.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:40:20

Look at how handsome these people are.

**Una Lynch** 1:40:29

So this is your—

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:40:31

That's my grandmother. She's the woman who had all of those kids.

**Una Lynch** 1:40:37

And is this a cousin of yours?

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:40:39

That's the child of this, of the police officer. Yeah. Oh, okay. And all the rest are brothers and sisters.

**Una Lynch** 1:40:50

Wow. Oh my gosh.

**Una Lynch** 1:40:52

They're all dressed very nicely.

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:40:53

Yeah. Well, that's a formal family portrait there.

**Una Lynch** 1:40:58

The background's cool, though. It is like—

**Lorraine Bongolan** 1:41:01

I don't know what you call that plant. But—No, that's wonderful. Yeah, you have such great photos in your home.