Tony Baniaga interviewed by Markus Faye Portacio

Speakers: Tony Baniaga and Markus Faye Portacio

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Scope and Contents: In this interview, originally conducted via Zoom, Tony Baniaga speaks with Markus Faye Portacio, a member of the Watsonville is in the Heart project team. Tony discusses his father Eusibio “Chevy” Margarin Baniaga’s migration history including his experience in Hawai’i working in the sugarcane fields and working in the continental United States as a migrant farm laborer. He explains how Eusibio served in the Filipino Infantry Regiment during World War II. He also discusses his mother, Maxima “Sima” Vea Baniaga’s experience working in Pajaro Valley agricultural fields alongside Eusibio and her job at Watsonville Canning Company. Tony describes his experiences growing up in the Pajaro Valley including attending Pajaro Elementary and Watsonville High School and working in agricultural fields throughout his adolescence. Tony also reflects on his time in the navy from 1969 to 1975, his service during the Vietnam War, his experiences while he was stationed in the Philippines and racial dynamics in the US military. Throughout the interview, Tony discusses the various Pajaro Valley farms where his relatives worked, this included West Coast Farms, Crosetti Farms, Sears Brothers, and Driscoll.

Markus Faye Portacio 00:00
All right, yeah. Um, there we go. All right. So I'm gonna just start – start off and stuff the preface for the recording. So this is Markus Faye Portacio. It's 11:10 am and I'm joined with and can you state your full name?

Tony Baniaga 00:18
My full name is Anthony Magarin Baniaga. And I go by Tony, because my son's name is Anthony, so there's a distinct, distinction between the two. But he's the young guy and I'm the old guy.

Markus Faye Portacio 00:33
Right, sweet. So to begin with– I want to know a little bit about where you were born and kind of your family background.

Tony Baniaga 00:43
Oh um, I was born during March 1948 in Salinas, California. No, yeah, Salinas, California. And I don't recall the name of the hospital because it was torn down. So my background is Filipino– Ilocanos. My parents are both Ilocanos from Lipay, Vintar, Ilocos Norte. And they– my dad started in Hawai'i in the sugarcane fields at age sixteen. And my grandfather, whom I never met, brought him over there to Hawai'i, probably on Oahu work to work in the sugarcane fields.

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And I have no history of how long he stayed there, but I know he migrated over to the mainland, you know, California, Montana, Idaho, Utah– and followed the crop– he was part of the manong group.

Tony Baniaga 01:55
And, I guess, World War II started when Japan invaded the Pearl Harbor, or bombed Pearl Harbor. And shortly after that, a lot of Filipinos joined the military and my father joined the U.S. Army. And I guess he trained somewhere in California– Fort Ord, Camp Roberts, somewhere down there. And that's where he got his military training. And before he shipped overseas, to fight in the war, they– all Filipinos that were there– were sworn in as US citizens. And that's how he became an American citizen during that time. And he fought in Philippines, New Guinea, New Caledonia. And the story was, I was told that, you know, he landed with General MacArthur through my uncle. So, that's– I didn't know that until he told me that so–Wow, General MacArthur. And, you know, he had a bolo knife. You know, because I remember as a kid, you know, there was a bolo, in the garage. For self protection, I guess, I don't know, he used it for a lot of things, you know, chopping wood or killing goat or chopping, you know– because we used to kill, you know, pigs in the backyard and chickens and you know, barbecues, there was a whole bunch of Filipinos who used to come over as a kid. And I didn't know who they all were, but, you know, they were having a good time having a barbecue, you know, drinking bossy or wine or something, you know.

Tony Baniaga 03:53
So, yeah. I lived on Hillcrest, by the way. I don't know, if anybody's familiar with Hillcrest. And that was out in the country, you know, so I lived at the end of the road on– in Hillcrest. And my neighbors where the Anchetas and– who's the other one? Reyes, the Reyes family. So that's all I recall– my oh, yeah – I went to Pajaro Elementary as a kid– grades one through eight, along with my two sisters. My sisters went there. And I went to Mora– Mora High School. And my sisters went to Watsonville High School. Yeah, so yeah, so that was that created my destiny actually, because, you know, I worked in the fields. My dad was pretty strict on me. You know, we'd go, he'd make me go work on Saturdays and Sundays, you know? When school is, you know, Monday through Friday, then Saturday and Sunday I'd be working in the fields, like man I can't even sleep in! I remember picking brussel sprouts in the rain and the cold. You know, pick strawberries for my, my cousin, Ruby, Ruby. I don't know if you know Ruby, and Romeo Jr.. Mom and Dad, you know, because they owned a co-op, and we'd go pick strawberries for them. Me and my sister– and we'd pick blackberries, and I picked apples, and I worked in the lettuce fields with a Filipino crew.

Tony Baniaga 06:01
And– and then I went to Hartnell College, you know, and I took Industrial Technology, basically becoming a mechanic, but I thought I was gonna be a mechanic. I built my own engine, you

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know, race engine. I had a 66 Chevelle and I took it out racing legally and illegally on Riverside and, and trophied once, trophied in Salinas. I got a trophy for drag racing there. And I went to Fremont. And I worked for the Chevrolet dealer in Watsonville. So and then 1969 I went, I joined the Reserves, Navy Reserves, and I went active duty December 1969. And I kept on going, you know, I thought I was gonna to, you know, get out but I kept on going. I was close to the Philippines. So I was in Vietnam, and I re-enlisted in Vietnam. And they gave me Philippines so I took it so. So I learned about Filipino culture, because, you know, I had it all wrong. Because I thought everybody spoke Ilokano then, you know like, what kinda language is that– what's– Tagalog? Tagalog, what's that? Or Visayan. Like, you know, and I didn't speak very much Ilokano anyways, I spoke English. So but, you know, I didn't have a chance to go to my parents' province in Ilocos Norte. Man! It was like camping, you know, because they didn't have electricity, they didn't have showers, hot water showers. I had to go into the river and take a shower. You know, and I don't know, it was something different. You know? That was my first time going to the Philippines. And you know, my parents didn't explain, try to explain it to me, but I didn't have an understanding about my culture, or who I was, was I a white boy or Filipino? Or, you know, but now I know who I am, you know, culturally Filipino. But I was raised in the US, raised in the US, and identify as an American. But, if somebody were to ask me: "What is your nationality?" It's "I'm an American." So you know, so there's no racial undertones or anything like that, you know. Proud to be an American because I served my country. And I know who I am. And I know my place in society.

Markus Faye Portacio 09:06
There's a lot to, there's a lot unpack. Well then, to kinda like continue from like the very beginning. So you were born in Salinas. So how did your family get to, like Watsonville? Like did your–

Tony Baniaga 09:22
Because my father had contacts. Well, all I remember is when they arrived from the Philippines, they landed in San Francisco. And I think somebody– or they took a bus to Salinas or Watsonville and met somebody there. I don't know who but he work– worked in Salinas as a farm laborer– farm laborer. And then they worked in Watsonville. All I remember is a guy named—Soriano was his last name. But I can't remember the first name. And I think that's how my dad got a job for West Coast Farms over there. And I remember, as a kid growing up, a young kid, we lived in a shanty house, and on Trafton Road. And, you know, it was not like, your place or my place, you know, it was a board, you know, a bunch of boards, a door, you know, and, you know, no insulation. And wintertime was cold. Summertime was hot. You know, and it just fields and fields of lettuce, you know. Oh yeah, my– our neighbor was the Tacardon family. I don't know if that name sounds familiar. That's all I remember, Tacardon, and they were our neighbors. And we had one of those old telephones. The ones, you know, on the wall, I can remember and, you know, you took the phone off the hook, and you spoke into a

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speaker on the telephone box. And that's how old that was, you know, now we have cell phones. And yeah, I remember rotary phones too, when we moved to Hillcrest, we had a rotary phone, I can still remember the phone number 722-0901 is the one on Hillcrest.

Tony Baniaga 11:44
And, yeah, so I remember my dad would go to work early in the morning, you know, and I would see him late at night. And, you know, I would always look out the window and see his car coming. So I run out there on a dirt road. You know, and my dad had a 19– I want to say– 1949 Chevrolet and it had running boards on it. So I'd jump on the running board and hold the post and you know, he'd drive, you know, from the roadway all up to the house. You know, so that's all I recall. You know, and oh, I remember the Mexican braceros, you know, they would, you know, cut the lettuce in the fields. And I would– like, I would be afraid like, "who are these guys?", you know, they would speak a different language and I didn't know Spanish then. But, you know, I was scared because these guys had knives. You know, they were cutting knives to cut the lettuce. And they would come up to the house and drink water from our faucet. So you know, I was a small kid then and I didn't– I didn't know better. I thought you know, they were gonna come and kill us all. [laughter] But, and we had a small backyard. I think we had some roosters or chickens there, my dad raised. And then one time I went into the garage, and I saw a dead deer in there, you know, and my– you know– and, I guess my dad drug it home. And they butchered it. So I probably– I probably ate some deer too. I didn't know, I was a kid then, my mom probably cooked it up and we ate it. So it was just me and my sister, Lolita, then. And my other sister, Linda, wasn't born yet. So yeah, we lived on Trafton Road. And if anybody knows Trafton, it was on the other side of the Pajaro River, and it was I guess fields and fields. I don't know. I know we lived by a guy named [Unknown]. So–

Tony Baniaga 14:20
That's all I remember. My dad would talk about [Unknown]. I guess he was probably a neighbor down the road or on the other side. But yeah, I can remember still, in my mind, that long stretch of dirt road on Trafton to get to our house, you know, but I don't recall going anywhere because I was– I missed Kindergarten because we lived there. And I guess all I remember is my dad got a letter saying I had to go to school or something. But I don't know what happened. I never did go to Kindergarten. I started in first grade and couldn't speak English. It was Ilokano. You know, I didn't understand what the teacher was saying. So I guess they told my parents to teach us English but they didn't speak English either because it was all broken English. So— but yeah.

Markus Faye Portacio 15:25
Do you remember– Do you remember how old, like how old you were when you started speaking more English? Like when you kind of lost your ability to speak Ilokano?

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Tony Baniaga 15:37
Oh, I– shoot. I don't know, I guess maybe five or six. Six years old, maybe six. That's when I remember I went to school. Started the school when we moved to Hillcrest. We bought– my parents bought a small house there on Hillcrest. 130 Hillcrest Road. That's the address, the old address. And it was like a mile, almost a mile we had to walk everyday back and forth to the bus stop. You know, well I can't remember that road. It's right by the– you know– we lived right by the golf–Pajaro Valley Golf Course. But we lived at the end– at the end of that road was a dairy. And there was a bunch of cows there. You know. The last name was Stevens, I believe, Eleanor Stevens. Her husband passed away, but I remember my dad used to buy cows from them, then they would butcher them, you know, on our property. You know, they'd bring the cow and they'd shoot the cow and they would butcher it. So—

Markus Faye Portacio 17:04
And you mentioned you lived on the same street as the Anchetas and the de los Reyes, and so do you have like any particular memories growing up with them?

Tony Baniaga 17:15
Yeah, I used to play with James and Shirley. We used to go and play baseball in their field. And my sisters would play with them too. Lolita and Linda, with James and Shirley, and I can't remember the other brothers. It's been so long. I remember my dad used to go to Manong Julio and Manang Delphina that's their— Ancheta. And I remember one time the next door– their next door neighbor was Japanese. Hiroshima. Yeah. Rich Hiroshima and Jean Hiroshima and they went to Pajaro too. And I remember they had a shed and they hired people to process green onions, you know, into bundles. And my mom worked there as well as Manang Delphina. And I don't know who else worked there in that shed. But yeah, there was other people there– you know like– I don't know where all that green onions came from but they– you know, like process it bundled it, and then I guess somebody came to pick it up to send it– sell it to the markets. So— what else?

Markus Faye Portacio 18:48
You mentioned that your– you and your dad worked at like multiple fields like for different crops? Did your mom?

Tony Baniaga 18:54
Oh yeah, my– West Coast Farms, J.J Crosetti. I worked for Sears Brothers. And that's where I learned how to drive a tractor and a Caterpillar. So who was that... the [Unknown]. And he's–he taught me how to drive a tractor. And I used to disc the fields with a plow and– oh, man, who's the other guy? He taught me to drive the Caterpillar. His– I think his son is living in Watsonville. I can't remember off-hand right now.

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Markus Faye Portacio 18:54
No worries.

Tony Baniaga 18:54
Yeah, oh, yeah. I was friends with Frank [Unknown], we went to school together at Pajaro, but we lost touch. He had a sister named Juanita [Unknown]. Yeah, we were best friends and I'd stay over his place, you know, we go out and do kid stuff. You know, we'd go hiking, I don't know. So– Ah! We'd go to the levee, the Pajaro River, you know, you know, try to catch fish or go fishing or try to float stuck up or be like Tom Sawyer, you know, trying to float down the river. [laughter] Yeah. Yeah. So–

Markus Faye Portacio 20:30
And so your mom worked for the Hiroshimas, but did she also do any other work?

Tony Baniaga 20:36
Oh, yeah. Later on, she worked for the Watsonville Canning Company. And she worked like, night shift, night shift. And I had to, you know, when I had my license and stuff, I had to drive her. I had to drive her to work and pick her up. Man, like, she worked the midnight shift. And I had to go to school, man, like, it was tough. You know, because, you know, I didn't have a social– social life, because, you know, in the evening, I had to bring my mom to work and then pick her up before I had to go to school. So my sleep was deprived. You know, I didn't have enough sleep, because, you know. And then my– oh, or I'd ask my– "Hey, Dad, can you go pick her up? Because I can't I can't get up". [laughter]

Tony Baniaga 21:31
But um, oh geez– where it was that canning– somewhere in Pajaro? Or somewhere downtown Watsonville somewhere, you know, on the Westside. All the– where they had the canning companies and stuff.

Markus Faye Portacio 21:51
Did she ever talk about like what it was like working there at the canneries?

Tony Baniaga 21:55
Yeah, she worked with a bunch of Mexican ladies. You know, they had to have their hair nets and their gloves and stuff like that. They– I don't know– they would process vegetables, you know, and stuff. So– uh, geez– I didn't know who she worked with. But, you know, that was during my school time– my school year, you know. So– I dunno– I did that for almost a year, maybe more than a year.

Markus Faye Portacio 22:28

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Do you remember how long she worked at the canneries?

Tony Baniaga 22:32
A long time. You know, she worked there probably a long time. But she never missed a day. Because I know because I had to bring her to work! [laughter] Yeah, so yeah.

Markus Faye Portacio 22:51
How long did your dad work?

Tony Baniaga 22:54
Oh, shoot. I don't know. I was in the military. And I remember Ruby's dad, Romeo, Romeo Senior. And he was my dad's partner in the field, you know, he was a irrigator. And so he would irrigate, you know, lettuce fields or whatever crops, you know, they were told to. They worked for different areas like on San Juan Road, Trafton, and I don't know where else. They would, you know, go to work early and come home late. So– but then, you know, my dad had to tend his garden, you know. So he would go out, grab a cold beer, and go out and tend the garden. Go water it, you know, weed it, you know, so my dad loved gardening. You know, we grow all those Filipino vegetables, you know? So, you know, the– what do you call it? Opo or [unknown]. You know, the big squash. And he'd grow– he'd grow the calabaza, the big, big squash and I don't know. He'd plant all over. He– you know– like he'd plant it on the other side of the street, too. Yeah. So and I remember, we had moles. Gophers. And my dad was good at trapping gophers! So, yeah.

Markus Faye Portacio 24:38
Such a big garden. Who was like the cook of the family?

Tony Baniaga 24:42
Mom was a cook. Like, she cooked for all of us, you know. So, before she'd go to work, she'd cook. You know, it was all Filipino food. You know? Either– either fish or pork or chicken, you know, that was from– not from the store. You know, it was like we had a big freezer. So, and then– yeah, we used to– my dad used to take us fishing every Friday, Saturday and Sunday. We'd go to Moss Landing. Go fishing for perch, sea bass, and mackerel. Or we'd go on the rocks and collect the snails, the– we'd call them [unknown] or something, I don't know. The sea snails– and we'd collect those, and, you know, take them home and eat them. My mom would like boil it, and then we get a pen and then take those little snails out of the shell.

Tony Baniaga 24:42
Oh, my mom–

Markus Faye Portacio 24:42

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Your mom!

Markus Faye Portacio 25:51
So you mentioned you didn't have as much of a social life, since it seems like you were working constantly. So was– was your family, not a part of, like, any of the Filipino associations?

Tony Baniaga 26:01
I don't recall going to any Filipino events. Like, you know, like the people– like the Filipinos in town, the kids in town, we didn't hang around with them people. You know, our social life was around our relatives, you know, that came from the Philippines. Like Ruby, you know, Ruby's mom and dad, because they were our relatives we'd hang around together. I know– I remember one time as a kid, the Alminianas came– came to my parents house and they gave us a food basket, you know, turkey or whatever it was, you know? So, but my mom and dad were not social people. So, I know they had a Filipino Community. Oh, I take that back. My dad was a member of the American Legion. And not Watsonville but in Salinas, because he, I guess he had army buddies there. So he would go there. But my mom would never attend any functions. [S]He was a stay-at-home-mom, you know.

Markus Faye Portacio 27:24
I see.

Tony Baniaga 27:25
Yeah. But our vacations in the summer would be going to like Fresno, uh, south of Fresno called Cutler, or Orosi, California. And that's where our relatives lived, because they were farmers. So like, we'd go there and my dad would bring back a ton of vegetables, because they were vegetable farmers. And then, you know, and we'd share it with our relatives in Watsonville, too. So.

Markus Faye Portacio 28:00
And how did the rest of your family come to California? Did they come along with your dad's like–

Tony Baniaga 28:07
No, um, you know, chain– chain migration, right?

Markus Faye Portacio 28:11
Yeah.

Tony Baniaga 28:12

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Chain migration. Like, my dad or my mom– I don't know which one– petitioned Ruby– Ruby's mom– uh, dad first. And then Ruby's dad would petition the mom, you know, her mom to come over. They weren't married yet, but you know, I guess then they got married here, I guess. And then, you know, Ruby and Romeo Jr. were born here in California. So um, and then um, then Romeo Sr. petitioned his mom– was Mart– Auntie Martina you know– and then, I guess when she got here she petitioned somebody else. I don't know who it was. Some more relatives. So, and then, you know, their family came over. Um, who else? Because on Hillcrest, I recall there were a lot of relatives that stayed with us. A lot. I mean, we had a little tiny two bedroom house, right. You know– you know, people'd be sleeping on a floor or on a couch, you know, and they would stay with us for a couple of months and then go away and find their own jobs, you know. So, like, our house was like a stepping stone into America. You know, we'd go pick up people at the airport, San Francisco or something like that. And me and my dad would go pick him up, you know? So I'd be the driver. In trying to find all these people whom I never met, you know, so. So, and then I remember one guy, he was a relative– What's his name? Geez. He– he was sitting in a chair. And I was asking him, "Are you so-and-so?" I can't remember the name. I got a picture of him in my face. And —"Yeah, I'm your relative." "Okay." But he only– he had less than $20 in his pocket. So he didn't make a phone call. So you had to go search for him, you know. So.

Markus Faye Portacio 30:50
So was your dad the eldest? And Romeo Sr. was his brother?

Tony Baniaga 30:57
No. Romeo... Romeo was my dad's cousin.

Markus Faye Portacio 31:05
Oh, okay.

Tony Baniaga 31:06
Yeah. So, my– I know my dad petitioned him. And then later on, he petitioned his half brother. And his half brother had like twelve kids. So those people came over too, because my father petitioned his younger brother– stepbrother. And we used to call him Taka and then, and then he came over and worked with my dad, because I remember he stayed with us. And then he didn't like staying in California, because it was too cold. So he went to live in Hawai'i. And then– then he worked in Hawai'i, then he petitioned his wife, and then– then all the other kids came over. So there's a ton of Baniagas in Oahu and the Big Island of Hilo. So, and now, all those kids had kids, you know, that he petitioned over, and those kids got degrees now. They– they're successful, you know, and even the kids in California, you know, they all got degrees. Engineering or being doctors, there's some doctors in our family. So um, military– like me. Like, some– somewhere in the military, Air Force, Army, Navy. So, you know, we got the slice

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of the American Pie, I guess, you know, American dream. So hopefully, it will continue that way. But man, you know, like, right now with the pandemic and economy, it's being– imposing a challenge on the youth, like you, you know. You know, the– how can, um– how can the young people buy a house with this much salary and this house cost this much, you know, how do you fit it into your salary? So it's like, in Japan, you know, it's like three generations to own a home. So, I hope–

Markus Faye Portacio 33:33
I guess, going back– Oh, yeah?

Tony Baniaga 33:35
Yeah. I hope your generation finds a way to overcome that.

Markus Faye Portacio 33:38
Oh yeah, I hope as well. So, kind of going back. Well, you seem to know a lot about your father. So did he, like, tell you all this growing up?

Tony Baniaga 33:52
Yeah, well, he did. You know, my father didn't receive a formal education. Because, you know, during that time you had to eat, you're gotta farm. You know, my father worked in, you know, rice land or whatever. They would farm in Lipay, you know, all they did was farming, rice or whatever, grow rice or vegetables. And that's how they had to survive. I know that my grandfather, I don't know how he got to Hawai'i to work in the sugarcane field. Maybe there was a call for overseas workers to work in Hawai'i to work in a sugarcane fields, and I know there were not only Filipinos but Chinese or Japanese. They were there in Hawai'i too. So, I guess they were looking for a better, brighter future, you know, to make money. But my grandfather, whom I never met, went back home because his wife got sick. So my, my dad was there. So.

Markus Faye Portacio 35:06
And how did your dad meet your mom?

Tony Baniaga 35:08
Um, through relatives. You know, because, you know, the village. Everybody knows everybody in the village, you know. And back in those days, you know, there was a river that separated the villages, you know. So, you know, marriages occurred, you know, like criss-cross criss-cross, you know, this way and that way and so we're all related by affinity. So, I remember when I went there to Lipay, the village, man, I was there up until four o'clock in the morning, meeting all these relatives. Man, I just sat in his chair like a king on a throne. [laughter] And all these people, one by one, you know, says, "Oh I'm your relative" and, you

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know, "I'm a relative of this relative and we're all related somehow." Like, yeah, sure. Like, you know, like, in my mind, I cannot connect the dots. You know? Because, you know, I'm, you know, like, I'm from America, and you know, and I only know, you know, the people I know, it's related, but then you know, you got uncles, aunties, first cousins, second cousins, third cousin, and, and then everybody is married to this person and related because we're related. And I said, "Okay, can we stop now because I am tired, cause I need to go to sleep." You know, four o'clock in the morning, it's still– and there's people lining up outside. And that was at my, my uncle's house. So, you know, he had the best house in the village. So they let me sleep there. And then, you know, it's all boarded up with the other had nipa huts, right. You know, bamboo floors, and you can look down– you can see the pigs and the chickens down below. [laughter] So, you know, and I didn't stay at one house, you know, like– "Oh, you can come out, you come to our house and stay at our house!" And I remember they killed a pig in my honor, you know, butchered a pig. So.

Markus Faye Portacio 37:33
And how long were you in the Philippines for?

Tony Baniaga 37:36
Three years. Yeah, I came from Vietnam, and went to the Philippines. Wait a minute I take that back. I went to Vietnam, then I went home to California. You know, visit my parents–and then– in Watsonville. Then I had to flew– fly back. And I flew back. And I stopped off in Hawai'i to visit some relatives in Hawai'i. Then I continued on, but, so the relatives I knew in Hawai'i, were my first cousins on my dad's side and my mom's side. So– and then I met one cousin for the first time. And I haven't seen him since 1972.

Markus Faye Portacio 38:29
Wow.

Tony Baniaga 38:30
Yeah. So he lives now in Kansas. He's retired army. So he lives in Kansas, and I plan to go visit him hopefully this year. And my auntie– she's the youngest sister of my mother's group. She's still alive. You know, and she lives in Kansas too. So I want to go visit them before she passes on. So I got a lot of things to do. Bucket list to do, and– and so little time, so.

Tony Baniaga 39:07
Yeah. I guess trying to trace it all– So you joined the Navy in 1969, so kind of like how was that journey for you?

Tony Baniaga 39:18

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Before 1969, I joined as a reserve. My friend– whom I graduated with on Mora. He told me about this reserve program. "Hey, you want to join the Navy?!" His name's Jim Spinetti. And said, "Yeah, okay. I'll try it." And then somehow I got into the Navy Reserve. And I was a reservist in Santa Cruz, you know, at the de la Viega Park. There was a Navy center there for reservists and I'd go there like once a month for training. And I worked myself up. I was a seaman– seaman recruit and seaman apprentice and seaman. And then, yeah, I'd go like once a month for meetings there from sixty– '68, and '69. So, I did like two years as a reservist and I went active duty for two weeks. Oh, I went to boot camp in San Diego, you know, and then my bootcamp was less than two weeks, because I reserved. All these regulars, they were all mad at us because we were weekend warriors and our bootcamp was two weeks. So, and then– and then, during that time, I was working for the Chevrolet up there in Watsonville. And I was a mechanic for a little bit, then I worked in the body shop. And then I got– I got to be friends with the Parts Manager. Because I asked for– I ordered all my parts to build my engine, you know, and stuff. So I bought parts, and I got all my parts and assembled it all together and built me an engine Ford 27. You know, all tricked out, you know, aluminum heads, roller cam. And I assembled all that stuff in my little garage on Hillcrest. Engine stand, and– oh– I had the engine blueprinted at Sweet Service in Watsonville. Yeah, I– you know, so I think some of my parts or my engine stand is still at the Reyes house on Hillcrest, because the– I can't remember the guys name, but we were the same age– he had a 66 Chevelle also, and he built an engine, since I gave him my– I lent him my engine stand and my A-frame, you know, to hoist engine up and down, to pull it out his car. It's probably still there. So um, and then um, let's see. I used to go help the other guys that were racing too, you know, I don't know, there's a guy named Nick [Unknown]. He was like my helper, and you know, I'd bring my car over to his place and he would be tuning up my engine for me. And he would be the one that encouraged me. "Hey, man, let's go to Fremont. Let's go to drag race. Let's go to Salinas". So [indiscernible], "Okay." But I don't know how we towed my car– towed my car to the drag races. It's been a while. Maybe it was a truck or something– somebody's truck towed my car there. And then I went to Fremont. I don't know if you're– Fremont dragstrip in Fremont, California, [indiscernible]. So, didn't win over there, [indiscernible]. But I did win in Salinas got a little old trophy. I ought to send you some pictures. I still have– I still have those pictures in my photo album. So.

Markus Faye Portacio 43:39
And then, so... Where were you stationed first, after training?

Tony Baniaga 43:45
I was stationed in Guam.

Markus Faye Portacio 43:46
Guam.

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Tony Baniaga 43:47
Yeah, NAS– Naval Air Station, again at Guam, and they put me in c– crash crew. Crash crew. Man, like... [indiscernible], you know, we had to go into, like, burning wreckage, and save pilots or crewmen, you know. We'd have to put out the fire with foam. And... That's just– Man, I– I don't want to be here, so I started studying to make rank. You know, I thought I was going to be a jet mechanic, but this guy talked me out of it. "Oh, no, jet mechanics? Man, they're hard to–" you know, "it's hard to get into rank and stuff," so I... "Okay, I'm gonna do paperwork." [laughs] So, I got into maintenance administration, and, and on the first test I took, I made it. So I made third class petty officer, you know, like, rank? And as soon as I, I made rank, somehow, I got a, a transfer order, from BUPERS, right? Bureau of Personnel, to transfer to a squadron. So I got transferred next door to a photo squadron, and that's how I learned to become a EZ in Aviation Administration. And then, a month later, that squadron– decommissioned, and I got transferred to another squadron, which was VQ-1, which was a reconnaissance squadron. And that was the lar– and that became the largest squadron in the whole navy. We had almost 1,000 people in that squadron. And– but, that squadron deployed all over the place. You know, Thailand, Philippines, air–aircraft carriers, Vietnam. So I s–, :oh, I want to go to Thailand!" They didn't let me go. So they sent me to Vietnam. "Ah, shoot." And that's why, you know, that's why I joined the Navy, so I couldn't get drafted, you know, into the army, because they wouldn't send people to Vietnam, but I went there anyway.

Tony Baniaga 45:58
But, you know, I carried my M16 in Vietnam, and I had to stand guard duty at night, with rocket attacks. I remember, when I got to Vietnam, the air was totally different. Soon as the air conditioning shut off, and we'd landed. And I got out, we landed right next to the base mortuary. Man, the air stank, man, like dead bodies, and like... And that stuck in my head. Oh, [indiscernible], you know, because there's a bunch of coffins, stacked up. I know they were empty, but they were waiting for the next person to fill it up, so.—nd, and, you know, fly people out. So. Then.Then I got– then they showed me where I was going to work, you know, in a hangar. And then they showed me where I was going to sleep. And the showers. Bunkers, we had bunkers, in case of rocket attacks. Every night we had a rocket attack we had to run to the bunker, you know, throw on our clothes, you know, and get our weapons and stuff like that, so— I remember, sometimes, you know, you had to do a guessing game, when the rocket attacks would come because, you know, like, you know— I get off work at seven, eight o'clock at night, then go forage for some kind of food, because I wouldn't eat in the galley. Because, the, there were Vietnamese women there, and I didn't trust those people, because, you know, they would cook the food. Because you know, they would come from outside the gate, and work inside the base. And they would booby trap. They would booby trap.—our toilets, you know. Because every time they told us "before you flush the toilet, you look inside, open the thing, and make sure there's no hand grenade in there, and put it back." Because, you know,

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you'd flush that thing and you'd go boom, so.— And then, they also told us about– watch out for razor blades. Because you know, we had, in– in the shower stalls, you know, we had dirt or sand, they would put razor blades in the sand. So when rocket attacks come, people run out in their bare feet, and you get all chucked up on the razor blades. So—and— I was super skinny then, and I wouldn't eat that much. I wouldn't eat. I would eat peanut butter and jelly. I'd go to the base exchange, and buy peanut butter and jelly and bread, you know. That was my meal. I would not eat in the galley, because, you know, I didn't want to get sick or poisoned. You know, so—

Markus Faye Portacio 48:54
Yeah, and— Prior to this meeting you had mentioned there was like, te– tension, like racial tension, er– when you were in the Army–

Tony Baniaga 49:01
Oh, yeah.

Markus Faye Portacio 49:01
Or in the Navy?

Tony Baniaga 49:02
Um. Yeah, we had race riots on aircraft carriers. Just go look up USS Kitty Hawk, and you'll find it. And— I remember, I went to Okinawa. You know, R&R, with a Black guy, and he told me it'd be safe for us to go to the Black section. Like, "what? What Black section!" you know? And there were a lot of Blacks that, you know, were hateful of white people, you know, "power to the people!" and all that stuff, right... And there would be no white people in the black section. So, I was the only brown guy, and then the Black guy said, "hey, man, he's cool," you know? "Don't hurt him!" or something, I was like, "don't hurt me? Oh, shoot. Don't hurt me." So I got along with the Black people, and— Going back to the Philippines, I was stationed there, we had race riots inside the base. You know, and I lived out in the town, you know, and then– and I tried to go to work and the guard says, "hey, the base is closed for indefinite." So, I had to call to say "hey I can't–" you know, I lived out in town, and I had to call my work and say, "hey I can't make it in... The base is locked up." So after, I don't know, 10 days or so, I got to go back to work, because, you know, the, the riot was quelled down. So, but, there was still a lot of tension. Because I worked with Black people, too, you know, and they were, "power to the people!" All these, you know, anti-racial slurs and stuff, so those were tense moments in my life. And—

Markus Faye Portacio 51:04
And you were–

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Tony Baniaga 51:05
And I think–

Markus Faye Portacio 51:05
–the only Filipino who was a part of... Who– who was like, in your batch?

Tony Baniaga 51:11
No, I had, I had–

Markus Faye Portacio 51:11
Or were there more Filipinos?

Tony Baniaga 51:12
I had military, Filipino workers, you know, but they were married, I guess. They were married, I was single then, so— We didn't— I don't know, I'd hang around the Filipinos, you know, just because, you know, they were training me, I'm the new guy, you know, so. So, you know, I became friends with them, and yeah I'd go to their house and eat Filipino food and go drink beer with them, so— I made friends that way. And we had some Black guys too, that were married to Filipina women, so—but—

Tony Baniaga 52:00
Then, I almost got killed! In a bar, in the Philippines, and, I told my mom about it, and she all freaked out. [laughs] And she... But, you know, I– you know how sailors are, you know, they go out drinking, and they start partying, and they turn ugly, you know. I wasn't that guy, you know, but they turn ugly and start calling names and stuff, and—So this guy in the bar, came down with a .45, pointed the gun [immitates gun clicking], put it to my head and started speaking, Filipino? Tagalog? I don't know, I don't even know what he was saying, you know, but he was pissed. Because you know, during that time was Marcos' time and, you know, people had guns and stuff like that. So, these were two white guys, you know, I was with, and, and then the PC police and some shore patrol sailors walked by and said "Hey we're in trouble!" You know, and he yelled up to those guys and—I remember there was a, like a gun battle, and I split. I went back to the base, and I stayed there for almost a month. I didn't go out in town, nothing. You know, I just played it cool. So after a month I ventured out in town. Then, that's how I– I said, "man, you know what? I'm going to stop going to bars and drinking." So I took up martial arts, and that's how I earned a black belt in JKA, Japan Karate Association. So—That kept me out of trouble, you know. But— I would go every evening to the dojo and practice, so... And– but I remember I took my, my black belt tests in Manila. It was full contact. No, no padding, no nothing. And they had a doctor standing by. So— I have a picture of my face like this, all swollen. I had black and blue marks on my chest. So—Yeah.

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Markus Faye Portacio 54:45
And when did you return to California?

Tony Baniaga 54:49
'72. Oh, 1975.

Markus Faye Portacio 54:58
What was it like?

Tony Baniaga 54:59
1975–

Markus Faye Portacio 55:00
What was it like returning?

Tony Baniaga 55:03
My dad picked me up, and Romeo Senior picked me up at Travis Air Force Base in Sacramento. So I was married then, I had one– one daughter, Melanie. I don't know, it was, I don't know. I–I was on vacation for 30 days in– in Watsonville, you know. I liked eating the lettuce, fresh lettuce, you know, and– and strawberries, you know. And I remember we had a little party at– on Hillcrest, like a welcoming thing. My mom and dad killed some pigs or something. Then we invited the Hillcrest people and some other people there. So—

Markus Faye Portacio 56:02
Do you remember if they were still working when you came back? Or had they been retired?

Tony Baniaga 56:06
Yeah, they were still– yeah.

Markus Faye Portacio 56:06
They were still working?

Tony Baniaga 56:07
Yeah, they were still working. And—Who was there? Oh, my sister and her husband, Clyde. Clyde sen– Callen Senior. Callens. The C– yeah. My sister married a Callen, and—He was a truck driver for Sakata? Sakata Farms, I think. An, yeah, he dr– you know, and— He, you know, drove the lettuce from the fields to the cooler, or something like that, then— Then he would, like, go to— Where's that place? Ah– way somewhere in Arizona. I don't know. There are some fields in Arizona– lettuce fields there, but, yeah. They ha– my sister had about five

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kids, so—But my– my brother-in-law, Clyde Senior, he was a Vietnam veteran, and—He was pretty messed up too, [laughs], from the war. So—

Markus Faye Portacio 57:15
Was Cl– ?

Tony Baniaga 57:16
I underst– I understand where he came from, so, nobody understood him but me [laughs].

Markus Faye Portacio 57:21
And was Clyde caucasian? Was he Filipino?

Tony Baniaga 57:24
Yeah. He was white. He was white.

Markus Faye Portacio 57:25
He's white– He was white.

Tony Baniaga 57:26
Yeah, and his last name was Callen.

Markus Faye Portacio 57:27
Callen, yeah.

Tony Baniaga 57:28
He has kids there in Watsonville. Sarah Callen, Laurie Callen, Clyde Ca– Clyde Callen, Jr., Scott Callen. There's– they're, they're there somewhere in Watsonville... And Santa Cruz. I think some of them work at Santa Cruz hospital... Dominican or something like that. My sister Linda got them interested in nursing, so—

Markus Faye Portacio 58:00
And, did your sister also... Wait, so y–your sister wasn't married when you got back? Your youngest sister, Linda?

Tony Baniaga 58:08
No. She had– but she, she was—had a relationship, but she had two boys, Danny—Danny and Jojo. They're my two nephews. They're half Filipino, Mexican, so—But, but my sister lives in Santa Cruz, still. She works part time work– teaching and working as a nurse too. I guess they call her back because they need her. [laughs] So, what else? Oh, yeah. When I was a kid, when I wen–went to Mora, man, like, when I had my car, we'd go cruising, a lot – Santa Cruz.

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Cruising— Watsonville. I had a friend named Bernard [Unknown] He's Filipino, Mexican. [Unknown]. He had a brother named Selby, and a brother, named... Eddie [Unknown]. I think Eddie still lives in Watsonville, somewhere. Who else... Bernard had a GTO and I had a sixty-six Chevelle, we would always race each other. You know. He would call me 396 because I had a 396. That was my nickname, so... And we both went to, went to Hartnell College.

Tony Baniaga 58:36
What did your parents think of your drag racing?

Tony Baniaga 58:52
Ah, they didn't say much. All I did was–

Markus Faye Portacio 59:25
Really?

Tony Baniaga 59:28
You know. I would, you know, work on cars. I would work on s–some of the manong cars, too. So they was, "hey can you fix my?" you know, "my car's not running right," so I'd take apart the carburetor and do something to it, so it would running smoother. Hey, they would give me 20 bucks, so I says "I'll take it! 20 bucks!" I can buy some hamburgers, A&W hamburgers with that, so—

Markus Faye Portacio 1:00:11
Do you remember some of the manongs who, who's cars you worked on? Like, do you remember their names?

Tony Baniaga 1:00:15
No. Like, Tomas Juan was one of them. Juan Lucas. A guy named Sindong. I, I don't know his– they called him Sindong. And. And then of course, a relative of mine, Manuel Magarin. Geez. I, I probably knew a lot of guys who they'd come– they would come and help kill us a pig, you know, and then we'd share the pig with them, or goats, yeah. And then my dad would sell fighting cocks too, to– to these guys, because I would help, you know, feed them in the morning before I went to school. Because we had a lot, man. I think we had close to a hundred. You know, every morning, [mimics roosters crowing], every morning, man, like! You hear those, you know, roosters crowing every morning.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:01:22
And were these manong– any of these manong married or were they all bachelors?

Tony Baniaga 1:01:27

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Some were bachelors. I know Tomas Juan lived in a labor camp. Joh–Juan Lucas, John Luc–Lucas, Sindong. You know what, I don't think anybody was married. Either they had family in the Philippines, or they were married in the Philippines, but didn't bring their wives over. I remember Tomas Juan, he passed away, and he lost all his money to the state, because, you know, nobody claimed him as a relative.

Tony Baniaga 1:02:11
You know, because I remember those guys, because, as kids, they would bring us treats, you know, like, you know, root beer, or pop or something. Or, you know, cookies or something like that, because—They would come, like, on weekends, you know? And then we looked forward to them coming because they would bring us some goodies. [laughs] So. Yeah.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:02:37
Did they ever tell you of any of the kind of like, racial tension in Watsonville? Or were they pretty quiet about anything that they experienced?

Tony Baniaga 1:02:48
They would never talk about it. They would never explain the racial tension, the experience. Even, well, my dad.—My dad sort of talked to me about it, just, "don't drink their water, they're gonna kill you or poison you!" or, you know, like, "don't trust them," you know?

Tony Baniaga 1:03:16
I don't know, but—You know, my dad didn't talk that much. He was a– he didn't talk much about the war, except being strict and following orders, you know? So. But— I think my dad had PTSD because, you know, sometimes he would go off. Sometimes. But during World War Two, nobody knew what PTSD was. Compared to– you know, you can get PTSD as a civilian! You know, like— You're in– involved in a shooting like those kids in Uvalde. They got PTSD, I know they do. Because you know, they experienced that horror.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:03:58
So he didn't talk too much about his involvement in the 1st Filipino Regiment? Y-you said it was the 1st Filipino Regiment, right?.

Tony Baniaga 1:04:05
Uh... Yeah, 1st Filipino Regiment. Did you ever look that up?

Markus Faye Portacio 1:04:09
Oh, I– Oh, I haven't gotten the chance to look up the book, but.

Tony Baniaga 1:04:12

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Yeah... Oh, no, it's online too, the 1st Filipino–

Markus Faye Portacio 1:04:15
Oh, yeah. I know about the 1st Filipino Regiment.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:04:18
Yeah. Yeah, we have quite a few people in the collec– quite a few families— Their fathers were a part of it, yeah. Yes.

Tony Baniaga 1:04:18
Oh, they– their fathers were? Yeah.

Tony Baniaga 1:04:18
Oh, really?

Markus Faye Portacio 1:04:31
So, he didn't really talk too much about it?

Tony Baniaga 1:04:34
Ah, he talked about hunger. You know, you had to kill the mules, or kill kangaroo to eat. Because, you know, I guess the su– the supply chain wasn't that good back then, so they had to go forage for their own food. So.They had to kill kangaroos, or mules, or whatever to eat. Nothing like today, you know, like on ships, you know, we have supply ships to deliver our food. We're at sea or I don't know about the army. So. I don't know, what else?

Markus Faye Portacio 1:05:20
Do you—? You mentioned he was part of the American Legion, so he only, he only went to those events himself, he never brought– brought you guys?

Tony Baniaga 1:05:29
Yeah, no, because he—I don't know if you ever saw his, picture of me and him on one of the Filipino calendars. I'm in my Navy uniform, and he is in his, American Legion hat, but it had Watsonville on there. So I guess he— Sometime he j– may, maybe when I was gone, he joined the Watsonville American Legion, so— But he still had ties in, Salinas. To a guy that I, I remember we'd go– we went– me and my sister went to his house one time, but that was so long ago, I didn't know he was one of the army guys. But I do recall as a kid, my– my dad had some uniforms in the closet and – army uniforms – and it had a patch, a yellow patch with a volcano on it. Geez. Volcano. That was the Filipino Regiment emblem. Yeah. It was like, the three stars represented the three provinces. You know, like, Mindanao, Luzon, and Ilocos, or

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wherever that was. Yeah. Yeah, that, volcano with the three stars and, I don't know, something else.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:07:03
Do you still have these uniforms?

Tony Baniaga 1:07:05
No.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:07:06
No?

Tony Baniaga 1:07:07
No, nobody saved them.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:07:11
Oh, I see.

Tony Baniaga 1:07:12
Yeah, nobody saved them, so—So, I don't know if my– Julie said anything. All I remember is my mom had a Singer sewing machine. You know, the pedal type? My mom– my mom– my sister Linda has that still. You know, as a momento from my mom because my mama used to sew a lot. You know? My ma– [laughs] my mom was practical. You know, the rice sacks? We used to, you know, we used to buy rice. She would make underwear for my dad from those rice sacks. [laughs]

Markus Faye Portacio 1:07:51
What– like, what other clothes would she make?

Tony Baniaga 1:07:53
I don't know. She made her own dress, like a muumuu dress. You know? My mom would do that. I don't– I don't know what–

Markus Faye Portacio 1:08:07
Did she ever make any– did she ever make any terno style dresses? The like, you know, the traditional Philippine style dresses?

Tony Baniaga 1:08:13
Yeah, I think so. My sister sent me one, but I said, "what am I gonna do with this?" She said "our mom made that!" So—

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Markus Faye Portacio 1:08:23
Do you still have it? Or did you send it back to let–

Tony Baniaga 1:08:26
No–

Markus Faye Portacio 1:08:26
You still have it?

Tony Baniaga 1:08:27
I think I still have it.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:08:29
Oh!

Tony Baniaga 1:08:30
I think I, I have it. But, "what am I going to do with this?" I, you know, my mom made it. You know, it was for her. Because, you know, she had cancer and she, she lost a lot of weight, so she made her own little dress. Something like that. So I still have it. Still in the box my sister sent me. She sent me a bunch of stuff; I don't know if you're familiar with Watsonville – there was a Japanese store called Murata... Murata's, off of Bridge Street. And the Japanese owners after, I don't know, 50-60 years closed it down. But, before it closed down, my sister bought me some soup bowls or something, and she sent me some of that from the store. And I still have them. I use them, I still use them. And then, speaking of Watsonville, I still remember the park. You know, the—I don't know if you ever been to Watsonville—

Markus Faye Portacio 1:08:38
No, just one time.

Tony Baniaga 1:08:50
[Indiscernible] it's called—It's a park there, downtown Watsonville, and there used to be a hotdog stand there. That was a popular place to get hot dogs. They had the best hot dogs, ever. It's right by the library, the Watsonville library, and I don't know if the post office is still there—You know, right, it's next to the library. I used to– and then as a kid, we used to go there and watch parades in downtown Watsonville. The Fourth of July parades, and that was our family get together, because we'd go watch the parade and we see the Filipino floats and the bands and stuff. And then, later on, I'd be in the parade, me and my sister because we were—We– my sister and I were– went to Pajaro and we, we joined the marching band there. And we would march in the parade– we'd go all over, you know. And we'd march in the parades. I

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remember we won trophies for, you know, first place or whatever. I played clarinet there in marching band, and we would practice, you know, on the field or down the street, next to the school. Yeah, those were the days and we'd do concerts inside the auditorium. We'd have our uniforms, too, and we had– I think was green, a green uniform with white pants. And who else?

Markus Faye Portacio 1:11:14
So you guys weren't a part of the, the Filipino floats, you were– just were in the marching band for your school?

Tony Baniaga 1:11:18
Yeah. Pajaro. Pajaro Elementary School band. From fourth grade to eighth grade. So that's when I started playing clarinet, fourth grade. Eighth grade, so—

Markus Faye Portacio 1:11:32
And did– were you– was your other sister involved in anything?

Tony Baniaga 1:11:35
Oh, my– Lolita, yeah, she was— Also played clarinet. She was in the marching band, too. And then my other, younger sister, Lin– Erlinda, she played an accordion. [laughs] Accordion, but I don't think she was in the marching band. But both of them went to Watsonville High School, but I don't recall any—anything about their activities. Because, you know, I was in the Navy I was over, overseas, so I missed their graduations and, you know, stuff like that. But—but they were involved in the community, like Relay for Life. I don't know if you heard about that.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:12:19
Oh, yeah.

Tony Baniaga 1:12:20
Relay for Life. They were in it for cancer or something. Because one of my nieces died from cancer, so they would like, hold fundraising activities for cancer and all that stuff. They would like, make lumpias and sell them, there. So.Where, where– I think it was at Watsonville High School grounds somewhere, but I don't recall where. Maybe it was off of Bridge Street. I think there was a football field back there somewhere. By the church, Buddhist church, so—

Markus Faye Portacio 1:12:55
And you– and you mentioned you, so you went to Mora?

Tony Baniaga 1:12:59
Mora. Mora Central High school. That was a Catholic high school.

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Markus Faye Portacio 1:13:02
Oh, do, do you know why you went to a different high school than your sisters?

Tony Baniaga 1:13:06
Ah. I don't know, my friends talked me into it.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:13:11
Oh, oh, okay.

Tony Baniaga 1:13:12
You know, for my school, they says "hey, what's that? Oh, it's a Catholic school," and you know. And, you know– but, to me, that was a benefit to go to there. Because, yeah, it changed my destiny for the better, because I would have never met Jim Spinetti, who told me to go and join the Navy. Otherwise, I would have probably been still working in the fields in Watsonville High School. Because, you know, these are– these were a different class of kids, you know, they were, like, man, like, I'm the poor guy on the bottom of the block here, you know, and everybody were upper class, you know, middle class, upper class people. So, that's when I decide– I figured it out, man like, who am I? You know, like, why am I here? What am I supposed to do? You know, and they we– these nuns were strict, you know, like, just like my dad, strict! You know? I had some—I had a Irish Sister, from Ireland. She was stricter than dirt, man! Like, she would make me do stuff. Yell at me, you know, but wouldn't hit me though. But— but you know what, that– that time sort of changed my outlook on life, you know, because I already knew what discipline was, because through my dad, and– and they were disciplined too. And that, that, that motivated me to try harder, work harder. During the high school days, you know, I worked. I worked for J.J. Crosetti and with the Filipino crews. I worked in the field, you know, and, and that's how I got money to buy my car. My first car, my '66 Chevelle... Was only three grand, then. 3,000 bucks for a brand new car, Man you can't buy a car like that anymore. [laughs] But, you know, I had to work my butt off, you know, and I had to, you know, get up early and stay late. And, you know, I had a Honda, Honda 50. You know, I used to drive that to work. You know, I used to catch– where would I go? I would drive somewhere, and catch the bus, labor bus. So.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:13:12
And so your sisters went to a different school, did they also– did they work like you or did they not work at all?

Tony Baniaga 1:15:13
Oh, yeah.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:15:15

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When you were growing up.

Tony Baniaga 1:15:56
They picked strawberries, blueberries.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:15:58
They picked strawberries?

Tony Baniaga 1:15:59
Yeah, they, they worked for Romeo. My—Romeo and Ruby. Romeo and— Romeo Sr., and they had a co- a berry co-op. They, you know– Driscoll. Driscoll. Driscoll.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:16:17
Oh, Driscoll.

Tony Baniaga 1:16:18
Yeah. Romeo and Betty, yeah. Romeo and Betty and that's, R- uh, Ruby and Romeo's mom and dad. And they lived right by Pinto Lake. Right there by the lake, by the– close to the Watsonville fairgrounds.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:16:39
So everybody in your family worked on it, like worked in the fields or worked in the canneries?

Tony Baniaga 1:16:44
Yeah, worked in the fields, yeah, cannery. Just li–you know. Nothing. No office jobs, or, you know, because most everybody worked in an agriculture field.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:17:01
So, were– were any of you a part of like any of the unions or were you, or did you hear about the unions?

Tony Baniaga 1:17:10
No. I don't recall. But, during that time, when I was gone, I know they did had labor unions and stuff. I don't think my mom was in a union at the cannery at that time, so— Yeah.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:17:29
And same with your father, he didn't join or anything?

Tony Baniaga 1:17:31

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I don't recall him being in a union. Just, you know, my, you know, we were like, poor, you know, just, you know— My mom would be the holder of the purse strings so to speak. She was tight, like this. Tight on money. So, you know, so that's why we grew our own vegetables, we, you know, butchered our own, you know, pigs and goats and chickens. We'd hardly– you know, we can just go to store, buy milk or bread or something like that. Or something, you know, nothing fancy. You know, because we grew our own vegetables and we'd go fishing, fishing a lot. And then, during the summertime, we would go visit our relatives, and we'd get vegetables from them, too. So—What else? So, went to Pajaro, went to Mora, graduated from Mora, and I worked. Then I went in the Navy. Not mu– no, no nice vacations, you know, everybody goes to Disneyland or you know, Mexico or something like that. You know, we– we didn't do all that stuff. We just stuck to agriculture and visit relatives. And. And then we had killed our pigs and, Fourth of July we'd go watch the parade. Nothing spectacular.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:19:22
I see.

Tony Baniaga 1:19:24
So, we just hung around in Watsonville, Santa Cruz, Salinas. And summertime we'd go to Fresno, or, yeah, south of Fresno and visit our relatives... So– and then we had relatives from the Philippines we had to go pick up, so—Nothing out of the ordinary, that was my life and my sister's life, Parents life, you know. We lived in Filipino labor camps– we went to, I don't know, Davenport. We lived in Devonport for a little whi– I was baptized in the church over there, little old Catholic Church there, Davenport. So, and my records still there because I had to get a copy of my baptismal certificate and it was on record. It was on file there! Still there. It's a little old church. And I remember my, my— Godfather—or Godmother– Godmother was a Mexican lady. The Godfather, he's—He's Filipino.Pri– they call them Primo. Primo Thai– Thailand, Thailand or something like that, so, that was on my baptismal certificate.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:20:51
And how long were you at Davenport?

Tony Baniaga 1:20:55
Oh, shoot. My, my dad worked in the brussels sprouts farm. Picking brussels sprouts with the Filipino crew. My mom used to be the camp cook, you know? And that was when I was a little kid– baby then, but, then, when I was a little older, my... My dad would bring us there and he would see his old buddies, you know? You know, he would— I don't know, probably— Because they were all manongs anyway, so my dad was probably the only one married, because everybody was single, so—yeah.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:21:40

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I guess as we're winding down, is there any other particular memories of Watsonville you, you would like to share with us?

Tony Baniaga 1:21:52
Used to go out to Riverside and go drag racing! [laughs]

Markus Faye Portacio 1:21:56
How was that like? How was that like?

Tony Baniaga 1:21:58
I remember, you know, we– we'd go to A&W's."Hey, you want to race that thing?" You know, and... We– everybody'd pile in their car and go out to Riverside, you know, and— you know, th– the– there would be lines marked, you know, the start and then, finish. You know, and that would be like a straight quarter mile. And I remember one time, I almost got caught by the Highway Patrol. The guy I raced was– his name was Bob [Unknown], and– and he had a 442 Oldsmobile. And we raced. And I beat him and he got the ticket. Because, you know, he was the last one. And. And his, his parents owned a gas station by the Pajaro Valley Golf Course. And. And his dad was pissed off at me. [laughs] His dad was like a mechanic, owner of the gas station, so I didn't I didn't buy gas there anymore. [laughs]

Tony Baniaga 1:23:04
Yeah, I think his sister still lives in Aromas, or somewhere out there, so, Yeah, we went to sch– we graduated from Pajaro, out there, so. Well. Let's see. I think I went to a reunion, like Watsonville, Mora reunion, for my graduation year. And I think I've only been to one of them, and it was in Santa Cruz, and... I saw a few, few people I knew, or they knew me. But everybody got old, and like, "who are you?" You know? "Yeah, remember me?" You know... The Flores brothers, they were twins, so, I remember them. Who else? I haven't. Oh, yeah, there was a guy named Stan Mono. Stan Mono, he's Japanese. He was my, I guess, mentor. And, I look– look up to him because, you know, he was into hot rodding, too. You know, he had a '57 Chevrolet, and a bunch of other cars, and... I used to– And they lived on Susan Street, so I'd go help him. He'd call me and say, "hey, can you help me put a transmission in this?" "Yeah, I'll go help you." So— And he worked at Ford's department store, downtown. And he hired– you know, he got me hired when I was going to Hartnell College. I worked there for a little bit, and I moved on, so. Oh, you know, I graduated from, that Catholic Church, St. Patrick's, on– on Main Street. That wa– I don't know if you ever been through Watsonville, I graduated in that church. Yeah, yeah. So nothing much for hope, you know, small town. Small agriculture town, and nothing spectacular, really. Mostly worked in the fields. And I don't know, if there's still a lot of Filipinos working in the fields today. Or they're man– they're probably working in the medical field, because my sister, you know, she's a nurse, right? And, she sees a lot of Filipinos that are in the nursing sector, so But, you know, the– my– they– she doesn't look Filipino, you

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know, so, they say, "Are you Filipino?" She says, "yeah!" "How come you don't speak Filipin–" just like me, [indiscernible], you know, because I was born here, and we didn't learn... To speak it. How about you? Do you speak the dialect?

Markus Faye Portacio 1:26:06
Very, very tiny, very tiny.

Tony Baniaga 1:26:08
Oh yeah, you're like me.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:26:09
Yeah. Yeah. I– I was raised with Tagalog, though. I was raised with Tagalog.

Tony Baniaga 1:26:13
Taga– oh, you probably could understand Tagalog, but you could probably answer back in English or—

Markus Faye Portacio 1:26:18
I un– I understand a little bit— I would say. My sister understands way more than I do.

Tony Baniaga 1:26:25
Yeah. Yeah. Because, like being up here in Washington, I don't hear very much Filipino dialect, unless you go to a party or something. Like– like, last night, I went to a Ilocano party. It was an anniversary. And I picked up some of the words, "hey, man, like" You know?

Markus Faye Portacio 1:26:45
Oh, that's so cool!

Tony Baniaga 1:26:47
I'd say– they– they say "You speak Ilokano?" [indiscernible] Then I say "sarita basit," I speak a little Ilokano, but that's it, just —This.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:26:57
Oh, yeah, just— Yeah, in Tagalog it's konti lang, konti lang.

Tony Baniaga 1:27:00
Yeah, kon- yeah.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:27:01
Very tiny.

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Tony Baniaga 1:27:02
Sarita bit– or, sarita basit, or [unknown]. I understand.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:27:07
Oh, oh. I see.

Tony Baniaga 1:27:08
Yeah. My kids don't even speak at all. Yeah, they don't speak at all. But they like Filipino food! [laughs]

Markus Faye Portacio 1:27:20
Oh! That's good, that's good! [laughs]. Something we can all relate to.

Tony Baniaga 1:27:24
They like pancit, and lumpia, and adobo, and all that stuff, so— Yeah. I don't know. I guess my life in Watsonville wasn't that spectacular, but growing up, it taught me how to become a good worker, not to be lazy, and try my best to do whatever in life, you know. Never give up.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:27:54
Yeah.

Tony Baniaga 1:27:54
That's what my mom taught– told me. Says– "you know, Filipinos are never lazy. We work hard." You know? "We work hard and do our best." And that's all I took away from my mom. And my dad was strict, so, you know. Now I'm strict on my kids, but You know, but I can't be s– you know, super strict because, you know, I'd get in trouble. [laughs] You know. Can't spank them or nothing, you know? Can't do that now or you go to jail!

Markus Faye Portacio 1:28:28
And this is, [laughs] this is a very late question, but can you for– for the recording, can you tell us your parents names?

Tony Baniaga 1:28:36
Oh! My dad's name is Eusibio Magarin Baniaga, and my mom's name is Maxima Vea Baniaga. She's– Vea. V-e-a.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:28:52
And you said they both had nicknames, right? Or that– people would call them–

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Tony Baniaga 1:28:55
Yeah, my dad [indiscernible]. Yeah, they couldn't pronounce my dad's name, Eusibio, the– they'd call him Chevy.

Tony Baniaga 1:29:02
Chevy, Chevy. And– and then, my mom's name– nickname was Xima. You know, like Maxima, but they just cut it for short, Xima.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:29:02
Chevy.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:29:10
Xima.

Tony Baniaga 1:29:12
Yeah. Like the car, Maxima, you know, like, Maxima? Yeah. But. Xima... But, I just call her Mom, you know, Dad, so— Anyway.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:29:26
Yeah, d–

Tony Baniaga 1:29:26
Maybe you can glean– glean more information from the Anchetas, you know, or Shirley, or James, yeah. Or What's her name? Who else? Oh, the Reyes family. I think one of them is a school teacher. The Reyes...

Markus Faye Portacio 1:29:45
Louise?

Tony Baniaga 1:29:45
[unknown]

Markus Faye Portacio 1:29:46
Yeah, we've done interviews with Shirley and—I forgot which person in the de los Reyes family.

Tony Baniaga 1:29:52
Oh, James? Oh, r– I remember, the mom's name was t– we used to call her Tecla, Tecla.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:30:01

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Tecla, oh—

Markus Faye Portacio 1:30:02
Did your parents ever tell you any stories about, about Lipay? About Ilocos Norte?

Tony Baniaga 1:30:02
Tecla, I think that, maybe that was a nickname, I don't know. But he would come to our house, you know, to my mom's house on Hillcrest, and, you know, would talk stories or something, I don't know. You know, how Ilocanos get together and they reminisce about the– the, the old days, you know. The Philippines wh– how they lived, and where they came from, you know. So.

Tony Baniaga 1:30:33
Working in the rice fields, you know, was hard work. And my dad didn't have any formal education, I think my mom made it to the third grade, because, I don't know They were involved in the war. My mom would explain to me they would go hide in the mountains, from– and hide from the Japanese. And, some villages would get executed, or by the Japanese, because they were cruel. Let's see— My– the story about my uncle—My uncle, my dad's brother. My– his wife went to– went to go buy rice, in Lipay, right? During the war, and there was a Japanese soldier there. And, the story goes, he says "is that your girlfriend?" He says, "yeah!" So, he kissed her, right? So, if you kiss a girl, you've got to marry her. [laughs] So he married her, right? So, that's how the story goes. To– because, if he didn't say, "that's my girlfriend," you know, he would've probably did something bad to her, so, you know, he saved her from being abused or something, but—The story goes, they got together, and got married, and—Yeah, so, anyway. I mean–

Markus Faye Portacio 1:30:33
So, wait, I– I think this is– yeah?

Tony Baniaga 1:31:45
Yeah, you're saying what?

Markus Faye Portacio 1:32:27
I don't know, keep going, keep going.

Tony Baniaga 1:32:29
My– you know, my, my sister probably has more stories, my– Erlinda, you might get a hold of her.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:32:35

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Yeah, [indiscernible].

Tony Baniaga 1:32:36
She'd probably tell stories about me, too. Yeah. So—

Markus Faye Portacio 1:32:42
Do you want to tell any stories about Linda, then? For your [indiscernible]?

Tony Baniaga 1:32:46
Linda? No, typical teenager–

Markus Faye Portacio 1:32:51
Typical teenager?

Tony Baniaga 1:32:53
I don't know. The, the—I remember, both my sisters wanted to wear mini skirts, you know, back in the day, it was popular and my mom got all ticked off, you know, and they would be fighting over the dress, you know, the, the length of the skirt and stuff. My mom was old fashioned, you know, like, below the knees, and– and they would be fightin', fightin', fightin', you know. You know, like, America meets Filipino culture, you know, they would clash.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:33:22
Oh, boy.

Tony Baniaga 1:33:28
So—But, you know, my mom taught them how to clean house. You know, I mean, I remember, she would make my sisters do house cleaning. You know, and stuff like that, so, wash clothes, clean—you know, the typical Filipino culture's– clean! Clean– cleanliness is next to godliness thing , you know. But, yeah—

Markus Faye Portacio 1:33:54
Yeah. Well, then. Yeah, d– don't worry, I think there's a lot in your interview.

Tony Baniaga 1:34:02
There's more– there's probably more, but, you know, like, high school days, I was there, but I left–

Markus Faye Portacio 1:34:07
Yeah.

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Tony Baniaga 1:34:07
In '69, and then there's p– then, you know, my, my brother in law was there, from Vietnam, and— They probably– well, my sister Lolita is gone now, but... You might want to talk to Julie.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:34:23
Yeah!

Tony Baniaga 1:34:24
My niece, Julie. I don't know if you know Julie Baniaga?

Markus Faye Portacio 1:34:27
I think I've– I think I've heard her from Kristen.

Tony Baniaga 1:34:30
She's– Julie Baniaga is my niece. But, then there's Laurie. Laurie Callen, Scott Callen, Clyde Jr. Callen. Oh, there's a bunch of other Callens, or– La– Laurie Callen is a nurse– is, somewhere in Santa Cruz. Yeah. But, you know, what– you might try to get a hold of my sister, Erlinda. Because she lives there in Santa Cruz.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:35:03
Yeah, yeah.

Tony Baniaga 1:35:05
Yeah. [Unknown], she's on Messenger, too.

Markus Faye Portacio 1:35:08
Oh, okay, okay.

Tony Baniaga 1:35:09
Yeah. I think she goes by– she sets her limits. She'd probably tell more stories about me, because you know, I don't know, she's not shy. [laughs]. She's strict! She's strict—

Markus Faye Portacio 1:35:28
Oh, I see!

Tony Baniaga 1:35:29
Yeah. She's more outspoken. More outspoken than her little sister, so—

Markus Faye Portacio 1:35:37
I see! Well, I'll– I'll end the recording, actually, because I think we're–

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Tony Baniaga 1:35:39
Sure.

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